FAST TALK & FLUSH TIMES

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The Confidence Man as a Literary Convention

William E. Lenz

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for my father (1917–1977),
a fast talker par excellence

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W.E.L.
Chatham College
Pittsburgh, Pa.
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The whole life of an American is passed like a game of chance.

—Alexis de Tocqueville,
Democracy in America (1835)

Arrest of the Confidence Man. —For the last few months a man has been travelling about the city, known as the "Confidence Man;" that is, he would go up to a perfect stranger in the street, and being a man of genteel appearance, would easily command an interview. Upon this interview he would say, after some little conversation, "have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until to-morrow;" the stranger, at this novel request, supposing him to be some old acquaintance, not at the moment recollected, allows him to take the watch, thus placing "confidence" in the honesty of the stranger, who walks off laughing.

—*New York Herald*, 8 July 1849

1 THE NEW COUNTRY

You have nothing but your character . . .
in a new country to depend upon.

—Captain John Farrago

The American has, in fact, yet no
character.

—Hugh Henry Brackenridge

The confidence man, a distinctly American version of the archetypal trickster, rises from the historical conditions of the boom and bust "flush times" and begins to have a literary life of his own in the 1840s. The term *confidence man*, which first appears in public discourse in 1849 as a description of what the *Literary World* called a "new species of the Jeremy Diddler,"[1] had by 1857 achieved currency as "one of the indigenous characters who has figured long in our journals, courts, and cities."[2]

Like the Elizabethan fool, Shakespeare's scheming Falstaff, or Robert Greene's cabalistic cony-catchers, the American confidence man embodies forces of disorder, transition, and unrest, just as he shares with Odysseus, Satan, and Till Eulenspiegel the skill of manipulating appearances. The American confidence man, however, emerges as a local rather than a mythic figure; he relies not on supernatural powers or charms or courts but on the fluid nature of society in the New World with its unique opportunities for self-government, self-promotion, self-posturing, and self-creation. He appears to trace his ancestry most directly from the ambiguities of the New World, which had earlier given rise to the regional images of the peddler, the Yankee, and the rustic Jonathan. Yet he does not spring from the natural landscape of New England but from an imaginative territory called by a host of nineteenth-century writers the "new country," exploiting the thinly settled and ill-defined regions along the frontier. Although the

confidence man draws upon these and other antecedents, he is defined by the nineteenth-century flush times, by the continually evolving new country, by his shifty language in the service of fun, and by a cardinal motive—personal profit. To him, the question posed by Melville's wooden-legged man—"How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?"[3]—is itself a sleight-of-hand trick designed to distract attention from his enterprise. Prowling fictional and historical works during the antebellum flush times, the confidence man disdains mere jokes and pranks, avoids eastern cities and criminal partners, shuns all tools but his own rhetoric. In border states where identity is often only a matter of assertion, he plays upon the need for confidence, the suspicion of dishonesty, the dream of easy riches, and his victims' certainty of their superior shrewdness. Temporary comic master of the new country, the confidence man seeks and wins the confidence of everyone he meets, then betrays that confidence for his own advantage.

The New World

The New World did not become the new country overnight, but it did from the first appear to foster shiftiness. Almost by definition, the New World represented the unknown, a psychological as well as a physical locale that seemed to embody at best ambiguity and at worst disorder. As William C. Spengemann argues, "By obtruding upon the elegantly simple cosmology of the late Middle Ages an unanticipated, amorphous, and therefore unassimilable 'fourth part of the world,' the discovery [of America by Columbus] gradually removed the world as a whole from the authoritatively defined state of being it had enjoyed before 1500 and thrust it into a highly uncertain state of becoming."[4] For over one hundred years accounts of the New World were rhetorical voyages of discovery and exploration, attempts to represent the unconventional in conventional terms for an interested but often skeptical Old World audience. Thus Christopher Columbus called the people he found "Indians" and claimed that on his third voyage he had nearly sailed to the earthly paradise.[5] What motivated Colum-

bus was in part his desire projecting itself as wish-fulfilling fantasy onto the unknown, in part his practical need to justify expensive voyages, and in part his recognition that he was a lone witness in what Wayne Franklin terms the "explorer's universe," an ambiguous expanse of possibilities "where word is deed" and where a report constitutes reality.[6] Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century promotion literature often exploited the dreams and the real or imagined needs of the Old World, picturing the New as a land of flowing milk and honey; the uncertainty of New World conditions made manipulation or misrepresentation possible and—as profit was involved—likely. In *A Further Account of the Province of Pennsylvania* (1685), William Penn makes explicit one of the primary reasons for colonization: so that "those that are Adventurers, or incline to be so, may imploy their Money, to a fair and secure Profit."[7]

If the New World existed as a speculative utopia in the minds of some promoters, it often appeared a terra incognita harboring chaos to early settlers. In an attempt to establish order and control over the vast wilderness around them and the potential wilderness within, the *Mayflower* pilgrims chose to "Covenant and Combine" themselves "into a Civil Body Politic."[8] The optimistic vision of the New World as the Garden of Eden competed with a simultaneous perception of the New World as the last stronghold of Satan. Despite the continued efforts of Puritan colonists to create perfect Bible communities, it soon became apparent that the devil was hard at work in New England, leading men into temptation and inciting Indians to violence. Fragile communities like Plymouth Plantation offered new opportunities for saints and sinners alike. As William Bradford noted in 1642, "Marvelous it may be to see and consider how some kind of wickedness did grow and break forth here, in a land where the same was so much witnessed against and so narrowly looked unto, and severely punished" (*OPP*, 316). The frequency of sinners—and the extreme forms of sin—in the colony Bradford explains through conventional biblical allusions (*OPP*, 321–22), yet he is clearly disturbed by the indeterminacy of identity engendered by the New World. How can one perceive the true nature of John Lyford, Thomas Morton, Isaac Allerton, and Thomas

Weston, to say nothing of the Arthur Peach Gang or the infamous Thomas Granger? How can any claims be ultimately authenticated or denied? The uncertainty of identity aids John Lyford, for example, a possibly counterfeit minister who repeatedly plots against Bradford and uses his position to seduce young women (*OPP*, 147–69). Cotton Mather in 1699 finds Lyford's repentances and recommissions more difficult to understand and judge, and devotes an entire chapter of the *Magnalia Christi Americana* to "Wolves in Sheeps' Cloathing," men who impersonate ministers for profit.[9] As the case of "Teague" makes clear, in which an Irishman's ability to read allows him to masquerade as a priest (*MCA*, 541), the question of New World evil is not fully answered by saying, as Bradford does of Lyford, that the community was "bitten" (*OPP*, 210). For Mather, these "impostors" raise complex questions about the nature of identity, language, and perception in America, and he is unable simply to condemn and dismiss Lyford, "Teague," Dick Swayn, Eleazer Kingsberry, and others as devils. Their number, moreover, suggests an increase in subaltern shape-shifters that Mather feels at pains to examine. The dangers New England faces are less clear and more subtle than in Bradford's day, Satan's presence is more ambiguous and more difficult to identify in absolute terms; men who present themselves as ministers may be minions of the devil, and even sermons—God's Word interpreted—may prove to have been stolen (*MCA*, 541).

To look at a few examples of more obviously pecuniary shiftiness, we might turn to John Winthrop's *Journal*. In 1639 the fine of £200 was levied against Robert Keaine for unfair profitmaking, an occasion that caused John Cotton to lecture upon some "false principles" of New World commerce: "That a man might sell as dear as he can, and buy as cheap as he can. . . . That, as a man may take the advantage of his own skill or ability, so he may of another's ignorance or necessity."[10] The question of what constitutes a fair profit still troubled men like the Quaker John Woolman in 1756, causing him to disencumber himself of numerous clients and thus of much tempting profit.[11] Another Quaker, Peter Collinson, wrote to his friend William Bartram the naturalist in 1763 condemning the avaricious nature of Americans in general

and finding particular fault with the shameless deceit of the infamous Pennsylvania "Walking Purchase" of Indian lands: "We, every manner of way, trick, cheat, and abuse these Indians with impunity. . . . I could fill this letter with our arbitrary proceedings, all the colonies through; with our arbitrary, illegal taking their lands from them, making them drunk, and cheating them of their property."[12] Francis Daniel Pastorius, the founder of Germantown, prayed that God would rid Pennsylvania of such human "chaff" as the "coiners of false money and other persons."[13] In "The Sot-Weed Factor" (1708), Ebenezer Cooke satirized the prevalence in Maryland of deception, dishonesty, unscrupulousness, and licentiousness.

> Many Canniballs transported o'er the Sea
> Prey on these Slaves, as they have done on me.
> May they turn Savage, or as *Indians* wild,
> From Trade, Converse, and Happiness exild,
> Where no Man's Faithful, nor a Woman Chast.[14]

These complaints pale by comparison with the wholesale looting practiced by John Robinson; during his eighteenth-century governmental career Robinson drained more than £100,000 from the treasury of Virginia through schemes including the recirculation of paper notes he was required to destroy.[15] The lucrative customs of land-grabbing, speculation in specie, smuggling, vote-buying, and bribe-taking have been well documented throughout the colonies, while the Georgia legislature itself played a game of fast and loose with the 1795 sale of Yazoo land for millions of dollars.[16] In this atmosphere, new fortunes could be quickly amassed, though it was equally true that the New World could as rapidly strip the newly rich of their wealth.

The New World also sanctioned the complementary impulses of self-definition and self-promotion. The art of putting the best appearance forward can be seen in the competing versions of events recorded by William Bradford in *Of Plymouth Plantation* and by Thomas Morton in *The New English Canaan*, while Captain John Smith's *General History of Virginia*, William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line*, and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* are not only public accounts but also personal documents advancing complimentary images of their authors. The self-posturing of Franklin, moreover, cre-

ated an imitable model for Americans continuing throughout the nineteenth century. Franklin's methods, intentions, and attitudes therefore bear close examination. They reveal themselves in his defense of the minister Hemphill, who to Franklin's delight preached practical sermons on the virtue of good works.

> One of our Adversaries having heard him preach a Sermon that was much admired, thought he had somewhere read that Sermon before, or at least a part of it. On Search he found that Part quoted in one of the British Reviews, from a Discourse of Dr. Forster's. This Detection gave many of our Party Disgust, who accordingly abandoned his Cause and occasion'd our more speedy Discomfiture in the Synod. I stuck by him however, as I rather approv'd his giving us good Sermons compos'd by others, than bad ones of his own Manufacture.[17]

Here in Franklin's wry defense of Hemphill we can begin to see the development of practical benevolence superceding the Puritan conception of absolute morality. It is a gradual process, as is shown by those who desert Hemphill, but it is steady. Just as Mather could recognize more human complexity in the motivations of a seducer than Bradford, so too can Franklin see with more detachment the act of sermon-stealing. To Franklin, Hemphill is no descendant of Mather's "Wolves."

The self-conscious irony implied by moral relativism leads Franklin himself to assume the appearance of virtues when he cannot muster their reality, to burn his lamp at night later than his rivals, and to translate Cotton Mather's *Essays To Do Good* into a secular program of self-improvement. Richard B. Hauck, noting that Franklin "could con the troops into attending prayer meetings, or he could con the separated colonies into rebellion," concludes that Franklin is a confidence man.[18] Hauck overlooks Franklin's benevolence and self-deprecating sense of play, qualities which distinguish him from deceivers like Governor Keith, who in the *Autobiography* encourages Franklin to travel to England with the promise of the governor's letter of credit, a promise he has neither the intention of keeping nor the funds to make good (93–94). Whether Franklin cajoles citizens into public works or assists Quakers to provide money for community defense, his pro-

motions further the goal of social betterment; though he may puff and prance and strut, claiming more personal credit or purity of motive than is his due, the public receives the value of each project.

In addition, Franklin's shape-shifting—when he casts himself as Silence Dogood, Poor Richard, or the star of the *Autobiography*—is a literary activity designed, as he notes of the *Almanac*, to convey "instruction" (164–65). What is important about these personae is not that they are misrepresentations or "false" images, but that through them we can see the tendency of Americans to view themselves with increasing detachment. As Daniel Hoffman points out, by the mid-eighteenth century "the power of transformation, of self-transformation, is no longer seen as malevolent."[19] Franklin's self-posturing—unlike Morton's or Lyford's—promotes the values of social responsibility and individual industry necessary to nationbuilding. He also marks a divergence from the seventeenth-century attitude that fiction is by definition evil; to improve the self in autobiography is not the work of the devil any more than to counterfeit the language of Silence Dogood is to join the ranks of Mather's "impostors."

These changes in attitude find popular expression around the turn of the century in Royall Tyler's clever Jonathan (*The Contrast*), in the emerging figure of the Yankee, in Hugh Henry Brackenridge's satiric portraits of Americans in *Modern Chivalry*, in Ann Stephens's *Jonathan Slick in New York*, in Seba Smith's Jack Downing, in Thomas Haliburton's Sam Slick, in the oral tales of Mike Fink, Pete Featherton, and Davy Crockett, and in the pages of newspapers like John Neal's *The Yankee*. These appearances share four characteristics: they reveal a new acceptance of fictionmaking as not immoral, they record a new ambivalence toward shiftiness expressed through humor, they register interest in the varieties and vagaries of language, and they suggest the desire stimulated by successful expansion, development, and revolution to create national symbols of American identity. Instructively, each figure is, like Franklin, in part an exercise in self-caricature; Americans have become willing to accept not the saints of Bradford or Mather but self-consciously ironic fictional characters as their

literary representatives. Constance Rourke, one of the best readers of the relation between American character and American humor, finds the two intertwined.

> "The comic," says Bergson, "comes into being just when society and the individual, freed from the worry of self-preservation, begin to regard themselves as works of art." With his triumphs fresh and his mind noticeably free, by 1815 the American seemed to regard himself as a work of art, and began that embellished self-portraiture which nations as well as individuals may undertake.[20]

As Rourke demonstrates, figures like the Yankee began as regional types, then evolved into emblems of American character recognized here and abroad. They mark the end of the colonial New World and the start of the American new country, manifest the initial stirrings of the flush-times confidence man, and wryly proffer dead-pan answers to J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's famous question, "What then is the American, this new man?"[21]

The New Country

The impulse toward self-definition visible in the writings of William Bradford, Thomas Morton, John Smith, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, and Benjamin Franklin, and in the figure of the Yankee and other native types, culminated in the self-assertive visionary rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence.

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The Declaration and the Revolution clearly set the stage for a new phase of self-definition, what Gary Wills calls the actual invention of America.[22] Although the choice of 1775, 1776, 1783, 1789, or 1800 might be arbitrary, it seems certain that between 1775 and 1815 Old World and colonial perceptions of the New World changed radically. Daniel Boorstin contends that "America grew in the search for community."

> Between the Revolution and the Civil War the young nation flourished not in discovery but in search. It prospered not from

> the perfection of its ways but from their fluidity. It lived with the constant belief that something else or something better might turn up. . . . Americans were glad enough to keep things growing and moving. When before had men put so much faith in the unexpected?[23]

Yet alongside this new faith in possibilities grew up a concomitant distrust of the unknown and a desire for the comforts of the familiar. Brilliantly analyzing the rising popular iconography of the Revolution, Michael Kammen charts the development of this complementary impulse: "What is most interesting about the 1820s, perhaps, is the fact that many Americans became engaged, in various ways, upon a quest for political order, social stability, and national identity."[24] In this view Americans sought to make coherent sense of the Revolution, to consolidate its gains and defuse its antisocial energies, to shape the thirteen colonies of the New World into a democratic republic of thirteen united states, a palpable "new country."

The search for identity and order in the early nineteenth century is evidenced by the popularity of Mason Locke Weems's *Life of Washington* (1800); the biography of General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," by Weems and Peter Horry (1810); the *Life and Adventures of John Paul Jones* (1807); William Wirt's *Patrick Henry* (1817); and a host of other Revolutionary War biographies and histories. Taken as a group, works like these codify a vanished past, certify it as heroic in stature, disseminate what Kammen views as a common cultural myth, and form a convenient bridge (especially for post-Revolutionary generations) between the past and the present (and future). Localized events become transformed into a national mythos. The same process is at work in the rapid cultural acceptance of the Yankee, and more directly visible in the immediate triumph of Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." The story of Rip Van Winkle does more than fulfill the male fantasy of escaping a shrewish wife and a life of labor; it effects through fiction the disorienting transition from George III to George Washington, dismissing by its nonthreatening fairy-tale form and the humorous detachment of its ironic narration Americans' real or imagined anxieties about life in the new republic. Rip learns—

and conveys to the reader—that his life in the United States will remain essentially the same; any changes—in flags, names, or political institutions—are either superficial or for the better: Rip Van Winkle achieves freedom and ease at Doolittle's Union Hotel.

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" has a similar implicit function. The tale first distinguishes between the progressive present and the legendary past, reducing the colonial era and the Revolution to fireside stories or superstitions. Irving views Ichabod Crane's interest in the musty volumes of Cotton Mather's witchcraft accounts as an eccentricity that marks his credulity and, almost tangentially, suggests to the reader the irrelevance or failure of Puritanism. The headless horseman that terrorizes the susceptible schoolmaster, moreover, is not a dreadful presence from the Revolutionary past with which men of the present generation must once again struggle but the projection of Ichabod's overexcited fancy, a manifestation of his own nonutilitarian nature. Brom Bones demonstrates through his manipulation of Ichabod Crane's nightmare that by 1819 (or even by 1789, the ostensible date of the story) Americans should have relegated both Puritan and Revolutionary fears to the realm of history and legend; witches, ghosts, and Hessians haunt only the dreamy—children, women, and Ichabod Crane. The pragmatic nineteenth-century man, like the hearty and industrious Brom Bones, lives in the present, sees the past as superstition, and makes practical use of a hoary specter, harnessing its fantastic energy to vanquish a rival. Brom Bones's comic representation of the ghostly Hessian's head as a pumpkin creates a disjunction between past and present through which the potential terror of a real Hessian trooper is disarmed.

Second, as in "Rip Van Winkle," Irving presents as models for the reader individuals who have become reconciled to nineteenth-century life. Although Brom Bones obviously triumphs over the anemic schoolmaster, marries Katrina Van Tassel, and becomes a gentleman farmer, it is easy to forget that Ichabod Crane may have adjusted to the modern age and achieved a different measure of success. Just before the closing frame Irving's narrator (Diedrich Knickerbocker) recounts that Ichabod appears to have moved to New York City, been ad-

mitted to the bar, flirted with politics and the press, and now presides as justice over the Ten Pound Court. By suggesting this destiny for Ichabod Crane, Irving narratively asserts that success is possible for all kinds of men in America, that a heterogeneous society offers flush times to those who will only look to the present and not remain possessed or obsessed by the past.[25] Two diametrically opposed regional types are made into successful fictional emblems of national identity, just as the colonial past and the Hudson River Valley are made into cultural synecdoche for the United States. To identify with either the prankster or the pranked is to discover a viable role to emulate.

One consequence of the success of post-Revolution historical and fictional works seems to have been the reinforcement of a perhaps unconscious geographical demarcation between East and West. Biographies like those of Washington created national myths of (and primarily for) the original thirteen colonies, just as Irving's stories turned the Hudson River into the shared property of American citizens. Along the eastern seaboard established cities symbolized the high culture achieved by the new republic, while to the west (or often to the north or south) existed the new country. Henry Nash Smith writes in *Virgin Land* that "until the very end of the eighteenth century the West beyond the Mississippi was so shadowy and remote that it could be pictured in almost any guise that might occur to a writer's imagination."[26] Without wishing to put undue pressure on the success of Ichabod Crane, it is instructive to recall that he begins a new life in New York City: Ichabod Crane is no Daniel Boone (and neither is Brom Bones a pioneer though he appears more rustic). Irving displays an eastern bias that prevailed for years, the definition of eastern culture against western "wilderness" that seems a corollary of the initial codification of national identity in terms of the Revolutionary past and the early nineteenth-century search for order.

If the Hudson River functions as a familiar locus of order (even producing its own native school of painting), then the Mississippi River serves as a symbol of disorder. The two rivers are in imagination—and for at least a generation in fact—worlds apart. The works of Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Philip

Freneau, William Cullen Bryant, Edgar Allan Poe, James Kirke Paulding, Washington Irving, and even James Fenimore Cooper cast the Trans-Allegheny region as howling wilderness or untapped Eden. As these and a host of lesser writers attempted to create a "native American literature" (as it was commonly called), a body of work that would compare favorably with the literary heritage of Europe, they sought to dispel the Old World image of Americans as coonskin-capped savages and therefore produced fictions that were often derivative in technique, emphasizing the sophistication of the (eastern) writer, and that in content either sanitized the vast territories beyond the Allegheny range or reduced their complexity through conventional labels including the *West*, the *frontier*, and the *new country*. In the late eighteenth century Crèvecoeur recorded the moral and psychological results of this geographic division, displaying in his *Letters* an anxiety about the effects of "the great woods,"[27] while as late as 1849 the Swiss scientist Arnold Guyot insisted on a form of cultural geography: "Is it not on the shores of the Atlantic that life is developed to its most active, most intense, and most exalted form? Is this merely a chance consequence of the accidental debarkation at that point of the colonists of the Ancient World? No, gentlemen, brilliant as may be the prospects the West may aspire to from the exuberance of its soil, life and action will always point toward the coast."[28] The *West*, the *frontier*, and the *new country* were essentially iconographic constructions similar in function to the earlier *New World*, conventions serving to separate the writer from the terra incognita and to domesticate the unknown in the act of naming. The geographic vagueness of these tags formed a large part of their literary utility. As Edwin Fussell contends,

> Especially in early nineteenth-century American thought and expression, the term West is not only all-inclusive but it perpetually vacillates between what might be called an absolute meaning (location) and what might be called a relative meaning (direction), the first of which is entirely arbitrary while the second is dependent upon the time, the location, and the linguistic habits of the speaker. . . . The American West is almost by definition indefinite and indefinable, or at least changing, pluralistic, and ambiguous in significance.[29]

To Hugh Henry Brackenridge the new country is at once the new republic, the sparsely settled region of western Pennsylvania, and the ambiguous, fluid modes of American behavior. And to most nineteenth-century Americans, as Ray Allen Billington demonstrates, the new country and the frontier existed in their minds and vocabularies as a place of uncertain but suspected opportunities for self-advancement.[30] But to effect this exploitation by both settlers and writers, the new country first had to become at least partially known.

The exploration of the new country forms yet another aspect of the nineteenth-century quest for identity, order, and stability. In 1803 the Louisiana Purchase added more than one million square miles to the United States, dwarfing the territories of the Old Southwest and Old Northwest. In addition to stimulating migration into these regions, Jefferson's acquisition of Louisiana and the subsequent expeditions authorized to explore it captured the American imagination with its newness. Lewis and Clark (1804–1806) reported on the new territories to a fascinated eastern audience, bringing back glowing accounts of the possibilities for trapping and trading in the nearly virgin land. Yet Thomas Freeman, Zebulon Montgomery Pike, and Major Stephen H. Long made less successful western expeditions, and in 1823 Long created the myth of the "Great American Desert" that was to plague the Great Plains for decades.[31] These men did not tame the new country but imported notions of its wildness to the East in much the same manner as Crèvecoeur.[32]

Even as migration made these regions secure and stable, the new country remained a land of ambiguous promise, potential hostility, and uncertain social order in the minds of writers. In *Travels in New England and New York* (1821–1822) Timothy Dwight warns pioneers not to be led astray by fantasies: "In certain stages of society the expectations of enterprising men may, with little difficulty, be raised to any imaginable height. Fortunes, they will easily believe, may be amassed at a stroke, without industry or economy, by mere luck, or the energy of superior talents for business."[33] Dwight also cautions the unwary about land speculators and itinerant peddlers, going so far as to claim that "men who begin life with

bargaining for small wares will almost invariably become sharpers. . . . Their sobriety is exchanged for cunning, their honesty for imposition, and their decent behavior for coarse impudence."[34] Condemning the immorality and roughness he finds common in his travels, Dwight echoes the arguments and accusations of Crèvecoeur, William Byrd, Charles Woodmason, Timothy Flint, Alexis de Tocqueville, Caroline Kirkland, James Hall, and James Fenimore Cooper. Timothy Flint compiles a list of speculators, robbers, and hostile Indians in his *Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley* (1828), James Hall dramatizes historical river pirates and bloodthirsty savages in his fictionalized *Legends of the West* (1832), while James Fenimore Cooper provides unsettling portraits of backwoodsmen through Richard Jones in *The Pioneers* (1823) and Abiram White in *The Prairie* (1827). Cooper, in fact, offers a model of the ambiguous attitudes held by nineteenth-century Americans. The "*new* States" could nurture a hero as admirable as Natty Bumppo, but they could also produce "swarms of that restless people" who, like Abiram White, are "deluded by their wishes." In addition, Cooper recognizes that Natty Bumppo must die without heirs in *The Prairie*, passing on to Paul Hover last words of advice that are at best ambivalent:

> Much has passed atween us on the pleasures and respectableness of a life in the woods or on the borders. I do not now mean to say that all you have heard is not true; but different tempers call for different employments. You have taken to your bosom, there, a good and kind child, and it has become your duty to consider her, as well as yourself, in setting forth in life. You are a little given to skirting the settlements; but to my poor judgment, the girl would be more like a flourishing flower in the sun of a clearing, than in the winds of a prairie. Therefore forget anything you may have heard from me, which is nevertheless true, and turn your mind on the ways of the inner country.[35]

Truth, like identity and morality, appears to be a relative concept only temporarily fixed.

In the quest for national identity, which often seems as much a linguistic search as a literal one, the value of the new country resides in its ability to contain and express contradictory truths. As used by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Daniel

Drake, Johnson Jones Hooper, Joseph Glover Baldwin, George Washington Harris, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and William Dean Howells (to list a few), the term *new country* throughout the nineteenth century subsumes the definitions of the *frontier* and the *West* advocated by Ray Allen Billington and Edwin Fussell;[36] it is potential, opportunity, change itself. "In America," the panorama painter John Rawson Smith declaimed, "the country itself is ever on the change, and in another half century those who view this portrait of the Mississippi will not be able to recognize one twentieth of its details."[37] An Ohio Valley pioneer in the 1830s noted that the settlers themselves embodied contradictions: "The people of the west, viewed as individuals, resemble the inhabitants of almost every clime; but taken as a whole, they are unlike every people under heaven. . . . Everything is new, just coming into existence."[38] These sentiments form a nineteenth-century refrain, as in the words of a new arrival in Michigan: "Language, ideas, manners, customs—all are new."[39]

The new country functions throughout the century as a psychic landscape, a projection of American hopes and fears. On the one hand, as Daniel Boorstin argues,

> a great resource of America was vagueness. American uncertainties, products of ignorance and progress, were producers of optimism and energy. Although few acknowledged it, in the era between the Revolution and the Civil War this vagueness was a source of American strength. Americans were already distinguished less by what they clearly knew or definitely believed than by their grand and fluid hopes.[40]

The sense of possibility could stimulate development and industry. Before midcentury the Cumberland Road, the Erie Canal, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and myriad other transportation projects triggered large-scale migrations to the West and brought the flush times to the new country. Americans could build a new and better life in the Old Southwest or Old Northwest, believing that the newness of the land and the process of migration would transubstantiate their dreams into realities; when after 1820 a man could buy as little as eighty acres at $1.25 per acre, it seemed obvious to thousands of pioneers that the nineteenth-century way to wealth lay to the west. Especially following the panics of 1819, 1837, 1857, and

1873, Americans anxious to leave behind lagging economic conditions or personal failures traveled to the new country, creating a unique state of affairs Boorstin calls settlement before discovery. Migration meant rebirth, renewal, and personal success. The pioneer participated in a vast creative enterprise that was at its best uplifting and fulfilling. In books like Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839) the spirit of enthusiasm is contagious, and even when she criticizes the roughness of conditions in Michigan or the morals of her neighbors, she remains guardedly optimistic about the new country.

On the other hand, new settlers *were* traveling into the unknown and often keenly felt the pressures of uncertainty. The very conditions that encouraged migration, development, and confidence also fostered speculation, boosterism, and suspicion. The new arrival without land, job, or home made easy prey for the unscrupulous. The greenhorn might, like the comic butt of George P. Morris's story "The Little Frenchman and His Water-Lots" (1839), be tricked into buying worthless swampland or a homestead controlled by determined squatters.[41] Squatters comprised two-thirds of the population of Illinois in 1828, and claim-jumping and preemption were widespread. Moral and legal confusion reigned. In *Western Clearings* (1845) Caroline Kirkland describes the distrust and animosity "new-country-folks" held toward "land-sharks," "land-lookers," and "land-hunters"; the reason for conflict she locates in competition during the "madness of speculation"—"land-fever." "The whirl, the fervor, the flutter, the rapidity of step, the sparkling of eyes, the beating of hearts, the striking of hands, the utter *abandon* of the hour, were incredible, inconceivable. . . . He who had no money, begged, borrowed, or stole it; he who had, thought he made a generous sacrifice, if he lent it at cent per cent."[42]

In the 1850s in Kansas, land fever, speculation, and chicanery became so intense, reports Albert D. Richardson, that "it was not a swindle but a mania. The speculators were quite as insane as the rest."[43] To the acute observer Alexis de Tocqueville this climate was to be expected, directly attributable to the moral character of pioneers.

> Those Americans who go out far away from the Atlantic Ocean, plunging into the West, are adventurers impatient of any sort of yoke, greedy for wealth, and often outcasts. . . . *There is nothing of tradition, family feeling, or example to restrain them.* Laws have little sway over them, and mores still less.[44]

The new country often appeared a fictional territory inhabited by picaros.

The anxieties engendered by this atmosphere were heightened by historical conditions: Indian wars, bank failures, or market declines could extinguish the dreams of both speculator and settler overnight. In addition to these potential dangers, the memory of past reversals lingered in the popular imagination; if an individual had not suffered bankruptcy himself, he had at least felt the effects of national panics. Though all were well today, could ruin be far behind? For the flush times seemed naturally to be followed by hard times, the fluctuations from boom to bust forming an apparently inevitable historical cycle. The specter of failure—side by side with the dream of success—haunted the new country. Just as uncertainty served as one antidote to optimism, so too did the transient's vulnerability mar the dream. Despite the threat of robbers, swindlers, hostile Indians, illness, accident, extremes of climate, and self-delusion, migration continued, fueled by either the optimism of a boom or the pessimism of a bust, by the rumors of gold in 1849 or of diamonds in 1872, by the offer of cheap homesteads in 1862 or of free Indian lands in 1889, and primarily throughout the century by the persistent belief that the new country would in fact make one's fortune. As one early nineteenth-century pioneer phrased it, "this is a land of plenty, but we are proceeding to a land of abundance."[45] Pessimism kept alive the myth of the Great American Desert at the same time that optimism fostered the myth of the American Paradise.

The Confidence Man

The alternating attitudes of optimism and pessimism found reconciliation in conventional images like that of the new country. The inclusiveness or vagueness of this term mini-

mized the discrepancies between known and unknown, imposed rhetorical order on potential chaos, and structured the uncertain into a familiar literary form. Through the Adamic act of naming, the wildness of the new country was partially domesticated, constraining the unknown to function as both an emblem of American fears and a repository of American aspirations. As a convention the new country safely channeled anxiety and desire.

In the early nineteenth century Americans embraced George Washington and Davy Crockett as representative ideals. As archetypes of heroic American character, they symbolize the ability of Americans to organize, interpret, and survive the unknown, to form the unformed into stability and order. As imitable models, however, George Washington and Davy Crockett seem to represent antithetical attitudes: Washington was enshrined in serious works as the first American president, the father of the United States, an educated intellectual, and a paragon of honesty; Crockett was celebrated in humorous subliterature as a frontier individualist, a citizen of the backwoods, a know-nothing of horse sense, and a model of shiftiness.[46] Together they seem to form an uneasy resolution of conflicting aspects of American identity; in the cities of the East, honesty is the best policy, while in the new country of the West, dishonesty and cunning are to be employed.

In Cooper's Natty Bumppo these contradictory virtues are clearly dramatized in one individual: be true when you can, and always in the clearings, but be tricky when you must, and especially in the wilderness. In addition to advocating two antithetical modes of behavior, which as we have seen Leatherstocking categorizes as two truths, Natty Bumppo embodies a vanished ideal, one that Cooper's novels demonstrate to be inadequate to post-1820s conditions. (Both Leatherstocking and Washington die before 1800, and Crockett becomes a martyr at the Alamo in 1836). All three are in fact anachronistic idealizations, not reconciling but avoiding anxieties produced by the evolving new country. Washington clearly has little to do with this territory, and Crockett—despite his legislative serivce—is, like Leatherstocking, bound in the popular imagination to the wilderness of bears, Indians, and individual acts of heroism. With increasing migration to, settlement of, and

development within the new country, backwoods archetypes like Crockett and Leatherstocking continue to battle elemental forces; they are, however, an expression of a nostalgic impulse, and by the 1840s must make room for other figures representing new social conditions. Crockett himself offers a clue to the form one new figure will take; the common denominator among the Crockett tales, annuals, biographies, and autobiographies is humor.

Daniel Boorstin persuasively argues that the same qualities that make Crockett and other frontier heroes heroic also make them comic.

> The pervasive ambiguity of American life, the vagueness which laid the continent open to adventure, which made the land a rich storehouse of the unexpected, which kept vocabulary ungoverned and the language fluid—this same vagueness suffused both the comic and the heroic. Both depended on incongruity: the incongruity of the laughable and the incongruity of the admirable. In a world full of the unexpected, where all norms were vaguely or extravagantly defined, readers of the Crockett legends were never quite certain whether to laugh or to applaud, whether what they saw and heard was wonderful, awful, or ridiculous.[47]

Two points need to be emphasized about these popular superheroes. First, Davy Crockett remains throughout the century a hero of the wild, a man who singlehandedly unfreezes the sun on the coldest day of the year; his apotheosis at the Alamo in 1836 fixes him in a mythic realm well beyond the experience of all but a few Americans. Second, the humor of incongruity and exaggeration, so much a part of the Crockett tradition (and so absent from the Leatherstocking novels), develops in the subliterature of the Old Southwest and functions as a means of displacing anxieties. Humor reconciles Americans to the 1840s new country.

As American society developed in the Old Southwest, the uncertainties of the new country became less elemental than social. In the 1840s, for example, fear of war with Indians seemed less likely than war with Mexico, while cyclones seemed less threatening than economic cycles. In this newly uncertain new country, conditions inverted traditional archetypes and engendered an antihero of society, the confidence man. Emerging as a local phenomenon in the humorous fic-

tions of the Old Southwest, the confidence man personifies the ambiguities of the new country in a nonthreatening form. He gives substance to the ambivalent American attitudes toward the flush times by enacting in his "snaps" individual dramas of boom and bust. Through artful fast talk he elicits the confidence of opportunistic optimists, manipulating the counters of confidence, optimism, opportunity, and greed until his victims are fleeced. Like the new country, the confidence man seems to offer wealth, comfort, and success to those sharp enough to seize these elusive rewards; that he consistently betrays the confidence placed in him, that he appears buoyed by optimism while his gulls seem pulled under by skeptical pessimism, that his victims function as representative Americans, express deep nineteenth-century anxieties about the possibility of realizing the dream of success in the new country and about the integrity of public myths of moral American character. The reader laughs at the confidence man's ingenuity, at his delight in profitable masquerade, at his victims' infinite avariciousness, at their easy manipulation, and, for a moment, admits and enjoys an anti-Adamic and anti-Edenic image of himself and of the new country.

Johnson Jones Hooper introduced to the nation one of the first fully articulated confidence men in *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*. Simon Suggs struck a responsive chord in 1845 when he advised that "IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY."[48] As elaborated by Hooper, the confidence man is a representative man of a marginal society; Simon Suggs exploits a new country characterized by greed, hypocrisy, and shiftiness. The confidence man's roles form a catalogue of flush times activities: Suggs's career includes bouts as card sharp, speculator, politician, war hero, Indian fighter, camp-meeting enthusiast, and slave trader. Hooper's confidence man acts as an index to nineteenth-century anxieties: he realizes in a comedic structure an increasing cultural nervousness about such broad issues as the future of the new country, the multiplicity of identity, the difficulty of distinguishing reality from appearance and morality from hypocrisy, and the cultural ramifications of manifest destiny and urbanization; analyzed more narrowly, the confidence man gives voice to a long list of specific fears including that of war (with

Mexico, with England, or among states), of increased Indian hostilities (as well as of Indian extermination), of public protestations of morality and the private practice of immorality, of repeated panics and national failure, of the implications of mob rule inherent in Jacksonian democracy, of a conflict between the increasing powers of the federal government and the rights of states, and of the sectional, economic, and social tensions caused by slavery.

Captain Simon Suggs gives shape to these anxieties; Johnson J. Hooper imposes the order of comedy upon the chaos of these cultural fears, temporarily resolving them for the reader, dispelling them in laughter. In the humorous successes and failures of the confidence man, the reader perceives a fictional model of boom and bust, one that allows him to reconcile antithetical attitudes of hope and fear, confidence and suspicion, and optimism and pessimism. The reader is safely distanced from the immorality of the confidence man and his victims by being aligned with Hooper's ironic, cultured narrator. With the exception of the frame-narrator, all Hooper's characters are "low," morally despicable types who inhabit a degenerate, fictive new country. Within this controlled fictive arena, Simon Suggs unmasks through masquerade and fast talk the hypocrisy and greed of his victims; carefully distanced from these shenanigans—by point of view and by a language unavailable to Hooper's characters, to name two devices—the reader can enjoy the artful antics of the confidence man in Hooper's fiction while condemning similar snaps in reality. As Hooper shares with the reader the mechanics of Simon's games, the reader is enlisted as the confidence man's silent partner. The novelty of this position dulls the reader's judgment of the confidence man and momentarily encourages the reader to laugh at the fleecing of self-serving or self-righteous gulls. To participate imaginatively in such humorous confidence games allows the reader to envision the worst image of Americans within the safe confines of comic fiction and to discharge the anxieties this image creates through laughter at the apparent poetic justice dispensed by the confidence man in Hooper's narrow focus on a highly exaggerated, stylized, corrupt new country. The specters of ambiguity, immorality, and betrayal are raised by the fiction and are dispelled

by the technique of a tightly controlled humorous world. Like a tall tale of a backwoods hero lassoing and riding a cyclone, a confidence man story images and domesticates the reader's real fears.

The difficulty in isolating the confidence man as a literary convention occurs for a variety of reasons: the figure rises to prominence in a period marked by literary experimentation, the "American Renaissance"; the confidence man develops through the interaction of fictional and historical sources and remains in the American mind as a cultural as well as a literary convention; the convention evolves within the informal, regional genre of Southwest humor; throughout the nineteenth century, writers continue to employ characters like the Yankee, the prankster, and the peddler, which had contributed to the formation of the confidence man; and modern scholars have been too quick to label all "shifty" American characters "confidence men," an act of retrospective naming that blurs the distinitions of form and function which literary historians should seek to clarify.

Gary Lindberg, in the most recent and most comprehensive study of American confidence men, concludes that the confidence man is a central but covert culture hero. Despite admirable analyses of shifty promissory language and gesture in numerous sources from Emerson and Thoreau to Melville and Barth, Lindberg throws such a large net that he fails to catch the essential conventional nature of the American confidence man as a distinct literary form. Susan Kuhlmann limits the usefulness of *Knave, Fool, and Genius: The Confidence Man As He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* by linking such diverse characters as Chaucer's Canon, Hooper's Simon Suggs, and James's Madame Merle and by treating peripheral figures (owing more to other modes) like Hawthorne's Westervelt as having a central place in the confidence man tradition. Richard B. Hauck similarly groups John Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Simon Suggs, and Elmer Gantry and ultimately subsumes these varied types under the rubric of "the absurd." Warwick Wadlington focuses exclusively on the negotiation of confidence between author and reader in Melville, Twain, and West, while John Blair moves abruptly from Melville to five twentieth-century authors to chart "a cycle of

moral revaluation" in *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction*.[49] Although most admit that the New World intensified both physical and metaphysical uncertainties, and that the flush times bred predators in many forms, critics have been unable or unwilling to distinguish between a universal pattern of blustering fast talk or deceitful manipulation and its particular American variation—the confidence man as a humorous literary convention, representative, master, and survivor of the nineteenth-century new country. Tricksters, promisers, shape-shifters, and rogues appear in many genres and periods, but the American confidence man emerges as a distinct literary convention defined by the new country, the 1830s and 1840s flush times, the genre of Southwest humor, and initially a cardinal motive: pursuit of personal profit.

P. T. Barnum serves as a useful point of reference in discussing American attitudes toward confidence, shiftiness, and the new country. His life from 1810 to 1891 nearly parallels the rise, fall, and reemergence of the confidence man as a literary convention, and his autobiography, in which he revealed his motives and techniques, was a popular bestseller for forty years following its publication in 1855. Barnum achieved the success, wealth, influence, and public notoriety dreamed of by fictional confidence men like Hooper's Simon Suggs, Baldwin's Ovid Bolus, and Melville's Cosmopolitan; adopting roles of increasing visibility and prominence—from peddler to editor to showman to legislator—he adapted himself as few literary confidence men could to changing conditions throughout the nineteenth century. Envisioning America as a continually self-renewing, exploitable new country, Barnum operated within a tradition given explicit statement by Brackenridge in *Modern Chivalry*: "Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur";[50] or, in Barnum's own more popular style, "When people expect to get 'something for nothing' they are sure to be cheated, and generally deserve to be."[51] Though he claimed to be no more than an honest showman, to the nineteenth century he appeared a culture hero, a public symbol of humbug, humor, profit, and success. At the height of his career, Barnum had his emblematic nature analyzed by a perceptive Englishman: "Barnum is not an ordinary showman. . . . He stands alone. Adopting Mr. Emerson's idea, I should say that Barnum

is a representative man. He represents the enterprise and energy of his countrymen in the 19th century, as Washington represented their resistance to oppression in the century preceding."[52] Neil Harris, in a fine study of the showman, concurs and argues that Barnum's autobiography should be read as "a text on the social functions of illusion and the role of a deceiver in an egalitarian society."

> Credulity and deceit, disguise and sincerity, hypocrisy and idealism, art and artifice were subjects of critical importance in a society that had abandoned traditional rituals of accreditation. Antebellum Americans worshipped both equality and achievement. . . .
>
> Barnum's exaggerations and confessions, his humbugs and deceits, were the dreams of many Americans who could not try them. His audacity in donning the mantle of morality appealed to Americans convinced that the older boundaries of human behavior were no longer valid, but who dared not overstep these limits themselves. Barnum was not merely a Trickster . . . he had become one of the lightning rods of the American imagination, drawing off the anger of the gods from the community's sins to himself. And his wealth and success suggested that divine wrath did not always punish outrageous indulgence.[53]

In this context Barnum seems analogous to Simon Suggs and his compatriots. Within nineteenth-century America's moralistic, industrious society, they function as antiheroes who humorously and harmlessly pervert, invert, manipulate, or exaggerate its official values and goals. They embody and vent, not unlike the Elizabethan fool, anxieties Americans share about the future, the new country, and themselves.

The similarities between P. T. Barnum and Simon Suggs are often striking. Both seek to profit from artful fast talk and self-promotion; delight in humorous strategems and skillful manipulations; make book on the defensive virtues of skepticism, cynicism, and distrust; maintain an apparent optimism and boldly survive; and successfully market the novelty of the new country to an eager audience. Barnum's successes, bankruptcies, and adaptations trace as well the familiar pattern of boom and bust, while his technical disclosures of his own humbugs—and the complicity he demanded of the public (which should judge for itself)—continued debate of the mer-

its, motives, limits, and determinability of shiftiness and honesty, appearance and reality, that had long been part of discussions on the American character. Charles Dickens echoed the confusion in the minds of many Europeans about American identity when he isolated at the heart of Americans a sense of "universal distrust": "You will strain at a gnat in the way of trustfulness and confidence, however fairly won and well deserved, but you will swallow a whole caravan of camels, if they be laden with unworthy doubts and mean suspicions."[54] Barnum effectively resolved contradictory attitudes by demonstrating that Americans perceived no conflict; credulity and skepticism, immorality and morality, pseudo-science and science, humor and profit were through style inextricably linked and mutually supportive. Uncertainty held the special attraction of novelty, and the challenge to discriminate personally between fiction and fact appears to have been irresistible in the land of self-reliant democratic individualism. The new country, P. T. Barnum, and Simon Suggs all encouraged Americans to trust and test their own abilities, offering as a reward confirmation of one's superiority in an ideally classless, protean society. Neil Harris speculates that "concentration on whether a particular show, exhibit, or event was real or fake, genuine or contrived, narrowed the task of judgment for the multitude of spectators. It structured problems of experiencing the exotic and unfamiliar by reducing that experience to a simple evaluation."[55] Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill add that figures such as Barnum and Suggs reveal the American admiration of expertise, technique, and success without moral reflection.[56] In fact, nineteenth-century Americans seemed especially to enjoy successful cons; they enjoyed the direct challenge to their intellects and sensibilities, the chance to debunk and unmask fraud, the lively controversy aroused, the ingenuity of hoaxes and harmless tricks, and, perhaps most important and most particularly American, they enjoyed that which was new.

In 1843 Barnum anonymously offered New Yorkers the opportunity to witness a real, wild-West buffalo hunt at Hoboken, New Jersey, free of charge. Although Barnum did contract in advance with the ferry-boat captains (who did a land-office business between New York and New Jersey) to split

their fares with him that day, and although the buffalo herd was less wild than woolly, the service he performed in introducing city folk to these mythic denizens of the new country was appreciated by most in attendance. N. P. Willis reported that one passenger on a returning ferry warned those just coming in that the event was " 'the biggest humbug you ever heard of!' Willis added, that the passengers on the boat with him were so delighted, that they instantly gave three cheers for the author of the humbug, whoever he might be."[57] The audacity of the performance, not to mention its scope, makes it fascinating and hence successful. Thus might be explained Barnum's success in displaying Joice Heth, the supposedly 161-year-old nurse of George Washington, or the fabulous Feejee Mermaid mummy, which had the head of a monkey and the lower body of a fish. And like the confidence man who piques the interest of his audience by flashing real gold before their eyes, Barnum often presented real wonders, including Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," Chang and Eng the Siamese twins, "General" Tom Thumb, and the enormous Jumbo the elephant, to command attention.

Yet if Barnum seems analogous to Simon Suggs, under closer scrutiny he is more the showman he professed to be than the confidence man modern critics insist he is. In his own exposé of nineteenth-century frauds, *The Humbugs of the World* (1865), Barnum unironically lectures Americans on the need for confidence, concluding that the man without confidence does not recognize "that every sham shows that there is a reality, and that hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue."[58] Without taking Barnum too literally, just to be safe, it seems nevertheless true that the essence of P. T. Barnum is to be found in the more accurate analogy to Johnson Jones Hooper. Susan Kuhlmann implicitly makes this connection in her chapter "The Fictive Imagination as a 'Useful Art,'"[59] but she fails to follow its implications to conclusion. Fictionmaking was an acceptable form of deceit in the nineteenth century, yet Barnum and Suggs appear in the final analysis to be second cousins while Barnum and Hooper appear genuinely to be first. The showman is like Hooper in complete control of his performers; he offers the public a familiar, clearly limited arena—Barnum's American Museum and

Hooper's *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*—in which to delve for amusement and for escape from the monotony of reality. The confidence man, on the other hand, promises reality in the form of tangible profit. Barnum's point of view is Hooper's, one the audience essentially shares from a comfortable distance outside the aesthetic structure: questions of morality are left behind upon entering the American Museum and *Simon Suggs*; for the duration, the audience agrees to subscribe to the playful rules of a ritual, conventional game. Through the security of a controlling point of view, both Barnum and Hooper engage and maintain attention; their often ironic tone and their mockery of their performers further strengthens the bond between showman-author and audience. In each case the public is restrained from condemnation through this invitation to superiority, through the insistence on the humor and harmlessness of the spectacle, and through the revelations of manipulation freely given by Barnum in his autobiography and by Hooper throughout. The confidence man depends on secrecy and anonymity; the showman and author trade on notoriety and exposure.

In addition, Barnum and Hooper bring the ambiguities and oddities of the new country to a national audience: Joice Heth, Colonel Fremont's "woolly horse," and the western buffalo hunt have this in common with the shifty Simon Suggs, hard-shell preachers, and land speculators. Unlike the confidence man, Barnum and Hooper make no attempt to enlist the greed of the public; both provide entertainment for a set price. And finally, the world of Barnum's American Museum is clearly a fantastic creation, an aesthetic world which, like Hooper's fictional world, poses as an alternative universe. Both establish what Johan Huizinga terms a "play-ground," within which "an absolute and peculiar order reigns."[60] Huizinga argues in *Homo Ludens*:

> Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life [play] brings a temporary, a limited perfection. . . .
>
> The element of tension in play . . . plays a particularly important part. Tension means uncertainty, chanciness; a striving to decide the issue and so end it. . . . Though play as such is outside the range of good and bad, the element of tension imparts to it a certain ethical value in so far as it means a testing of the player's prowess.[61]

The tension and uncertainty experienced by Barnum's and Hooper's audience is of a different order than that felt by Simon Suggs's victims; the audience consciously and deliberately seeks out the experience and consents to it, while the victims of the confidence man are unwilling and unknowing participants in his performance. And of course at any moment Barnum's spectator can leave the American Museum just as Hooper's reader can put down *Simon Suggs*, whereas the fictional Simon Suggs inhabits a restricted, self-enclosed realm that has no exit and is self-referential.

Without I hope appearing to play fast and loose myself, I have been insisting on the distinction between fictional confidence men and historical confidence-man-like analogues. Though fiction-writer and showman may in fact be acceptable cultural versions of fictional confidence men in the nineteenth century (or vice versa), and though historical figures are useful in locating the popular appeal of characters such as Simon Suggs, it is important to see that the confidence man evolves as a distinct convention of American literature and must be studied as an aesthetic form within that culture to which it is a response and of which it is an expression. To quote Melville's narrator in *The Confidence-Man*, "It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie."[62]

2 THE EARLY TRADITION OF CONFIDENCE GAMES

> Here's for the plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world.
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals*

> All falsehoods, all vices seen at sufficient distance . . . become ludicrous.
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Comic"

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815) and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835) survey the loose tradition of tricksters and confidence games that contributed to the creation of the American confidence man as a literary convention symbolizing the southwestern flush times. *Modern Chivalry* recapitulates the traditional literary forms available to writers in their attempts to apprehend the new country, while *Georgia Scenes* reveals the struggles of nineteenth-century writers to develop new literary techniques and new stereotypes of American character. During the twenty years that separate these works there emerged a growing acceptance of American shiftiness, an increasing literary independence, and an informal new genre of American fiction.

Modern Chivalry

In *Modern Chivalry*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge offers a catalogue of early American confidence games which have their roots in sources as diverse as Elizabethan drama and Puritan demonology. He pictures the new country as encouraging ambiguity, confusion, corruption, and autotheism, and he presents the confidence game as a satiric model of democratic society. In addition, Brackenridge expresses common anxieties of educated Americans about the future of the new republic during its transition from Puritan theocracy to political de-

mocracy.[1] Even as it exposes discrepancies between the real and ideal in American society, *Modern Chivalry* allows the reader to discharge in laughter the tensions this gap creates by employing the traditional and therefore reassuring form of the humorous picaresque.

In chapter 1, Capt. John Farrago is mistaken for a biter by a gaggle of jockeys. Brackenridge plays on the reader's recognition of Farrago as a harmless Don Quixote to suggest the equivocal nature of identity in the new country. The jockeys—stock characters in the *Spectator* tradition, "a class of people not far removed from the sagacity of a good horse"[2]—reinforce this theme by their belief "that there is no trusting appearances" and that Farrago must be something other than a gentleman: "For they could have no idea, that a man could come there in so singular a manner, with a groom at his foot, unless he had some great object of making money by the adventure. Under this idea, they began to interrogate him with respect to the blood and pedigree of his horse" (7). Their assumption that pedigree determines value spurs Farrago to lecture.

> —Gentlemen, said he, it is a strange thing that you suppose that it is of any consequence what may be the pedigree of a horse. For even in men it is of no avail. Do we not find that sages have had blockheads for their sons; and that blockheads have had sages? (7)

Captain Farrago's argument is rigorously democratic, yet the implications of his reasoning escape notice: pedigree and appearance, two criteria used to determine identity and value in the Old World, are untrustworthy in the New. Like each horse, each man must be tested individually. The jockeys, who come to believe Farrago not a clever sharper but a pedantic fool, fail to recognize that he proves cause for their initial suspicions. That he is neither a biter nor a fool establishes in this first episode the uncertainty of identity, the slipperiness of language, and the limitations of perception. His misapprehension as a biter suggests several things about American society: first, the figure of the biter is familiar to the reader; second, the problem of ascertaining identity, made more difficult by the mobility of an increasing population, is so acute that it is commonly assumed that every stranger is a biter; and third,

by the late eighteenth century the biter is no longer merely a historical exemplum of vice but a device of the fiction writer. Neither moral nor immoral, the biter is a rhetorical construction that has independent aesthetic value; as if to confirm that the biter is in fact a literary device, Farrago is only a biter in the jockeys' imaginations and, for an instant, in Brackenridge's prose.

The reader's guide on this journey is Brackenridge's narrator, an observer of American eccentrics who goodnaturedly admonishes Farrago, Teague, and the other characters in a normative language instilling confidence; classical and homespun maxims dot his narrative, confirming his position as a cultured rationalist. As the captain examines the institutions of the new republic, he also explores its literary possibilities, incorporating sermons, tracts, historical sketches, and tall tales in his picaresque. Although his survey of literary genres echoes Farrago's tour, the narrator is no American Quixote but an enlightened gentleman whose morals, humor, and discretion mirror those of his intended audience.

In a typical adventure, Captain Farrago is approached by an entrepreneur who wishes to masquerade Teague as a Kickapoo Indian chief. "I confide in your good sense," the sharper tells the captain, "and have occasion for your servant" (56); Irishmen, Dutchmen, and other men with accents counterfeit Indian leaders, make treaties with federal commissioners, and divide the goods intended to prevent Indian warfare. "Is it possible," Farrago asks, "that such deception can be practised in a new country?" (56). This confidence game suggests that appearances are untrustworthy, that Americans make profits from immoral activities, that the republic's officials are either knaves or fools, and that the occasional biters of earlier periods have become organized and commonplace: "These things are now reduced to a system; and it is so well known to those who are engaged in the traffic, that we think nothing of it. . . . This being the case, it can be no harm to make a farce of the whole matter; or rather a profit of it" (57). The treatymaker exhibits a characteristic interest of the age in mechanics rather than morals: recognizing the discrepancies between appearance and reality, language and act, intention and result, he seeks not to unite them in Puritan fashion into one moral vision or

truth but to exploit these differences for personal profit. Concerned with creating his own way to wealth, he considers financial success proof of the virtue of manipulation.

Brackenridge pictures the processes of democratic government as appearances that mask elaborate confidence games. Style, rather than substance, is all-important on the frontier; as if in perverse imitation of Benjamin Franklin, the treaty-maker puts on the appearance of good works, satisfying both himself and the legislative guardians of democracy. He is able to masquerade Irishmen as Indians because identity is uncertain, because language is merely style, and because everyone has come to the new country with "some great object of making money by the adventure" (7). In this society, Farrago the idealist is deluded, while the sharper follows the norm in pursuit of the real—money. Americans neither want nor need the unpleasantness of truth, but seek the smooth assurance of style.

Captain Farrago is himself fascinated by the sharper's style, inquiring how Irish can be passed off as Kickapoo, and reveals the ease with which a man of morals can become caught up in discovering practical solutions. He recognizes that the treatymaker is not confused or disheartened by the ambiguities of the frontier, that he confidently puts them to a personally rewarding purpose, and that his scheme is a systematic program—not unlike Franklin's—for insuring survival and wealth. To dissuade Teague from becoming a partner in the swindle, the captain adopts a version of the confidence game: he, too, manipulates through misrepresentation, picturing to Teague the pain he will endure by being scalped, rather than the profit he will enjoy scalping the government.

> "There has been a man here with me, that carries on a trade with the Indians, and tells me that red-headed scalps are in great demand with them. . . . The taking off the scalp will not give much pain, it is so dextrously done by them with a crooked knife they have for that purpose. The mode of taking off the scalp is this; you lie down upon your back; a warrior puts his feet upon your shoulders, collects your hair in his left hand, and drawing a circle with the knife in his right, makes the incision, and, with a sudden pull, separates it from the head, giving, in the mean time, what is called the scalp yell. The thing is done in such an instant, that, the pain is scarcely

> felt. He offered me an 100 dollars, if I would have it taken off for his use, giving me directions, in the mean time, how to stretch it and dry it on a hoop. . . . He talked to me something of making you a king of the Kickapoos, after the scalp is off; but I would not count on that so much; because words are but wind." (58–59)

This is not unlike Bradford representing Thomas Morton as a devil, or Captain John Smith embellishing the dramatic story of his rescue by Pocahontas. Teague, who believes Farrago's words to be more than wind, is easily deceived: "Dear master, vid you trow me into ridicule, and de blessed shalvation of my life, and all dat I have in de vorld, to be trown like a dog to de savages, and have my flesh torn out of my head . . . for an 100 dollars or the like?" (59).

The answer is "Of course not"—Farrago is like Franklin a benevolent deceiver, one who subjects Teague to imaginary pain in order to protect society from actual harm. The captain adopts the sharper's method to create a literary image of a common fear—that of being scalped—to instruct Teague as Brackenridge instructs the reader. Farrago's minute description is amusing to the reader, for unlike the bog-trotter, he knows it is merely a tall tale. As fictional analogues of the reader's own anxieties, these literary confidence games function as humorous devices to divert attention from horrifying possibilities to harmless, rhetorical resolutions. The dangers of violence and fraud are defused because the reader concentrates on the clever technique of the treatymaker, the Hogarth-like terror of Teague, the precise language of Farrago, rather than on the reality of scalping. In equally precise terms Captain Farrago details the limitations of marriage, the pulpit, the stage, the legislature, and other occupations to which Teague aspires but for which he is unqualified. Myth, literature, religion, and empiricism mix without distinction in the captain's entreaties: a seductive landlady becomes in language an American Circe, an old hag planning to transform Teague magically into a pig prior to castrating him (96–97). Frightened by these vivid images, the Irishman seems a comic version of Thomas Morton or John Lyford.

Farrago's humorous tale-telling is related to the treatymaker's and, more closely, to Brackenridge's. Like the author of

Modern Chivalry, the captain creates fictions in order to instruct; both concur that "it can be no injury to deceive a man to his own advantage" (246). What Farrago fails to understand, and what Brackenridge satirizes, is that like most of his countrymen, Teague reckons advantage in dollars. A blind lawyer who argues with the captain over Teague's service to a fraudulent conjurer "in the semblance of Belzebub" intones two laws that govern the new country: "Doubtless it was a fraud upon the public; but the people themselves became a party, by consulting the wizard. . . . But in foro conscientiae, it might be a question of whether it was wrong to trick people that were willing to be tricked. Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur"; and "But in a republican government, the trade or employment of a man, is but little considered. The great matter is, the profits of it. Does it make the pot boil? If the bog-trotter finds his account in the service, and makes money, the world will wink at the means" (502–3). The lawyer offers the American trickster as the real American Adam.

Brackenridge follows closely Farrago's attempt to reconcile this perception with the ideals of democracy. In book 2 of *Modern Chivalry*, a controversy arises that echoes Cotton Mather's warning of "Wolves in Sheeps' Cloathing" and Franklin's defense of the minister Hemphill.

> Two men appeared, the one of a grave aspect, with a black coat; the other without the same clerical colour of garb; but with papers in his pocket which announced his authority to preach, and officiate as a clergyman. The man with the black coat, averred, that coming over together, in a vessel from Ireland, they had been messmates; and while he was asleep one night, being drowsy after prayers, the other had stolen his credentials from his pocket. The man in possession of the papers, averred they were his own, and that the other had taken his coat, and by advantage of the cloth, thought to pass for what he was not. (99)

The two preachers dramatize ironically the captain's pronouncement that "you have nothing but your character . . . in a new country to depend on" (17). Farrago proposes that each preach a sermon, and "let him that expounds the scripture the best, be adjudged the clergyman" (99). The two discourses present a contrast in styles as distinct as that between the cap-

tain's and Teague's. The performances divide the people, but the captain resolves the issue in a suggestive manner.

> Gentlemen, said he, the men seem both to have considerable gifts, and I see no harm in letting them both preach. There is work enough for them in this new country; the first appears to me, to be more qualified for the city, as a very methodical preacher; but the last is most practical; and each may answer a valuable purpose in their proper place. (104)

The solution is itself most practical, for it recognizes that two styles may serve one purpose, and that the impostor's enthusiasm may be as important in taming the frontier as the ordained minister's credentials. Imaged tensions are discharged in laughter at his sermon, a recitation of Adam and Eve's genealogy, and in admiration of the captain's solution; the reader knows that the episode is, after all, a fiction. Brackenridge, however, not only exploits the appearances of New World tricksters but also explores the implications of their presence in American culture as creators of fictions. Of *Modern Chivalry* Brackenridge writes: "Now it may be said, that this is a fiction; but fiction, or no fiction, the nature of the thing will make it a reality" (22). If fictions do become realities, then Farrago's solution of the minister-impostor is neither successful nor amusing. It is clearly unfair, not to mention unchristian, to certify the impostor as a "practical" man of God; his congregation will be at least ill-served. Farrago's decision smacks of condescension and elitism, and, as in his misrepresentation to Teague of the treatymaker's intentions, it suggests a certain sadistic pleasure the captain takes from giving people he considers foolish what he thinks they deserve. If Americans are willing to be tricked, and willingly accept mere style as the substance of reality, then Captain Farrago is himself willing to give them style—with a vengeance. At this point Farrago has internalized the pattern of confidence games he deplores in American society and becomes the object of satire for more than his quixotic behavior; he manipulates for personal profit, receiving the sensations of perverse, vicarious pleasure as his reward.

Brackenridge expresses more than the fear that politicians, lawyers, doctors, and other citizens are dishonest profiteers

and that American society encourages corruption in every profession; *Modern Chivalry* dramatically gives shape to Brackenridge's fear that beneath the appearances of order in society lie the realities of chaos. If style has become separated from substance, as Brackenridge insists in his introduction[3] and as *Modern Chivalry* demonstrates, then meaning—certainty of identity, intention, reference—cannot be determined. In the face of this epistemological uncertainty, Brackenridge focuses his fiction through a conventional literary character whose stock-in-trade is the confusion of appearance and reality, the substitution of language for fact—the archetypal trickster. Embodying the ambiguities of border states—between civilization and wilderness, the rulers and the ruled, style and substance—the trickster, especially in humorous guises like the Lord of Misrule or Till Eulenspiegel, plays confidence games that temporarily unleash the spirit of disorder and, as they are defined and sanctioned by society, displace unarticulated cultural fears of impending chaos. Brackenridge's repeated use of the confidence game appears in this light an attempt to domesticate the deepest fears of enlightened Americans through a constraining, recognizable, comic literary structure. *Modern Chivalry*, however, dramatizes the inability of Americans to discover adequate bases for judgment and calls into question the ability of Brackenridge's own fiction to offer certainty or reassurance. As the new country does not have the well-defined social structures of the Old World, the confidence games of *Modern Chivalry* express cultural anxieties about the American frontier, political corruption, practical democracy, social mobility, and the limits of perception that cannot wholly be resolved in humorous fiction. The literary conventions of the Old World prove inadequate to the New.

In 1839 the editor of a monthly literary magazine could say of *Modern Chivalry*, "Twenty years ago this work . . . was the humorous textbook of all classes of society."[4] The dismissive tone reflects a change in the attitudes of Americans toward confidence games, a change that was visible in the disappearance from polite literature of humorous and harmless expressions of American shiftiness. Nonetheless, the questions Brackenridge raises in his union of Old World techniques,

American materials, and confidence games again demanded expression in the southwestern flush times of another new country.

* * *

In the period following the publication of *Modern Chivalry*, the confidence game vanishes from American fiction as a critical model of democratic society. The cry for American writers to create a "Columbian" literature intoned by Philip Freneau, Charles Brockden Brown, Joel Barlow, and others encouraged laudatory and unambiguous literary images of America. The desire to be recognized by a skeptical European audience as successful practitioners of a valuable art led American writers to imitate Old World models: thus the *Red Book* of John Pendleton Kennedy and Peter Hoffman Cruse, which brought satiric essays and verse on American subjects to Baltimore, was consciously modeled on eighteenth-century British periodicals like the *Spectator*. In this literature, an acceptable American characer might be the time-worn sentimental rogue or picaro, but certainly unacceptable would be a self-serving American biter who might appear representative of the new republic.

Yet in the oral tales and informal fictions sprouting on the southwestern frontier, American tricksters retained the sharp social bite present in *Modern Chivalry*. This evolving tradition, however, remained submerged beneath the dominant literary establishment of polite letters in the 1820s. The generation of Americans coming of age in the "Era of Good Feeling" for the most part exchanged self-criticism for self-congratulation and sought in fiction unthreatening realizations of American independence, merit, and achievement. In the wake of the collapse of Federalism, American defeats in the War of 1812 (in which Washington, D.C., was burned), and the suspension of specie payments heralding the Panic of 1819 and a national depression, American culture could not accommodate Brackenridge's satiric tricksters in its national literature. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823, proclaimed following President Monroe's reelection without opposition, is perhaps the most obvious example of the American desire for a reassuring and confident national rhetoric. In the popular imagination the War of 1812 became a series of stunning military victories for

individual American leaders, a transformation reflecting the power of the need for American optimism. After all, by 1820 William Henry Harrison and Andrew Jackson seemed to have put an end to Indian hostilities, and between 1810 and 1830 the population of settlers beyond the Appalachians quadrupled; to most Americans the Indian inhabitants of the frontier seemed abstract literary images. The popular response in the 1820s anticipates that following the Civil War: Americans embraced literary stereotypes as true representative men, transformed American guilt into optimistic idealism, and relegated American biters to simplistic, secondary fictional roles. Critical expressions of American shiftiness, ambiguity, and defeat were overshadowed by the popular need—intensified by the legacy of the American Revolution—to confirm as realized the national dreams of security, certainty, and success. Ambivalence within the new republic found expression in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "Rip Van Winkle," and the Leatherstocking novels: Irving opposes two competing orders in Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones and dramatizes disorientation in Rip Van Winkle; Cooper chronicles the loss of the noble wilderness and the death of Natty Bumppo as a direct result of the advance of ignoble civilization. The American public, however, chose to ignore (or could not admit) the anxieties about class, morality, democracy, and the new country clearly present in the works of the "American Goldsmith" and the "American Scott."

* * *

In 1822 William H. Gardiner urged his countrymen to create a native American literature, fashioning the events of their history into romantic images of national identity: "We have long been of opinion that our native country opens to the adventurous novel-writer a wide, untrodden field, replete with new matter admirably adapted to the purposes of fiction." Noting that "the characters of fiction should be descriptive of classes, and not of individuals," he devotes several pages to the great variety of "specific character" found in the United States, listing such representative types as the proud Virginian, the Dutch burgomaster, and the uncivilized Indian. Comparing the covenanters immortalized by Scott to "those sterner puritans" whose journey into the wilderness remained

yet unexplored, Gardiner suggests that three American epochs "are peculiarly well fitted for historical romance;—the times just succeeding the first settlement—the aera of the Indian wars, which lie scattered along a considerable period—and the revolution." "What would not the author of Waverly," he challenges, "make of such materials?"[5]

Gardiner's summons, appearing in the prestigious *North American Review*, explicitly accepts conventional literary forms; he heralds Cooper as the American Scott and praises *The Spy* as forming "the foundations of American romance." In this view, nineteenth-century American literature will be "American" because its settings will be American, though its techniques clearly will be European. In addition, Gardiner implicitly rejects figures of democratic corruption, vice, and duplicity as inappropriate, unworthy, and uncharacteristic of this native art.

James Kirke Paulding's "The Yankee Roué" reveals the union of New and Old World elements as clearly as it marks the fate of shifty American characters.[6] More roué than Yankee, Stafford Sheffield inherits a fortune and sets out to prove his worth by seducing another man's wife. The roué's desire to adopt European social manners, undemocratic attitudes, and ungodly morals leads him to shoot himself in the foot in a duel and to a dissolute end in the Bowery. Paulding teaches a lesson that smacks of the humorless tracts of his contemporary, Mason Locke Weems. Like Weems's *God's Revenge Against Gambling. Exemplified in the Miserable and Untimely Deaths of a Number of Persons of both Sexes, who had Sacrificed their Health, Wealth, and Honor at Gambling Tables*, "The Yankee Roué" imitates the stereotypes of British sentimental and didactic fiction. Stafford Sheffield is a two-dimensional exemplum, a Europeanized aberration whose destruction reaffirms the American values of industry, frugality, honesty, and morality. In fact, to his native land Paulding attributes nothing more than his birth: the tale could without damage have been located entirely in Europe, retitled "The Youthful (or "Parisian" or "London") Roué."

Henry Junious Nott's "The Counterfeiters" owes just as little to Mills's Gap, North Carolina. Although nominally the plot concerns a conflict between rough mountaineers and civ-

ilized valley farmers, the mysterious Martin Brownfield—called a "feudal baron" by the narrator—plays the soured English highwayman to perfection. If Brownfield practices an American confidence game with counterfeit money, it is eclipsed by the story of Brownfield's daughter's love for the prosecuting magistrate's son. In true sentimental style, Brownfield kills his own son, mistaking him for his enemy's, and, without further mention of counterfeit money, begs his daughter from his deathbed to marry the magistrate's son.

Collected in *Novelettes of a Traveller*, Nott's tale shows the influence of eighteenth-century English periodical literature (not to mention *Romeo and Juliet*). In similar fashion the "Biographical Sketch of Thomas Singularity, Journeyman Printer," also included in *Novelettes*, displays its descent from periodical and picaresque fiction, borrowing from American soil only its ostensible location. At best Thomas Singularity's misadventures with snakes, bees, and women appear diluted versions of Teague O'Regan's.

In 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville acutely observed that literary forms of the Old World, veneered with American names and settings, served as appropriate literature for the New World.

> Not only do the Americans constantly draw upon the treasures of English literature, but it may be said with truth that they find the literature of England growing on their own soil. The larger part of that small number of men in the United States who are engaged in the composition of literary works are English in substance, and still more so in form. Thus they transport into the midst of democracy the ideas and literary fashions which are current amongst the aristocratic nation they have taken for their model. They paint with colors borrowed from foreign manners; and as they hardly ever represent the country they were born in as it really is, they are seldom popular there.[7]

Anticipating Tocqueville's complaint, Gardiner chides "the graceful and humorous author of Knickerbocker and the Sketch Book" for not making use of more American sources and suggests that "the Indians themselves are a highly poetical people"; as the savage warrior "is no mean instrument of the sublime and terrible," "we see not why those superstitions of theirs . . . may not be successfully employed to supersede the worn out fables of Runic mythology."[8]

The response to Gardiner's suggestion in nationalistic journals can be gauged by the popularity of Lydia M. Child's "The Indian Wife," Sarah J. Hale's "The Frontier House," and James Hall's "The Backwoodsman." Each sketch reduces the inhabitants of the frontier to literary stereotypes offering the polite reader the luxuries of sorrow, terror, and superiority. The Indian appears as either an agent of evil or a sentimentalized hero living in harmony with nature; the backwoodsman likewise becomes alternately a rough comic barbarian or a courtly gentleman. When these characters assume center stage they lose their American traits and are transformed into eighteenth-century European archetypes of noble pathos and honorable vengeance. In Child's "Indian Wife," Princess Tahmiroo has been married for her father's wealth by the unscrupulous trader Florimond de Rancé. The name suggests that Americans are not party to such vile acts and functions to displace any guilt Child or her readers have for taking Indian lands. Unable to witness the sale of her ancestral lands and the estrangement of her newly Europeanized daughter, Tahmiroo paddles over the Falls of St. Anthony, choosing death for herself and her young son. Four years later James Hall's "Indian Wife's Lament" (also in *Legends of the West*) follows another wife and children over the Falls of St. Anthony, this time in eighteenth-century couplets. Both Hall and Child may have drawn upon historical as well as literary sources; Wordsworth, whose "Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" appeared in *Lyrical Ballads* (first printed in the United States in Philadelphia in 1802), urges the reader to "see that very interesting work, Hearne's *Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*." Sentimental characterizations like Mrs. Child's are indebted to European literary stereotypes. As Roy Harvey Pearce explains in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, noble savages alternate with heartless butchers in early national fiction. In Hale's "Frontier House"—as in the numerous popular Pocahontas plays—both images uneasily coexist: bloodthirsty Indians spare the family of a woman who offered them kindness in the past. More frequently, though, literary Indians, as in Hall's "The Backwoodsman," display no mercy: they carry off a young bride-to-be on her way home from a camp-meeting; their brutal inten-

tions are matched by the ferocity of the "Patriarch of Kentucky," who refuses sleep or thanks until each Mingo is killed. Pearce concludes that "by the first quarter of the century . . . Indian nobility and ignobility, Indian virtues and vices, had to be at once admitted and praised and dispraised for what they were, qualities tied together and delimited by the special nature of Indian society."[9]

At the same time that Thomas Singularity played his impolite tricks and polite backwoodsmen vanquished savage Indians, Mike Fink drank barrels of rot-gut whiskey, made love to willing country girls, and joyfully cracked together human skulls. Around campfires, in local "doggeries," and at any official meeting, the exploits of Fink and his contemporaries were recounted. The popularity and importance of these oral tales throughout the nineteenth century is testified to by the metaphoric observations of the acutely perceptive Andrew Lang: "All over the land men are eternally 'swopping stories' at bars, and in the long endless journeys. . . . How little, comparatively, the English 'swop stories'! . . . The stories thus collected in America are the subsoil of American literary humour, a rich soil in which the plant . . . grows with vigour and puts forth fruit and flowers."[10] These stories were short, often recounting a single incident, and were meant to be told in one sitting. Acts of tremendous strength, incredible marksmanship, and devilish cunning form the base of this oral tradition, in which the frontier appears inhabited by neither roué nor noble savage but by a breed known as "half man, half horse, and half alligator."[11] No hastily repainted European scenery, the frontier functions as a central character in many narratives, an entity competing fiercely with backwoodsmen. The Ohio Falls that Mike Fink rides in a broadhorn, the frozen sun that Davy Crockett oils with a bear, the rivers that suddenly flow backward in a tale of Pete Featherton—these landscapes challenge the imagination.

These features of the frontier environment naturally formed material for campside yarns, in which the triumph of regional heroes over swollen rivers, deep snows, and savage Indians reaffirmed each man's abilities and temporarily minimized in fiction the day-to-day hazards of frontier life. The oral tale was set temporally in the present or recent past and spatially in a

nearby region. The teller, who had usually witnessed the event himself, vouched for its truth personally, thereby guaranteeing implicitly repetitions of superhuman achievements. As opposed to the romance, which as Gardiner explains converts the familiar into a theater of remote antiquity, the oral narrative domesticates elements in everyday life that are terrifying or bizarre. To do this storytellers often made light of danger, or made light of the consequences resulting from the worst imaginable accidents; humorous exaggeration was a main ingredient in oral art, apparent in the tornado ride of Davy Crockett down the Mississippi River, or in the ram-butting match that finally scattered the brains of Jack Pierce. Whether victor or victim, the narrator of the tale survives. He also gives form to chaotic experiences, proclaiming his existence as he laughs at adversity. He is able to laugh because of the control he establishes by means of the dramatic frame, the conventional form of most frontier tales, within which the rough action occurs. With the storyteller introducing and concluding the tale, all manner of activity—earthy, brutal, supernatural—can take place in between, safely distanced from the listener. Tocqueville again demonstrates his perceptiveness of the patterns—literary as well as social—evolving in the new country.

> Accustomed to the struggle, the crosses, and the monotony of practical life, [Americans] require rapid emotions, startling passages,—truths or errors brilliant enough to rouse them up, and to plunge them at once, as if by violence, into the midst of the subject. . . . Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose—almost always vehement and bold.[12]

This loose narrative form, antithetical to that found in early nineteenth-century annuals and reviews, encouraged the creation of mountain-size heroes who spoke outrageous dialect and withstood unbelievable challenges. And as tales were swapped at informal gatherings, each teller in turn would try to top the last, embellishing and exaggerating to the utmost reach of his powers of invention. Half a century after Tocqueville, Henry Adams reflected in similar fashion that "border society was not refined . . . and little idea could be drawn of the character that would at last emerge. The Mississippi boat-

man and the squatter on Indian lands were perhaps the most distinctly American type then existing, as far removed from the Old World as though Europe were a dream."[13]

The frontiersman, epitomized in the oral tales of Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, Mike Fink, and others (not to mention Natty Bumppo, as well), became an accepted image of national identity, one intrinsically linked to images of the American landscape and the conventions of fireside art. Part picaro, part rogue, part Indian, and part animal, he embodied both the wildness of the historical frontier and the superhuman qualities necessary to survive it. The storyteller, not restricted by the expectations of a formal literary audience, freely indulged his fantasies and fears, creating symbolic American characters within distinctly American settings and forms. The hunt, the fight, the contest, the swap: these were the activities of the frontiersman, archetypal actions made American in oral lore.

Oral tales began to appear in local newspapers in the 1820s as humorous filler contributed by amateur writers. William T. Porter, editor of the popular and successful weekly *New York Spirit of the Times*, boasted in 1837 that "from Maine to Florida, from the St. Lawrence to the Missouri, a thousand gifted pens are employed in imparting novelty and interest to our columns."[14] Stories of frontier exploits kept the form and flavor of their oral sources to insure "novelty and interest," and, as Walter Blair notes, "to go one step farther in catching the pleasant quality of a fireside yarn, many of the correspondents . . . put their mock oral tales into an evocative framework."[15] Duplicating in print a common ritual of the frontier, these tales brought to an expanding and an increasingly educated regional audience a sense of identity and community.

Georgia Scenes

Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, &c. in the First Half Century of the Republic* (1835) is typical of the regional literature that began to give form to the passions, anxieties, and doubts suppressed in earlier fiction. The first collection from the Old Southwest to reach a

national audience, its eleven editions demonstrated that the rural life of the Old South was of interest to New Yorkers as well as Virginians and that unidealized frontier materials could be adapted to literary forms flexible enough to preserve their native freshness. Dominated by the rhetoric of an Addisonian narrator, Longstreet's tales are nonetheless often populated by rough-hewn backwoodsmen who prance, snort, and bellow in a vernacular guaranteed to attract attention. In *Georgia Scenes* the frame technique establishes an aesthetic distance between the author and his dialect-using characters that is essentially comic; the reader joins the cultured narrator in laughing at the rude talk and crude manners of the country folk he describes. This structure emphasizes an even greater moral distance, one not always found in oral tales, and reveals that the audience is presumed to be morally aligned with the proper narrator (and author) in contrast to the vernacular characters. The "half man, half horse, half alligator" is an oddity—the well-bred narrator is the moral and perceptual center of the story. Though he may enjoy watching the antics of Georgia b'hoys, fighting, drinking, and practical joking are clearly not the occupations of a Whig gentleman.

They are, however, the occupations of Longstreet's characters. As the first in a line of southwestern writers, Longstreet developed frontier stereotypes and narrative techniques that record the boom and bust flush times, express Whig anxieties about the practice of Jacksonian democracy, and reveal the influence of oral, journalistic, and literary traditions. In *Georgia Scenes* the figure of the American sharper begins to emerge from the violence, cruelty, and opportunism characteristic of this new country.

"The Character of a Native Georgian" reflects Longstreet's dependence on conventional literary devices like the prankster. Ned Brace "seemed to live only to amuse himself with his fellow-beings, and he possessed the rare faculty of deriving some gratification of his favorite propensity, from almost every person whom he met, no matter what his temper, standing, or disposition."[16] Impossible to claim as wholly an American innovation, the "Native Georgian" yet reveals the growing interest in distinct characterization begun with Royall Tyler's

Jonathan, and though certainly related to Addisonian eccentrics like Sir Roger De Coverly and Will Honeycomb, in name alone he is more suggestively American; *Ned Brace* has neither the euphony nor the affectation of *Pindar Cockloft*. His tricks likewise bear a more American stamp than those of Thomas Singularity or Brom Bones.

In a ritual of good-fellowship, each traveler salutes a Savannah barkeeper with his name before entering the public house; Ned Brace's alarmed refusal to speak his name aloud, offering instead a soiled and illegible scrap of paper to the proprietor, suggests in humorous form the fragility of American hospitality, the self-assertiveness of individual identity, the uncertainty inherent in a mobile population, and the importance Americans place on forthrightness and personal conformity. Ned's joke of withholding his name, like that of mashing his food into a mush or drinking coffee and tea together, violates unwritten social conventions and comically exposes the uncertainty and distrust lurking just below the surface of American confidence. Ostensibly a sketch of an eccentric in the *Spectator* tradition, "The Character of a Native Georgian" cuts across the grain and demonstrates the vulnerability of society in the new country. Amusing though it is as Ned preys upon "the beau in the presence of his mistress, the fop, the pedant, the purse-proud, the over-fastidious and sensitive" (31), the tone of the sketch shifts when Ned disrupts a fire brigade for a lark: as Savannah burns in the background, Ned stops the passage of water to the blaze, insisting on quenching his thirst with an entire bucket of water. No denunciation follows; although the narrator closes this frame, he shares with Ned an ambiguous moral position: both exist on the same imaginative level, and walk off "on our way homeward" virtually hand in hand.

The preface to *Georgia Scenes* acknowledged Longstreet's problem of establishing control over ambiguous frontier materials.

> I cannot conclude these introductory remarks, without reminding those who have taken exceptions to the coarse, inelegant, and sometimes ungrammatical language, which the writer represents himself as occasionally using, *that it is lan-*

> *guage accommodated to the capacity of the person to whom he represents himself as speaking.* (iv, Longstreet's emphasis)

The emphasis in this admonition implies intention, but Longstreet's ambiguous rhetoric creates more problems than it solves. Ignorance of the implications of using frontier materials and new narrative techniques occasionally led him to tortured syntax, uncertain aesthetics, and aberrant ethics.

"Georgia Theatrics," the first Georgia scene, postulates a solution to both moral and artistic imperatives. The narrator opens the frame with an explanation of the "Dark Corner" of Lincoln.

> I believe it took its name from the moral darkness, which reigned over the portion of the county, at the time of which I am speaking. If in this point of view, it was but a shade darker than the rest of the county, it was inconceivably dark. If any man can name a trick, or sin, which had not been committed at the time of which I am speaking, in the very focus of the county's illumination, (Lincolnton), he must himself be the most inventive of the tricky, and the very Judas of sinners. (5)

His tone is at once amused, condescending, and self-righteous, and the Latinate diction and measured cadences of his speech establish his superiority to the moral wilderness around him. Completely in control while contrasting the area's moral and natural condition, the narrative voice assures as it describes the charms—"undulating grounds," "luxuriant woodlands," "sportive streams," "vocal birds," "blushing flowers"—of a perfect pastoral. This eighteenth-century idyll is suddenly shattered.

> "Boo-oo-oo! Oh, wake snakes, and walk your chalks! Brimstone and——fire! Don't hold me, Nick Stoval! The fight's made up, and let's go at it. ——my soul, if I don't jump down his throat and gallop every chitterling out of him, before you can say 'quit'!"
>
> In Mercy's name! thought I, what band of ruffians has selected this holy season, and this heavenly retreat, for such Pandaemonium riots! I quickened my gait, and had come nearly opposite to the thick grove whence the noise had proceeded, when my eye caught indistinctly, and at intervals, through the foliage of the dwarf-oaks and hickories which intervened, glimpses of a man, or men, who seemed to be in a

> violent struggle; and I could occasionally catch those deep drawn, emphatic oaths, which men in conflict utter, when they deal blows. (6)

The contrast between narrator and character is rhetorical, temporal, and moral—the narrator is separated from and clearly condemns the battle he perceives; the dialect used by the combatants emphasizes the rough-and-tumble nature of the frontier, which relies on lawless brutality to maintain a semblance of order: "'Enough! My eye's out.' . . . 'Now, blast your corn-shucking soul . . . come cutt'n your shines 'bout me again, next time I come to the Court-House, will you!'" (7). Presented dramatically, the details are horribly realistic and serve not only as a historical record of backwoods language but also as an indictment of backwoods morality. Reader and narrator deplore the fight, horrorstruck at its consequences. From similar moral positions, both view brawling as distasteful, uncivilized, and unchristian—senseless violence at its worst. Both are, as well, implicitly threatened by the proximity of the struggle; the narrator of "Georgia Theatrics" is only one step away from joining the fracas (though, admittedly, that step is a long one). However, by a kind of narrative sleight of hand, Longstreet makes the violence disappear into comedy.

> "Come back, you brute! and assist me in relieving your fellow mortal, whom you have ruined for ever!"
>
> My rudeness subdued his embarrassment in an instant; and with a taunting curl of the nose, he replied "You needn't kick before you're spur'd. There a'nt nobody there, nor ha'nt been nother. I was jist seein' how I could 'a' *fout*." So saying, he bounded to his plough, which stood in the corner of the fence about fifty yards beyond the battle ground.
>
> And would you believe it, gentle reader! his report was true. All that I had heard and seen, was nothing more nor less than a Lincoln rehearsal; in which the youth who had just left me, had played all the parts, of all the characters, in a Court-House fight. (7–8)

The threat vanishes, or rather its existence is forcibly denied, so that the author appears to disengage himself from the savagery described. Longstreet's moral position is unassailable—he condemns from a safe distance the characters who would use violence, and, as the fight did not actually occur, denies that his hands are dirtied by the tale's minuteness of

"Georgia Theatrics" (from Burton, *Cyclopaedia*, 1858).

detail. His stuffy narrator, like the duelling roué who shoots himself in the foot, becomes an object of derision; he, not the author, overheard, misapprehended, and overreacted. And he, not Longstreet, may appear the voyeur. Seen in this way, "Georgia Theatrics" constrains the violent elements of the frontier as the apparent threat is removed by the denial, ex post facto, of its reality.

In action "Georgia Theatrics" resembles the typical misadventures of oral tales. In language, however, its narrator recalls the eighteenth-century affectations of Messrs. Boozle and Noozle in Longstreet's "The Ball." "Georgia Theatrics" forcibly yokes together their self-consciously inflated literary style and the painfully realistic vernacular description of a frontier fight. Despite the fact that no violence is actually committed, the narrator seems not an objective gentleman but an effeminate, foppish moralist, a southwestern Ichabod Crane whose bookish rhetoric is more appropriate to a georgic like Thom-

son's "The Seasons" than a robust Georgia scene. In fact, "Georgia Theatrics" has no conclusion: the implications of the incident extend uneasily beyond the visionary abilities of the narrator. As his introduction to the "Dark Corner" affirms, the fight could undoubtedly have happened as imagined. What he overheard, after all, was a "Lincoln rehearsal," a preparation for a real encounter; that the story's last paragraph presents his puzzled, almost clinical observation reinforces this possibility, confirming that the threat of dismemberment is not dismissed but postponed. The cries of the dialect characters—"Enough! My eye's out," "Get your owl-eye in agin if you can!"—create images that the pompous language of the narrator can do nothing to dispel. Crushed by the defeat of his expectations, the narrator is reduced to passivity, his superior moral position undercut, his rhetoric deflated. His minute inspection of the battleground, moreover, suggests that he may even at the end vicariously enjoy the closeness of his brush with violence.

> I went to the ground from which he had risen; and there were the prints of his two thumbs, plunged up to the balls in the mellow earth, about the distance of a man's eyes apart; and the ground was broken up, as if two stags had been engaged upon it. (8)

Longstreet laughs at both the savage youth and the anemic cosmopolitan; whether he also laughs at the reader is a moot point. As Brackenridge's Captain Farrago deceives Teague about the treatymaker's interest in his scalp, so too does Longstreet deceive the reader of "Georgia Theatrics" about the reality of this fight. In both fictions, however, the violence transformed into comedy remains in the imagination as a possibility; appearance and reality merge in Longstreet's disturbing final vision of violence that is not violence, the thumb prints of the boy in the soft earth.

Edgar Allan Poe applauded "The Fight" as "a sketch unsurpassed in dramatic vigor" that would "positively make the fortune of any British periodical" because of its "forcible, accurate and original generic delineations of real existences to be found sparsely in Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana, and very plentifully in our more remote settlements and territories."[17] A detached first-person narrator sets the frontier scene.

> In the younger days of the Republic, there lived in the county of ———, two men, who were admitted on all hands to be the very best men in the county—which, in the Georgia vocabulary, means that they could flog any other two men in the county. Each, through many a hard-fought battle, had acquired the mastery of his own battalion, but they lived on opposite sides of the Court House, and in different battalions: consequently they were but seldom thrown together . . . so that, but for the circumstance which I am about to mention, the question, which had been a thousand times asked "Which is the best man, Billy Stallions, (Stallings,) or Bob Durham?" would probably never have been answered. (53–54)

The slightly inflated rhetoric demonstrates the author's control over the story and its characters, the brief insertion of dialect (corrected parenthetically) a cautious preview of what will follow. Ransy Sniffle is a comtemptible squatter who "never seemed fairly alive except when he was witnessing, fomenting, or talking about a fight. Then, indeed, his deep-sunken grey eyes assumed something of a living fire" (57). Sniffle engineers the fight, embodying Longstreet's worst fears about the kind of men the new country may produce.

As the fight commences, the modulated tones of the narrator are comically broken by the rude cries of the backwoodsmen.

> As he struck the ground, commingled shouts, screams and yells burst from the lower battalion, loud enough to be heard for miles. "Hurra my little hornet!"—"Save him!"—"Feed him!—Give him the Durham physic till his stomach turns!" Billy was no sooner down than Bob was on him, and lending him awful blows about the face and breast. Billy made two efforts to rise by main strength, but failed. "Lord bless you man, don't try to get up!—*Lay* still and take it!—you *bleege* to have it." (62–63)

Their exaggerated oaths of encouragement add fantastic details to the description; yet, as in Hall's "The Backwoodsman," the precise diction of the narrator obtains, shaping the action and defining the limits of involvement: "Billy now turned his face suddenly to the ground, and rose upon his hands and knees. Bob jerked up both his hands and threw him on his face. He again recovered his late position, of which Bob endeavored to deprive him as before; but missing one arm, he failed and Billy rose" (63). The frame closes with a conven-

tional moral injunction, an authorial condemnation of the violence witnessed and recorded on the frontier.

> Thanks to the Christian religion, to schools, colleges, and benevolent associations, such scenes of barbarism and cruelty, as that which I have just been describing, are now of rare occurrence: though they may still be occasionally met with in some of the new counties. Wherever they prevail, they are a disgrace to that community. The peace officers who countenance them, deserve a place in the Penitentiary. (66)

The moral and aesthetic values of the author subdue the frontiersman's; the narrator observes, reports, and evaluates—negatively—the rough country custom. The fight is an aberration, not entirely an amusement but also an occasion for instruction. Whig gentlemen do not bite off each other's ears.

Kenneth S. Lynn explains the function of the frame technique as "a convenient way of keeping . . . first-person narrators outside and above the comic action, thereby drawing a *cordon sanitaire*, so to speak, between the morally irreproachable Gentleman and the tainted life he describes."[18] The frame's flexibility, apparent in the rambling, ponderous introduction and abrupt, staccato conclusion of "The Fight," preserves the violent immediacy of the story intact. It also allows Longstreet time to individualize his characters: Billy Stallions and Bob Durham are not idealized noble savages, but battered men worthy of sympathy; and Ransy Sniffle, the contemptible go-between, gains a reputation that lasts into the twentieth century, where Sniffle is smoothly transposed to Snopes.[19] The brawling and whooping of the backwoodsmen, though contained within the frame, do more than characterize Stallions and Durham unsentimentally; the brutal action and jarring vernacular recreate the turbulence of the historical frontier.

> "Oh, my lark!" cried the east, "has he foxed you? Do you begin to feel him! He's only beginning to fight—He ain't got warm yet."
>
> "Look yonder!" cried the west—"didn't I tell you so! He hit the ground so hard, it jarred his nose off. Now ain't he a pretty man as he stands? He shall have my sister Sall just for his pretty looks. I want to get in the breed of them sort o' men, to drive ugly out of my kin folks."
>
> . . ."Bullets!"—*Hoss*-kicking—Thunder'"—"That'll do for the face—now feel his short ribs, Billy!" (63, 64)

Bullets, wild horses, and thunder symbolize the American landscape of the 1830s. "The Fight," a compressed imaginative rendering of this terrain, captures the vitality of the flush times, embracing momentarily the anarchic forces released in senseless violence. The closing paragraph forms an embarrassing admission of its powers of evocation, the overzealous protest of a voyeur. The tacked-on moral underscores the fragility of the boxlike structure and acknowledges the newly discovered danger of frontier materials—for several reasons their potential is difficult to control. As W. J. Cash points out in *The Mind of the South*, the distinction between southern gentleman and southern roustabout was largely fictitious; both often sprang from identical sources on the frontier, where to every man the tendency to use and approve of violence came naturally.[20] The almost intoxicating effect of the fight on the narrator reveals him less the gentleman than one of the b'hoys; his superiority is torn away as quickly as Billy Stallions's nose. The details of personality and motivation that Longstreet gives the brawlers work against the ostensible containing purpose of the frame, pulling the narrator down to the level of what Poe termed the "horrible and disgusting details of southern barbarity." Like "Georgia Theatrics," "The Fight" expresses the possibility that Americans—Longstreet, his narrator, his reader—are typically Ransy Sniffles, squatters who are secretly thrilled by violence. In this unsettling vision resides the Whig fear of the leveling power of Jacksonian democracy, fear of the frontier's ability to corrupt good men, and fear that each individual hides a secret nature.

"The Horse-Swap" is perhaps the most firmly controlled frontier tale in *Georgia Scenes* and marks a return to the deceptive and ambiguous new country of *Modern Chivalry*. Introduced by a conventional frame-narrator, the traditional frontier pastime—swapping—brings the historical flush times into fictional focus. As both a real and a metaphoric activity, swapping forms an emblem of life in the boom-and-bust days of the border states. Like "The Fight," "The Horse-Swap" reflects these historical conditions in symbolic rituals of identity; their purpose is always to separate reality from deceiving appearances, to decide "which is the best man." The narrator's initial description of the Yellow Blossom from Jas-

per, however, stresses this contest's potential for comedy, not violence. His colorful language, so unlike the narrative affectations of "Georgia Theatrics," sets a humorous, informal tone well suited to the cavorting Blossom: "he cursed, swore, whooped, screamed, and tossed himself in every attitude which man could assume on horseback" (21). Longstreet assumes that the reader will recognize this descendant of the Yankee Jonathan and Mike Fink. In name, speech, and confidence the Yellow Blossom proclaims himself the archetypal American sharper, while his vernacular boasts form a native refrain that amounts to self-caricature: "I'm the boy . . . perhaps a *leetle*—jist a *leetle* of the best man, at a horse-swap, that ever trod shoe-leather" (21).

Compressing the rambling introduction of "The Fight" into a single brisk paragraph, "The Horse-Swap" begins immediately with a comic threat to the narrator himself: "'Stranger,' said he to me, 'did you ever see the *Yallow* Blossom from Jasper?'" (21). By suggesting that the narrator might become involved with the Blossom, though of course it is Pete Ketch who actually swaps horses, Longstreet blurs ever so slightly the conventional distinction between gentleman frame-narrator and rough frame-character. The Blossom's playful question sets in motion the self-contained and self-completing contest of wits and tongues, an aesthetic ritual as prescribed in form as a medieval joust. Like frontier knights the Yellow Blossom and Pete Ketch enter the lists, each determined to prove that he more skillfully wields the shield of appearance and the lance of reality. The swap swells to near-mythic proportions as the Blossom cries that he can "out-swap any live man, woman or child, that ever walked these hills, or that ever straddled horse flesh since the days of old daddy Adam" (21).

Longstreet transforms his fears—and those of his reader—of the violence and corruption characteristic of the historical frontier into a comic literary dance. As the object of the swap is to lose the worst horse, the tale focuses on the rhetorical strategies used by each biter to convince the other that swapping will give him the best horse. The Yellow Blossom's Bullet is an earless, malformed nag whose tail "exhibited the line of beauty in so many diretions, that it could not fail to hit the

most fastidious taste in some of them" (22), while Pete Ketch's Kit appears "a well-formed sorrel of the middle size," though "Bullet had the decided advantage of him in point of intellect" (24).

> "Why, man," said Blossom, "do you bring such a hoss as that to trade for Bullet? Oh, I see you've no notion of trading." (24)
>
> "Well," said Peter, "I didn't care about trading; but you cut such high shines, that I thought I'd like to back you out, and I've done it. . . ." "Come, old man," said Blossom, "I've been joking with you. I begin to think you do want to trade; therefore, give me five dollars and take Bullet. I'd rather lose ten dollars any time than not make a trade, though I hate to fling away a good hoss." "Well," said Peter, "I'll be as clever as you are. Just put five dollars on Bullet's back, and hand him over; it's a trade."
>
> Blossom swore again, as roundly as before, that he would not give boot; and, he said,"Bullet wouldn't hold five dollars on his back, no how. But, as I bantered you, if you say an even swap, here's at you."
>
> "I told you," said Peter, "I'd be as clever as you; therefore, here goes two dollars more, just for trade sake. Give me three dollars, and it's a bargain." (27–28)

The swap concluded, the Yellow Blossom warns Pete Ketch not to hurt Bullet, who, he notes, has a huge sore on his back. "I am, perhaps, a leetle," Blossom laughs, "of the best man at a horse-swap that ever catched a coon" (29). The laugh is turned back on the Blossom, however, as Pete Ketch's son Neddy blurts out that Kit is both deaf and blind. At this point the frame collapses inward, Pete's ironic repetition of the Blossom's boast formally completing the narrative structure: "You are a *leetle* the best man at a horse-swap that I ever got hold of" (30).

The comic shape of the tale moderates the educated writer's exaggerated fears that all Americans in the new country are sharpers, that all swaps or transactions are fraudulent, that one's senses are always untrustworthy, and that the individual will always be fleeced. Longstreet's sketch calls attention to its own fictiveness: the stylized vernacular of the Yellow Blossom, his repeated boasts, the familiar folk and literary motif of "the biter bit," the distance and superiority of the author/narrator from the action of the swap, and the self-contained

nature of the swap itself all remind the reader that he is reading a work of the imagination and not a guidebook to the real Southwest. In addition, all that suffers is the self-inflated reputation of the boasting Yellow Blossom, a biter bitten by the unassuming Pete Ketch.

In "The Horse-Swap," Longstreet offers a model for displacing common anxieties about the southwestern flush times. The sharper functions as a literary symbol of the ambiguities of the new country; his aggressiveness, vernacular, and dishonesty form an American frontier type. By using two sharpers, however, Longstreet places a greater distance between the reader and his characters than did Brackenridge in *Modern Chivalry*, and seems to insist that the dishonesty he describes is restricted to an inferior class of American. As the action is thereby contained and held at one remove, the author and reader can condemn the action as representative only of "low" characters while at the same time enjoying the selling of the Blossom. There is no narrative intrusion at the tale's end (as in "Georgia Theatrics" and "The Fight"); Pete Ketch has the last word. In "The Horse-Swap" Longstreet achieves a comic displacement of real anxieties.

In *Georgia Scenes*, Longstreet introduced a new country to a national audience and developed native characters and techniques; in "The Horse-Swap," he immortalized the southwestern sharper, imaginative midwife to the literary convention of the flush-times confidence man.

3 THE EMERGENCE OF THE CONFIDENCE-MAN CONVENTION

> Even on his practical and sordid side, the American might easily have been represented as a victim to illusion. If the Englishman had lived as the American speculator did,—in the future,—the hyperbole of enthusiasm would have seemed less monstrous. "Look at my wealth!" cried the American to his foreign visitor. "See these solid mountains of salt and iron, of lead, copper, silver, and gold! . . . Look at this continent of mine, fairest of created worlds, as she lies turning up to the sun's never-failing caress her broad and exuberant breasts, overflowing with milk for her hundred million children! See how she glows with youth, health, and love!" . . ."Your story is a fraud, and you are a liar and a swindler."
>
> Met in this spirit, the American, half perplexed and half defiant, retaliated by calling his antagonist a fool. . . . For himself he cared little, but his dream was his whole existence. The men who denounced him admitted that they left him in his forest-swamp quaking with fever, but clinging in the delirium of death to the illusions of his dazzled brain. . . . Whether imagination or greed led them to describe more than actually existed, they still saw no more than any inventor or discoverer must have seen in order to give him the energy of success . . . and from them were seldom heard complaints of deception or delusion.
>
> —Henry Adams, *History of the United States* (1889)

In the flush times of the Old Southwest, the wilderness gradually gave way to the geometry of civilization. Writers of the American frontier, pioneers themselves, struggled to impose literary order on a region at once historical and imaginative. "The sole intention of the tales comprised in the following pages," wrote James Hall in *Legends of the West*, "is to

convey accurate descriptions of scenery and population of the country in which the author resides. The only merit he claims for them is fidelity."[1] Charles Fenno Hoffman insisted that the "chief merit"of his *Winter in the West* (published in the same year as Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*) was that his letters were "first and faithful impressions"; "novelty" and "romantic beauty" mark precise descriptions of the frontier, because "there is an ever-salient freshness in the theme of 'The Far West,' which prevents its becoming trite or tiresome."[2] Reports are informed by the perception that the frontier offered incomparable wealth; traveling west from Detroit, Hoffman sees a land of unparalleled opportunity and records original testimony of its bounty.

> What a country this is. Into land like this, which is comparatively undervalued by those seeking to settle on the prairie, a man can run his plough without felling a tree; and, planting a hundred acres, where he would but clear ten in the unsettled districts of New York, raise his twenty-five bushels of wheat to an acre in the very first season. "How is the soil here, sir?" said I to a farmer whose broad fields, though but a year under cultivation, looked as if they had been tilled for ten. "A pretty good gravelly loam of eighteen inches; but I think some of moving off to Kalamazoo, where they have it *four feet deep, and so fat that it will grease your fingers.*" (1:183–84)

The two languages in this passage convey both "romantic beauty" and "novelty": Hoffman celebrates the region in normative terms by means of a rational comparison, while the hyperbolic vernacular of the farmer transforms good land into a vision of fantastically fertile soil. The claims of the farmer serve as a faithful impression of pioneer optimism and western exaggeration.

On the other side of the frontier coin, however, we find not an agricultural wonderland but a menacing terra incognita of fraud, illusion, and deception. Hoffman notes that after being warned of "a gang of counterfeiters and coiners of false money" in the Old Southwest, "the individual who gave the writer this information subsequently palmed a copper dollar upon him" (2:211). Henry Adams, although quick to praise

the confidence of the southwestern frontiersmen, criticized their substitution of appetite for virtue.

> In the long, unbroken line, pioneers were at work, cutting into the forests with the energy of so many beavers, and with no more express moral purpose than the beavers they drove away. . . . Greed for wealth, lust for power, yearning for the blank void of savage freedom such as Indians and wolves delighted in,—these were the fires that flamed under the caldron of American society.[3]

In the historical and fictional literature describing the flush times—an imaginative frontier beginning around 1830 and continuing until the outbreak of the Civil War, and stretching spatially from Virginia southwest to Alabama, and from Louisiana northward to Missouri—predators appear with more frequency than in earlier American works. Timothy Flint's *Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley* (1828) provided not only numerous maps, tables of navigation, and charts of flora and fauna but also warnings of the methods and location of river robbers and hostile Indians; he enumerates tricks by which unwary travelers are ambushed and laments the heathen "medicine men" who stir up their tribes against white settlers. Other accounts confirm that backwoods slyness and cruelty were legendary for both white and red renegades: James Hall's "Harpe's Head" (1832) is a novella fictionalizing pirates described in Flint's *History*; Charles Fenno Hoffman's *Winter in the West* (1835) contains prime examples of aboriginal cunning; and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Indian Atrocities* (published in book form in 1843) catalogs infamous massacres. Speculators in land, specie, and American votes fall under Flint's censure, as he outlines an all-too-common path of the pioneer's destruction.

> Lands rose above their value, and speculation in them became a raging epidemic. Money, put in circulation by the sale of lands, abounded in the country. Town making, steam boat building,—in short, every species of speculation, was carried to a ruinous excess. Mercantile importations filled the country with foreign goods. There were no reasonable foundations to the schemes, and no limits to the extravagance of the people. To give a more fatal extension and efficacy to the

> mania of speculation, banks were multiplied in all the little towns and villages of the West, whose spurious paper, not predicated on banking principles, nor based on capital, answered the turn of speculation, as long as the excitement of confidence lasted. The consequence of all this was, that lands rose to double and triple their natural value, and were bought up by speculators. . . .
>
> New states and territories grew out of this order of things, like the prophet's gourd. . . . A great many forward and plunging young men, whose only qualifications for their great work, were vanity and confidence, composed the legislatures. . . .
>
> Meanwhile, this unnatural state of things could not last long. The tide began to ebb, and things to settle to their natural level. The first indication of this change was, that the banks began to fail, at first as rare occurrences; but these failures soon became so numerous and common, that the paper, except of the banks of Louisiana, Mississippi, and a very few interior banks, became as useless as any other wrapping paper. We have not the data for calculating the amount of loss in the western country, and patience and moderation of feeling would fail us, in contemplating these enormous mischiefs of legislative swindling. An inconceivable quantity of paper perished, not in the hands of the speculators, and those, who had been efficient in generating it; for they foresaw the approaching ruin, and they passed the spurious paper away, before the bubble of confidence, on which it was predicated, burst. It finally rested, and perished in the hands of farmers and mechanics,—the honest and the useful members of the community, who had fairly earned the value of the money. May it be a perpetual warning to the legislatures of the West. . . . A more enormous engine of mischief and dishonesty never was introduced into a community.[4]

Flint's speculators, however, only stole men's goods; another kind of frontier sharper—thought far more dangerous by some—traded in men's souls. In 1834 the *American Protestant Vindicator* warned its readers of godless western lands and men.

> It is an ascertained fact, that Jesuits are prowling about all parts of the United States in every possible disguise, expressly to ascertain the most advantageous situations and modes to disseminate popery. A minister of the gospel from Ohio, has informed us, that he discovered one carrying his devices in his congregation; and he says, that the western country swarms with them under the names of puppet show-men, dancing

> masters, music teachers, pedlars of images and ornaments, barrel organ players, and similar practitioners. . . . Beware of the Jesuits![5]

Fear of religious fanatics seems somehow justified when the case of Joseph C. Dylks is examined. In 1828 he convinced the settlers of Guernsey County, Ohio, that he was himself God Incarnate. Although he failed to perform the miracles he had promised, he insisted that he would proclaim the New Heaven and New Earth for his faithful followers in the forest surrounding Leatherwood Creek. And despite some ungodly behavior in Philadelphia, Dylks's preaching was either so full of conviction or his message so genuinely attractive that members of his congregation insisted as late as 1870 that they had—with their own eyes—beheld Dylks ascend into heaven.[6] Tapping an apparently bottomless well of American innocence, or a deep-seated need to believe (as Adams theorized), charlatans less spiritual than Dylks collected fees for supposed communication with the dead and for demonstrations of animal magnetism and medicinal mesmerism. Dr. David M. Reese rebuked Americans in *Humbugs of New-York* (1838) for encouraging the "popular delusions" of phrenology, homœopathia, and "Ultra-Temperance," and Jereboam O. Beauchamp's 1826 *Confession* suggests that he acted under the guidance of heavenly voices when he killed his fiancée's seducer, Colonel Solomon Sharp, in the sensational "Kentucky Tragedy."[7] Mechanisms ranging from automatic chess-masters to simplified perpetual-motion machines were commonly displayed as wonders of the modern world—even the skeptical Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne considered trying mesmerism as a cure for prenuptial headaches.[8]

Wherever men met, at backwood crossroads or in towns, rogues in every form preyed upon the unsuspecting. Davy Crockett, the much-admired frontiersman, himself cozens an inattentive bartender in "A Useful Coonskin" (1834).[9] To pay for repeated rounds of drinks, this hero trades a prize pelt for a bottle of whiskey. Still thirsty but without more barter, Davy spies his original fur beneath the bar, just a short distance from his hand. Stealthily, he manages to reproduce—again and again—the same fur as payment, and merrily toasts each new

success with his whiskey-warmed friends. Crockett's manual dexterity is comical, not criminal; the tale's setting in a friendly "doggery," its tone of rugged comradeship, and its action of ritual fellowship make clear that his sleight-of-hand is a humorous feat of skill morally equivalent to hitting a bull's-eye at one hundred yards.

Edgar Allan Poe's "Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" (1843) also emphasizes the comic aspects of sharping. Americans must be wary of thieves impersonating bill collectors, false newspaper advertisements for "lost" valuables, and dogs trained from birth to swallow welshers' IOU's. Reminiscent of Robert Greene's sixteenth-century pamphlets on cony-catching,[10] Poe's sketch illustrates eleven tricks of urban artists; unlike their predecessors, however, American diddlers work alone. "Were he not a diddler," Poe explains, "he would be a maker of patent rat-traps or an angler for trout."[11] In form and aesthetics Poe echoes De Quincey's "On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827), claiming for the science an ancestry antedating John Kenney's Jeremy Diddler in "Raising the Wind" (1803).[12] Poe writes:

> The origin of the diddle is referrible to the infancy of the Human Race. Perhaps the first diddler was Adam. At all events, we can trace the science back to a very remote period of antiquity. The moderns, however, have brought it to an perfection never dreamed of by our thick-headed progenitors. (871)

The perfection Poe insists on for the art of swindling confirms that in 1843 he perceived the diddler to be central to American life. In *The Monks of Monk Hall* (1844), George Lippard contends that life in the city is a constant battle with seducers, blackmailers, and fiends. George H. Devol, a literal and perhaps literary sharper, remembers in *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi* (1887) that the flush times were inhabited by only two species of Americans—the diddlers and the diddled. In 1845 E. Z. C. Judson ("Ned Buntline") sought to play a financial game of fast and loose with both categories: he first announced that as a service to his readers his new review, *Ned Buntline's Own*, would print a list of notorious sharpers; in order to capitalize fully on this innovation, however, he then collected a fee from countless rogues to have

their names removed from his list. And Jonathan H. Green, the "Reformed Gambler," held that "gaming has attained such an ascendency in our country" because of the "unexampled prosperity" during the era of southwestern expansion.[13]

In these flush times, sharpers, diddlers, gamblers, and thieves assumed new prominence in fictional works. Drawing upon what Jonathan Culler calls the "text" of their culture,[14] writers increasingly created sharpers who expressed and resolved common anxieties about American boom-and-bust society: Poe's "Diddling," for example, gives form to the reader's suspicion that everyone—even a pet dog—is out to rob him. The potential inability to perceive misrepresentation, and the likelihood of deliberate misrepresentation, are both dramatically defined. By focusing on the diddler as artist, however, Poe turns the reader's attention to the intricate aesthetics of diddling and his fears into amused appreciation; he admires the diddler's talents—a combination of "minuteness, interest, perseverance, ingenuity, audacity, *nonchalance*, originality, impertinence, and *grin*" (870)—no longer bothered that these tricks may represent larger clandestine operations in American life, such as the manipulation of land prices by speculators, of import tariffs by northern businessmen, of the value of specie by bankers, or of tax rates by corrupt government officials.

Particularly in the Old Southwest, conditions required of literature more than transcriptions of "first and faithful impressions": the nullification crisis in South Carolina, Nat Turner's slave rebellion, the long and bloody Seminole Wars, and the Panic of 1837 revealed complexities in the South and West that demanded interpretation. The *new country*, the *frontier*, or the *West* seemed to have become inadequate terms for directing the expression of many American authors. As early as 1835, a reviewer of Charles Fenno Hoffman's *Winter in the West* hinted at the limits of fidelity as a satisfactory motive, method, and intention. For "the West," he complained,

> is a vague description of any place in North America. Although there be a distinct meaning in the phrase, well understood by the person using it, yet paradoxical as this is, it points to no locality. Twenty years ago the Alleghany range might,

> by most people, be considered in these new countries. Ten years ago, the Mississippi was the *ne plus ultra* for five-sixth of Americans. The imaginary line which limited the bounds of the West, has thus been continually changing.[15]

Without drawing a rigid cause and effect model, I would suggest that in the 1840s a particular imaginative matrix emerged from, imposed itself on, and extended earlier conceptions of the new country—the confidence man, who seeks and wins confidence by deliberate deceit and then abuses that confidence for personal advantage. Writers used the evolving figure of the confidence man to embody a cycle of boom and bust and to act as a mediating structure between the increasingly problematic new country and an anxious national audience. In 1849 the first recorded use of the term *confidence man* appeared in the *New York Herald*, followed quickly by appearances in the *Knickerbocker*, the *Literary World*, the *Spirit of the Times*, and even the *National Police Gazette*,[16] testimony to the era's familiarity with the type and to the appropriateness of the name to disparate audiences. As Jonathan Culler explains, "The process of developing literary conventions depends on models or operations already current in the social discourse of the period (in the 'text' of everyday life, of the 'natural attitude,' as well as the discourse of its sciences)."[17] Frontier fictions of the 1840s in this sense prepared the country to recognize the confidence man as an American convention, for the Southwest humorists peopled the flush times with shifty characters whose main business it was to trade in confidence and cash. Foregoing the cities of diddlers and the wilderness of pioneers, the confidence man inhabits the frontier in between. He illuminates both states, functioning as the center of an ongoing debate over the merits of nineteenth-century American society, a stable point of intersection for conflicting attitudes toward the flush times. The frontier serves as a backdrop against which the confidence man—and through him, American society—is seen in bold relief.

Another way to understand this process of literary change is to envision a vertical model of historical continuity.[18] The desire to create a native literature led writers in the 1820s and 1830s to insert in American settings inherited conventions like the prankster with little more than a change of clothes:

the continuity from Brom Bones to Thomas Singularity to Ned Brace is direct or vertical. Longstreet's Yellow Blossom and Ransy Sniffle, however, are new kinds of characters, bound to a particular American locale and sporting symbolically colloquial American names. They represent a horizontal discontinuity in our historical model: the horse-swapping Blossom transcends the limitations of the traditional "biter bit" motif, just as Sniffle stands head and shoulders above scores of ne'er-do-wells; each typifies a contemporary experience and serves as a literary nexus for readers uncertain of the southwestern new country. In the 1840s, writers like Johnson Jones Hooper reformed these innovative characters into conventions of frontier literature: all at once (or so it seems) Ned Brace's sense of fun, the Yellow Blossom's boasting and swindling, and Ransy Sniffle's insinuating manner emerge in Captain Simon Suggs, the American confidence man par excellence.

Johnson Jones Hooper

Hooper's first literary effort, "Taking the Census in Alabama. By a Chicken Man of 1840," appeared in the La Fayette *East Alabamian* in 1843. This humorous reminiscence of misadventures in Tallapoosa was immediately applauded by William T. Porter, editor of the influential New York weekly *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage.* Introducing "Taking the Census," which the *Spirit* printed in September 1843, Porter outlined for his sixteen thousand subscribers Hooper's literary ancestry: "This Hooper is a clever man, and we must enlist him among the correspondents of the 'Spirit of the Times.' His sketch reminds us forcibly of the late Judge Longstreet's 'Georgia Scenes,' and the 'Adventures of Thomas Singularity,' by the late Prof. Nott, of S.C."[19] As Porter implies, "Taking the Census" is a linear descendant of traditional humorous sketches, an informal description of southwestern oddities: the low dialect is a characteristic element of 1830s frontier humor; the punctilious narrator, whose carefully chosen words contrast comically with those of the backwoodsmen, is likewise a conventional device. Hooper's comic perspective itself—based on such structural oppositions as those between the country and

the city, the community and the stranger, and rebellion and authority—is a well-worn technique, and his deflation of both narrator and vernacular characters echoes Longstreet's methods in "Georgia Theatrics" and "The Horse-Swap."

The main structure of "Taking the Census" consists of humorous confrontations between the "chicken-man" and assorted residents of the Tallapoosa backcountry. In each of these, the narrator's repeated attempts to acquire information are frustrated—by mean dogs, fearful women, and artful circumlocution. A secondary structure emerges, however, which indicates a reorganization of conventional meanings and techniques.

Sol Todd, at first glance a conventional prankster like Longstreet's Ned Brace, lures the unsuspecting census-taker into the bottomless "Buck Hole" of the Tallapoosa River. Unlike Ned Brace, who frustrates Jacques Sancric's attempts at understanding ("The Character of a Native Georgian"), Sol intends more than the chicken-man's amusing embarrassment, for the ducking, we are told, is "but the fulfillment of a threat" (155). The census man represents more than Ned Brace's archetypal foreigner; he is the visible agent of Van Buren, who would personally, the population of Tallapoosa believed, after taking the census levy "a tremendous tax" upon every Alabamian—every man, woman, child, and chicken. To make the chicken-man take a swim in the Buck Hole is therefore to strike out at the personal representative of the federal government. Sol's prank, as opposed to any of Ned's, is motivated by more than a rough sense of fun—it is a political statement. Seen in this light, each encounter in "Taking the Census," although subordinate to a unifying comic structure, is informed by the rough individualism or rebelliousness characteristic of the frontier. Sol Todd and the other vernacular characters are not traditional pranksters playing traditional pranks.

Neither are they playing out the traditional action of the "biter bit." Hooper's "Taking the Census," although containing the ducking of Sol Todd—the prankster pranked—directs attention beyond itself toward a symbolic interpretation of the *duello*, one that suggests new external forces impinging upon the frontier. The 1840 United States Census embodies the intrusion of national political issues into the Southwest and

gives particular literary form to the constitutional question of states' rights. The resistance of the vernacular characters to this form of federal regulation not only recalls the nullification crisis but also prefigures the impending Civil War. "Taking the Census" implies no political resolution to the debate, though as a loyal States Rights' Whig Hooper sees to it that the chicken-man's single victory is pyrrhic; rather, the sketch links opposed points of view. In this manner Hooper avoids judging the political issue, insisting instead on the "valueless action" of comedy.[20] Hooper focuses on the narrator's frustration, insulating the reader from the pressures of external problems. By withholding a final resolving action between the narrator and the vernacular characters, he allows the reader to try out each position, to evaluate each without commitment, and, at the tale's end, to retreat to a humorous vision of the whole.

"Taking the Census" reveals the method by which an author like Hooper could condition his audience to accept disturbing new perceptions; he utilizes familiar forms and techniques in order that his readers will be pleased rather than confused by deviations from the expected. The narrator's humorous observations and misadventures form the sketch's conventional main structure, one familiar to contemporary readers of *Georgia Scenes*, and one for which they share a conventional response: laughter. The implications of the confrontations between narrator and characters occupy a secondary position, held in check by equivalent pressures: the narrator, ducked in the Buck Hole by Sol Todd, immediately engineers Sol's own ducking—a balance is maintained.

From "Taking the Census" it is but a short imaginative step to Captain Simon Suggs.[21] The census-taker is, to Hooper's Whig Alabamians, no better than a shifty swindler, the Sixth U.S. Census no more nor less than a cleverly contrived game of theft. Simon Suggs, the "shifty man," is a chicken-man unrestrained by federal forms, a confidence man who at his leisure conducts his own personal census of the American frontier.

Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs (1845) borrows its form from nineteenth-century political biographies of prominent men like Andrew Jackson.[22] Written to present potential political candidates to the voters, campaign biogra-

From *Simon Suggs' Adventures* (1881 edition).

phies normally contained information on the office seeker's youth, his mature exploits of honor, his portrait accompanied by a physical description, and a statement of his intentions when elected. Hooper provides Simon Suggs with all of these elements, yet each is informed—or malformed—by the comic perspective of frontier humor. "His whole ethical system," writes Hooper, "lies snugly in his favourite aphorism—'IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY'—which means that it is right and proper that one should live as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others; and of the practicability of this in particular instances, the Captain's whole life has been a long series of the most convincing illustrations."[23] A portrait by Felix O. Darley (reproduced above) complements a thorough anatomical analysis: the serpentine "lids without lashes," "An ever-present sneer—not all malice, however," and other "facial beauties" (11). "His autograph,—which was only produced unblotted and in orthographical cor-

rectness, after three efforts, 'from a rest,' on the counter of Bill Griffin's confectionary—we have presented with a view to humor the whim of those who fancy they can read character in a signature." Pointing out the discrepancy between appearance and reality—and between a conventional form and its humorous imitation—Hooper states plainly that "all such, we suspect, would pronounce the Captain *rugged, stubborn, and austere* in his disposition; whereas in fact, he is *smooth, even-tempered, and facile*" (10). To complete this parody, the author regrets the lapse of twenty years in Suggs's biography, and offers only one example from his formative years. It is, however, telling.

In his seventeenth year, Simon is caught playing "seven up" by his father, the Reverend Jedidiah Suggs. Hooper renders the hard-shell Baptist preacher, like Simon's Negro friend Bill, with conventionally exaggerated characteristics, attitudes, and language.

> "Soho! youngsters!—*you* in the fence corner, and the *crap* in the grass; what saith the Scriptur', Simon? 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard,' and so forth and so on." (15)

Jedidiah resembles Fielding's Thwackum, a familiar figure of pompous authority the reader is expected to resent. This conventional response Hooper insures by underscoring Jedidiah's unbending nature, an even mixture of self-righteous piety and greed. The reader sympathizes with Simon and desires the humorous deflation of his humorless dad, who appears to take more than spiritual enjoyment in disciplining the boys with canes. Escape, triumph, and laughter are Simon's goals: escape from punishment, triumph over his environment, and laughter to confirm his success. Simon is symbolically the champion of the individual, the reader's conventional hero of freedom, a truant not entirely unlike a frontier Tom Jones.

Facing a bout of discipline for playing cards with Bill, Simon boldly proclaims that the punishment will do no good, as he intends to make his living by gambling. Caught red-handed, the boy's brashness not only postpones his beating but redirects Jedidiah's thoughts: Simon's impassioned defense of his card-playing abilities astounds his father and arouses his righteous indignation and pity.

> "Simon! Simon! You poor unlettered fool. Don't you know that all card-players, and chicken-fighters, and horse-racers go to hell? You crack-brained creetur you. And don't you know that them that plays cards always loses their money." (21)

Jedidiah's pulpit logic is no match for Simon's simple question: "Who wins it all then, daddy?" The reader appreciates Jedidiah's embarrassment and savors his fumbling efforts to assert his authority.

> "Shet your mouth, you imperdent, slack-jawed dog. Your daddy's a-tryin' to give you some good advice, and you a-pickin' up his words that way. I knowed a young man once, when I lived in Ogletharp, as went down to Augusty and sold a hundred dollars worth of cotton for his daddy, and some o' them gambollers got him to drinkin', and the *very first* night he was with 'em they got every cent of his money." (21–22)

Jedidiah's advice falls upon ears that are anything but deaf: "I'm as smart as any of 'em, and Bob Smith says them Augusty fellers can't make rent off o' me" (22). Simon's timely invocation of Bob Smith as a higher authority than his father on the perils of city life wounds Jedidiah's pride and arouses his contempt—for Bob Smith.

> "*Bob Smith* says, does he? And who's *Bob Smith*? Much does *Bob Smith* know about Augusty! he's *been thar*, I reckon! Slipped off yerly some mornin', when nobody warn't noticin', and got back afore night! It's *only* a hundred and fifty mile. Oh, yes, *Bob Smith* knows *all* about it! *I* a'n't never been to Augusty—*I* couldn't find the road thar, I reckon—ha! ha. *Bob–Smi–th*! The eternal stink! If he was only to see one o' them fine gentlemen in Augusty, with his fine broad-cloth, and bell-crown hat, and shoe-boots a-shinin' like silver, he'd take to the woods and kill himself a-runnin'. Bob Smith! that's whar all your devilment comes from, Simon." (23)

By a kind of logical sleight-of-hand, Simon confuses his father and severs the link connecting cause (caught gambling) and effect (immediate punishment).

Realizing his advantage, Simon insists that Bob Smith, his gambling tutor, assures him that he cannot be cheated by professional sharpers. "Bob Smith's as good as any body else, I judge; and a heap smarter than some. He showed me how to cut Jack . . . and that's more nor some people can do, if they *have* been to Augusty" (23). Simple Jedidiah, unwilling to ad-

mit his ignorance and to doubt his perceptions, agrees to witness Simon's attempt to cut jack: "If Bob Smith kin do it . . . I kin too. I don't know it by that name; but if it's book knowledge or plain sense, and Bob kin do it, it's reasonable to s'pose that old Jed'diah Suggs won't be bothered *bad*" (23–24). It is the very reasonableness of Simon's explanation that snares Jedidiah.

> "Well, now the idee is, if you'll take the pack and mix 'em all up together, I'll take off a passel from the top, and the bottom one of them I take off will be one of the Jacks."
>
> "Me to mix 'em fust?" said old Jed'diah.
>
> "Yes."
>
> "And you not to see but the back of the top one, when you go to 'cut,' as you call it?"
>
> "Jist so, daddy."
>
> "And the backs all jist as like as kin be?" said the senior Suggs, examining the cards.
>
> "More alike nor cow-peas," said Simon.
>
> "It can't be done, Simon," observed the old man, with great solemnity.
>
> "Bob Smith kin do it, and so kin I."
>
> "It's agin nater, Simon; thar a'n't a man in Augusty, nor on top of the yeath that kin do it!" (24)

Simon has won his father's confidence, although Jedidiah knows "that them that plays cards always loses their money." It is this very distrust of others coupled with an intense faith in himself that makes the senior Suggs such a willing victim of the junior's "transaction." For Simon, acutely aware of the labyrinthine, contradictory impulses of human nature, appeals to the hard-shell preacher's egotistical confidence ("I *know* he can't do it, so there's no resk"), his sense of spiritual office ("I'll jist let him give me all his money, and that'll put all his wild sportin' notions out of his head"), his plastic morality ("It sartinly *can't* be nothin' but *givin'*, no way it kin be twisted"), and his greed ("Old Mr. Suggs ascertained the exact amount of the silver . . . he weighed the pouch of silver in his hand"). Jedidiah, whose instincts and emotions are now fully aroused, eagerly responds to a suggestion of the devil and removes all the "*picter*" cards from Simon's deck. Confidently awaiting the outcome of Simon's cut, Jedidiah is the quintessential victim, the dishonest man who is sure he is about to

outsmart the confidence man. But by "a suspicious working of the wrist of the hand on the cards," Simon defeats his father's expectations, denies the validity of his perceptions, calls into question his powers of reasoning, and presents the jack of hearts for inspection. Astonished—and unwilling to admit his own dishonest manipulations—Jedidiah gives Simon the horse Bunch, a reprise from correction, and agrees with his son's ironic explanation of events.

> "Daddy coun't help it, it was *predestinated*—'whom he hath, he will,' you know;" and the rascal pulled down the under lid of his left eye at his brother. Then addressing his father, he asked, "Warn't it, daddy?"
>
> "To be sure—to be sure—all fixed aforehand," was old Mr. Suggs' reply.
>
> "Didn't I tell you so, Ben?" said Simon—"*I* knowed it was all fixed aforehand." (29)

The reader laughs with Simon, for he too understands that fate was fixed. He shares in the triumph of adolescence over sententious authority and delights in the exposure of the preacher's true qualities: avarice, egotism, and an ill-founded self-confidence. Had Jedidiah been a truly honest man, Simon could not have induced him under any circumstances to postpone his "correction" and take part in his "transaction"; Jedidiah reaps exactly as he sows. Hooper's use of the conventional frame technique further enlists the reader's sympathy, as the amused voice of the narrator assures him that this biography of Captain Simon Suggs chronicles the exploits of a humorous fellow worthy of note and that his behavior is completely under rational—narrative—control. It is also difficult to resist a boyish confidence man who wins an impractical horse and his freedom: Simon acts out a common fantasy of adolescent triumph. The confidence man is the youthful new country.

Simon's victory, however, is not without qualification. It is perhaps the result of the needs of frontier authors to reassert their superiority over low characters, or of these authors' awareness that shifty characters symbolize historical threats not completely dismissed by humor, that the confidence man is almost never entirely successful and admirable. His winnings are small, like the unmanageable horse Bunch, and his

resolve to "git these here green feller's money" has social implications that are less than amusing. The reader is related, regardless of whether he acknowledges his kinship explicitly, to the confidence man's victim; in the broadest sense, he shares with every man the fate of the "green feller." By anticipating with pleasure Simon's hoodwinking of Jedidiah, the reader recognizes his own predicament and admits his own vulnerability. The same experience that teaches him to expect Jedidiah's victimization also teaches the reader that he too is susceptible to victimization. Although the reader overtly laughs with Simon, the entire episode acts as a kind of multiply refracting mirror in which the reader sees himself as both confidence man and foolish gull. The effect diminishes the confidence man's appeal and reinforces the reader's identification with the narrative voice.

When Simon appears to be the dispenser of poetic justice—Simon surely gives Jedidiah his just reward—his moral posture is vitiated by more than a streak of inhumanity: the malicious glee with which he "very wickedly" drives the mumble-peg deeper into the ground, knowing full well the inevitable consequence for his friend Bill, is bettered by the pipe he fills with gunpowder and leaves for his mother as a reminder of his affection. These are not the poetics of the confidence man, for they require neither confidence nor art—they are the dirty tricks of an irresponsible prankster. Twice Simon deliberately exposes Bill to painful beatings, and Simon's "involuntary sympathy" does little to enhance his appeal; his clear theft of his friend's pennies confirms the fact that the Negro is literally his whipping boy. Simon's often vile behavior clearly separates him from the normative frame-narrator (and author) and shows that the confidence man's ethical system is ultimately self-reflexive rather than social.

The distinction between artistic confidence tricks and blatant dirty tricks is crucial, revealing much more than a historical difference in standards of humor. The confidence man's occasional physical pranks resemble those of Longstreet's Ned Brace; they remind the reader of Simon's ancestry by their conventional form and provide the reader with a conventional model for response. They also invite comparison with confidence art, which implies an inchoate new standard. The con-

fidence man becomes a literary convention precisely at the point that we can distinguish his aesthetic moneymaking schemes from the exploding gimmicks of the traditional prankster. As Hooper notes of Simon Suggs, it is the captain's ingenuity and wit which enable him "to detect the *soft spots* in his fellow . . . to assimilate himself to whatever company he may fall in with," and "which entitle him to the epithet *'Shifty'*" (12, 13). Further, the narrator insists that he will not be guilty of the cheap stunts to which Simon resorts; he can be trusted implicitly—the reader need not fear a similar betrayal of his confidence. As the confidence man triumphs over his victim, so too does the frame narrator triumph over his charismatic character, thereby assuring his audience that the harsh, chaotic world of Simon Suggs is carefully circumscribed. The confidence man's art appears subservient to the narrator's: stuffing his mother's pipe with gunpowder demonstrates Simon's tendency to forgo the rhetorical tools of his profession and seriously qualifies his success. These acts of rough sport signify that although the confidence man is decidedly the master of his frontier world, it is the frame narrator's rhetorical mastery that ultimately shapes and contains it.

Simon's youthful escapade provides a paradigm of expectations and response, its conventional and innovative elements fused through Hooper's overarching perspective of frontier humor. The momentary uneasiness the reader experiences when he recognizes himself in Jedidiah, Bill, Mrs. Suggs, or Simon himself is a defining characteristic of the American confidence man. Like the figure of the fool in Elizabethan drama, the confidence man makes the audience—the reader, not his victim—laugh, but it is laughter always tinged with anxiety: he who laughs at the fool's antics also laughs at himself, for the fool symbolically mirrors the folly to which every man is prone. The tension felt by the audience, common to both confidence man and fool, receives structural reinforcement by their peripheral social status: both function as outsiders, outlaws who simultaneously represent the contradictory human impulses toward society and anarchy. Whether in an English court or the American Southwest, these figures inhabit a symbolic frontier where opposed pressures intersect and intermingle. Thus the fool, lording over his bauble, forms an ambigu-

ous doppelgänger of the king ruling his court, and the confidence man, who abuses frontiersmen, functions as an analogue of those Americans who exploit the frontier.[24] Thus the confidence man embodies and recapitulates the continuous struggle between order and chaos in nineteenth-century America. A child of the frontier, the confidence man embodies its ambiguities; ruled by these ambiguities, he is also defined by the frontier and bound to it. Temporally and spatially, the confidence man symbolizes in a conventional literary form the flush times in the new country.

It is therefore altogether appropriate that Simon Suggs's first mature "operation" is speculation in frontier lands. Hooper carefully initiates the reader in the mysteries of flush times economics, detailing Simon's methods of speculation "without a dollar":

> We admit that there is a seeming incongruity in the idea but have those in whose minds speculation and capital are inseparably connected, ever heard of a process by which lands were sold, deeds executed, and all that sort of thing completely arranged, and all without once troubling the owner of the soil for an opinion even, in regard to the matter? Yet such occurrences were frequent some years since, in this country, and they illustrated *one* mode of speculation requiring little, if any, cash capital. But there were other modes of speculating without money or credit; and Captain Simon Suggs became as familiar with every one of them, as with the way to his own corncrib. As for those branches of the business requiring actual pecuniary outlay, he regarded them as only fit to be pursued by purse-proud clod-heads. Any fool, he reasoned, could speculate if he had money. But to buy, to sell, to make profits, without a cent in one's pocket—this required judgment, discretion, ingenuity—in short, genius! (35)

Simon's genius, undeniably, lies in "that tact, which enables man to detect the *soft spots* in his fellow, and to assimilate himself to whatever company he may fall in with" (12). The confidence man is proud of his ability, a national virtue, to make something out of nothing. Overhearing two speculators discuss a valuable piece of property, Simon, though unable to learn its exact location, formulates an inspired plan to profit from his greatest resource, human nature, and from the confident appearance of knowledge. The shifty man overtakes the speculator, Mr. Jones, and, knowing that one of any fellow's

softest spots is his suspicion of others, insinuates that he, Simon Suggs, is also heading to Montgomery to lay claim to Mr. Jones's land. Jones, whose horse has been worn to the bone, allows his fear that Simon is his competition to cloud his reason, and within minutes reveals the coordinates of the property to the confidence man. Certain that Simon—whose horse is fresh—will be able to enter the claim first, Jones, whose blind greed is obvious, agrees to pay Simon $150 not to make the entry, furthermore "convincing" Simon to swap his own fine but tired horse plus $20 for the worthless but well-rested Ball. Using only his genius, Simon makes the speculator pay the price of his profession, for without Jones's desire to make a fast killing and the suspicion that attends such dishonest dealings, the shifty man would have remained the penniless owner of Ball; the victim's own fear and avarice give Simon the opportunity to speculate on him. The confidence man merely confirms (and profits by) Jones's apprehension that the world is filled with men as dishonest as himself.

Simon concludes the episode with a parodic paean to honesty.

> "Now some fellers, after makin' sich a little decent rise would milk the cow dry, by pushin' on to Doublejoy's, startin' a runner the nigh way to Montgomery, by the Augusty ferry, and enterin' that land in somebody else's name before Jones gits thar! But honesty's the best policy. Honesty's the bright spot in *any* man's character!—Fair play's a jewel, but honesty beats it all to pieces! Ah yes, *honesty*, HONESTY'S the stake that Simon Suggs will ALLERS tie to! What's a man without his inteegerty?" (40–41)

The confidence man's mock praise is humorous, for the reader knows that what really stops Simon is that the effort required to register the claim would be tiresome. He is honest only to his nature, which dictates "that one should live as merrily and comfortably as possible at the expense of others" (12). And his insistence on the truth of a traditional aphorism—"honesty's the best policy"—reminds the reader of Suggs's credo: "IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY."

Simon's adventure with Mr. Jones, ending with a parody of conventional wisdom, appropriately introduces the sentimental address with which Hooper's fourth chapter commences.

> READER! didst ever encounter the Tiger?—not the bounding creature of the woods, with deadly fang and mutilating claw, that preys upon blood and muscle—but the stealthier and more ferocious animal which ranges amid "the busy haunts of men"—which feeds upon coin and banknotes—whose spots, more attractive than those of its namesake of the forest, dazzle and lure, like the brilliantly varying hues of the charmer snake, the more intensely and irresistibly, the longer they are looked upon—the thing, in short, of pasteboard and ivory, mother-of-pearl and mahogany—The FARO BANK! (42)

Hooper's rhetoric explores new possibilities for the artificial style of much sentimental fiction: the real and fictional worlds intersect, like the animal and mechanical images Hooper employs, and a new synthesis results. It also provides for his audience an immediately recognizable structure of understanding. The conventional address, humorously inflated, forms a familiar literary signpost for the reader and signals to him by its very nature as a set piece that not all traditional values will be inverted or burlesqued in *Simon Suggs*. In addition, Hooper qualifies Simon's activities by devoting much of chapters 4 and 5 to his weakness: the Faro Bank. That Simon has a weakness proves that he is only human, not the Devil Incarnate, and that he is susceptible to other confidence men of greater quickness and skill. The reader reimagines with Hooper the character of Simon Suggs, recalling the truth of Jedidiah's biblical wisdom once so easily dismissed: "Them that plays cards always loses their money" (21). Jedidiah, it seems, may have been right, for "The Tiger" repeatedly makes a poor fool out of Simon.

Hooper's introductory digression, itself a conventional literary device, enforces the reevaluation by the sharp contrast between Simon's obsession and the narrator's normative rhetoric. The narrator's verbal "actions" may be imaginative and energetic, but they will never veer out of control. As in chapter 5, the descriptive digression is reassuring because of its substantiality; the physical details—the "mother-of-pearl and mahogany" Faro Bank, the "huge-lettered advertising cards" of Tuskaloosa—confirm the reader's knowledge of the historical frontier. They also acquaint the green fellow with the operations of gamblers and sharps. And finally, Hooper begins to flesh out the character of one particular confidence man; the

shifty man is defined as an individual, a personality not to be confused with other types. Unlike Longstreet's Yellow Blossom or Ned Brace, Simon Suggs is the protagonist of fourteen stories. And as this confidence man becomes a more round character, there appears a trace of involuntary sympathy in Hooper's language; Simon's flaw, his "delusion," is lamentable, a consequence of his fuller personality. In this, Hooper reveals a new aspect of frontier humor, compassion for the confidence man, which will be fully developed by Harris, Melville, and Twain. The discovery of Simon's depth, his complexity of character, is Hooper's own, and implies an ambivalence toward the confidence man and an uncertainty of his identity as a mere comic device. Appropriately, Simon's next two exploits involve masquerade.

Simon Suggs is of course itself a form of literary masquerade, the "campaign biography" of an American who is the antiface of the Leatherstocking ideal, the ironic counterfeit or mirror image of Cooper's hero. More particularly, Hooper's fiction exemplifies what Henry Nash Smith terms "the nineteenth-century fondness for disguises."[25] Simon Suggs puts on and takes off identities with less effort than that required to change hats: at one moment he becomes the representative from Tallapoosa, only to be transformed in the next into the heroic hog-driver General Witherspoon. These disguises, provided by acts of mistaken identity, suggest a traditional pattern of complication; in *Simon Suggs*, however, the conventional revelations of sentimental and romantic fiction Hooper shares only with the reader. Simon's victims do not learn his identity (or their folly) until he has made good his escape. The humor of each episode depends on concealment rather than on revelation. Finally, the comedy of errors the confidence man perpetuates ends neither in tragedy—as in James Nelson Barker's "Superstition" (1825)—nor in marriage—as in James Fenimore Cooper's *Pioneers* (1823)—but in an ironic ritual of goodfellowship. Having been mistaken for the representative from Tallapoosa by a man desirous of becoming—by the representative's influence—a bank director, Simon good-naturedly accepts a bribe, and with "his new friend travelled the remainder of the way to Tuskaloosa, in excellent companionship, as it was reasonable they should. They told their tales, sang their

songs, and drank their liquor like a jovial pair as they were—the candidate paying all scores wherever they halted" (51). And after playing the part of General Witherspoon to the tune of two thousand dollars, Simon entertains the gentlemen of Tuskaloosa with an oyster supper (on the general's credit) and a farewell toast.

> "Gentle*men*," said he "I'm devilish glad to see you all, and much obleeged to you, besides. You are the finest people I ever was amongst, and treat me a d——d sight better than they do at home"—which was a fact! "Hows'ever, I'm a poor hand to speak, but here's wishing of luck to you all"—and then wickedly seeming to blunder in his little speech—"and if I forgit you, I'll be d——d if you'll ever forgit me!" (66–67)

The reader, privy to the real import of Simon's speech, agrees with a smile that they will never forget "General Witherspoon," nor will they soon forget the ease with which they were manipulated. For Simon has only "to assimilate himself" to their expectations, parody their fantasies of the general's liberality, and allow his victims to deceive themselves.

As the legislator from Tallapoosa and as General Witherspoon, Simon acts in "a sublime moral spectacle" with unpleasant social ramifications. Chapter 4 demonstrates that "there are many reasons why gentlemen of distinction should at times desire to travel without being known" (49). The confidence man, of course, does not wish to be unmasked; this is the joke Simon shares with the reader. A dishonest legislator, as well, desires the protection of secrecy; this joke is on the reader. The suspicion that all representatives can be bought impinges upon our amusement, and Hooper's distrust of figures of authority manifests itself both in the confidence man's ability to assume the identity of a legislator or general and in the congruence between the practical methods of officials and con men. Hooper underlines the immorality of heroes and statesmen by noting that "General Witherspoon" is accepted in the Tuskaloosa gambling hall by gentlemen, "a large proportion members of the legislature" (55). The unamusing implication is that these crooked fools are actually Representative Men, not the worst America has to offer, like Captain Simon Suggs, but the best, those to whom the reader has entrusted his faith and his future.

That Hooper employs a central character whose business is dishonesty itself, that Simon Suggs never meets an honest man, and that the reader finds such characters entertaining all suggest a critical impulse to the confidence man's adventures. The new country, which in the 1830s had seemed to offer infinite opportunity, wealth, and security, by 1845 often appeared to have become—again, in the imagination—settlements plagued by necessity, poverty, and uncertainty. The cycle of boom-and-bust, culminating for many pioneers in financial ruin following the Panic of 1837, created anxiety in the Southwest that often appeared as suspicion of those in power who seemed to profit in proportion to the pioneers' loss. The confidence man, who returns to the 1830s in fiction to expose, profit from, and triumph over the speculators, expresses the common fantasy of the disillusioned who, as Timothy Flint noted, watched helplessly as their bubble of confidence burst. Simon Suggs is no frontier guardian angel; he, too, is helplessly tossed about, and though he may float high on the calm surface one day, on the next he must struggle not to go under.

Simon's dealings with Indians, a people who lost everything in the flush times, begin with the conventional *ubi sunt* theme, yet it is modified to accommodate contradictory impulses.

> In those days, an occasion of the sort drew together white man and Indian from all quarters of the "nation"—the one to cheat, the other to be cheated. The agent appointed by the Government to "certify" the sales of Indian lands was always in attendance; so that the scene was generally one of active traffic. The industrious speculator, with his assistant, the wily interpreter, kept unceasingly at work in the business of fraud; and by every species and art of persuasion, sought—and, sooner or later, succeeded—in drawing the untutored children of the forest into their nets. . . .
>
> And where are these speculators NOW?—those lords of the soil!—the men of dollars—the fortune-makers who bought with hundreds what was worth thousands!—they to whom every revolution of the sun brought a reduplication of their wealth! Where are they? (69)

By lamenting the passing of the flush times of rampant speculation Hooper fulfills a comic purpose, for it is amusing to

mourn for confidence men and thieves. Yet his sobering answer to "Where are they, and what are they, now?" defeats the humorous expectations of the reader.

> They have been smitted by the hand of retributive justice! The curse of their victims has fastened upon them, and nine out of ten are houseless, outcast, bankrupt! In the flitting of ten years, the larger portion have lost money, lands, character, every thing! And the few who still retain somewhat of their once lordly possessions, mark its steady, unaccountable diminution, and strive vainly to avert their irresistible fate—an old age of shame and beggary. They are cursed, all of them—blighted, root and trunk and limb! The Creek is avenged! (69–70)

The narrator attempts to have it both ways, affirming first with one set of values a comedic golden age, and then praising with a very different set of values that age's destruction. Hooper suspends the reader between two visions of the 1830s, one a comic pastoral in which the confidence man is king, and the other an antipastoral of retribution and wrath. The reader's confusion may be the result of Hooper's ambivalence toward the flush times and the confidence man, for the pastoral and antipastoral illuminate each other by contrast, mutually exclusive images evoking separate responses. The apparently humorous scene of speculation is by narrative fiat transformed into a court of ultimate justice, the comic perspective so comfortable to the reader becoming suddenly reflective and bitter. The reader may accept that the Indians have been wronged, that confidence men deserve their comeuppance, and that Hooper's sympathy and condemnation are equally genuine; but what, then, is the proper response to Hooper's Simon Suggs, who shamelessly speculates in Indian lands? Hooper appears to intend his literary devices to communicate contradictory attitudes: the Indians lost their ancestral lands to speculators who exploited their innocence; those speculators, though corrupt, were clever men, and one cannot help but admire their skill; the passing of both "races" should be mourned, for the wide-open frontier that gave them life is forever gone; and although some speculators hastened the death of the frontier through their monomaniacal pursuit of lucre, there was at least one, Simon Suggs, who was in harmony with

the flush times and who loved the art, laughter, and personal triumph as much as a stack of golden double-eagles.

Hooper clarifies the reader's response to Simon Suggs by directing his attention to a mere criminal, Mr. Eggleston of "the great Columbus Land Company" (71). This fiend has no love for anything save profit. He marries a Creek chief's daughter, Litka, convinces the "Sky Chief" to entrust his lands to himself, sells the lands for three thousand dollars, and thrusts the penniless and homeless old chief and his own very pregnant wife on the mercy of the federal government. Simon Suggs, in sharp contrast, takes from the "Big Widow" only what she in fact offers—and he sees to it that she is paid. Hooper does not allow the reader to question the difference between these two thefts; he asserts the wickedness of Eggleston's and the harmless amusement of Simon's.[26] Bridging these parallel episodes of reprobation and approbation is a humorous interlude of Indian boasting.

> "Coop! coop! hee!" shouts a champion of the Cohomutka-Gartska town. . . . "The Oakfuskee people are all cowards—they run like rabbits! They are liars! They have two tongues! Coop! coop! hee-e-e! the Alligator family is mixed-blooded! they come from the runaway Seminole and the runlet-making Cherokee! The 'Deer' people can beat the Alligator people till they beg for their hides!" (72)

Recalling Colonel Nimrod Wildfire's rhetoric in James Kirke Paulding's *The Lion of the West* (1831), this contest seems a set piece designed to realign the reader's expectations. He laughs at the exaggerations of the Deer and Alligators and, on familiar footing once again, anticipates Simon's future operations without dwelling on their implications.

In chapter 7 Hooper demonstrates that Simon Suggs desires not wealth but power. At Fort Suggs the shifty man wins the confidence and admiration of his frightened pioneer neighbors by assuming the appearance of courage in the face of imminent Indian attack, keeping to himself the knowledge that all the Creeks around the settlement are friendly. The citizens, who expect to be scalped within the hour, vote the cool Simon their leader and insist that he accept the military rank of Captain of "the Tallapoosy Vollantares." Their commission the confidence man assumes with modesty, pride, and pleasure, for he is finally superior to the vagaries of circumstance. He

triumphs over the authority earlier represented by his father, legislators, and generals by seizing with his own hands the reins of power. He delights in the direct exercise of military authority and, having no longer to practice the petty subterfuges so much a part of confidence art, publicly court-martials the foolish Widow Haycock. Though Captain Suggs does not overlook this opportunity to fine the widow twenty-five dollars, his enjoyment seems largely the result of his superiority to the community. To command rich widows, merchants, and officials, to be literally above civil law, appears to be the fulfillment of the confidence man's dream: he governs not just pasteboard cards, nor does he rule his victims by impersonating a general—the confidence man is elected captain of the fort because he is Simon Suggs. Though this distinction may at first appear merely a question of semantics, like that between Simon's "Tallapoosy Vollantares" and his "Forty Thieves," it discloses the confidence man apart from the necessity of disguise, releases him from the need to mask his identity. He is free to pursue what activities he prefers, for his manipulation of the settlers' fear of Indians has guaranteed his survival. Rather than "milk the cow dry," as a mere money-grabber like Eggleston might, Captain Suggs enjoys eating, drinking, socializing, playing cards, and—most of all—exercising the privileges of his rank. He is no longer at the mercy of those fickle goddesses, Chance and Luck, but has conquered their frontier domain, consecrating a whiskey barrel—the court-martial's symbolic "drum-head"—to the more appropriate deities Authority and Pleasure. Although master of Fort Suggs, master of his subjects' perceptions, and master of his own fate, Captain Suggs discovers the bounty of his new *Lares* and *Penates* to be limited and temporary.

Captain Simon Suggs's authority does not pass unchallenged. "Yaller-laigs" questions the captain's abilities, makes jokes at his expense, and informs the reader that Suggs has become as jealous of his command as a hard-shell preacher of his pulpit. The confidence man has become "Captain Suggs," an official with a particular social identity, with power over the community he wishes to maintain.

> Suggs . . . remained snug enough at the Fort, subsisting comfortably upon the contributions which he almost daily levied from wagons passing with flour, bacon, and whiskey, from We-

> tumpka eastward. In his own energetic language, "he had tuk his persition, and d——d ef he didn't keep it as long as he had yeath enough to stand upon!" (111)

Yaller-laigs adds another humorous perspective to the narrative, reminding the reader through his function as a Suggsian doppelgänger that *Captain* Suggs embodies the authority that Simon Suggs, the confidence man, hates and distrusts. That the captain's heckler escapes disciplinary action indicates Hooper's insistence on the comic values of the confidence man. It also records a comforting truth: though even the greatest scoundrel may come to power, there will always be enterprising individuals to ambush his flanks and make him smart. As if aware of the captain's awkward position, Hooper concludes chapter 8 with a revealing aside that merges the perspectives of Yaller-laigs and Captain Suggs: Simon rewards "Lewtenant Snipes" for honorable service with one of the Widow Haycock's twenty-five dollars. This division of plunder relocates *Captain* Suggs in the comic world of the confidence man, not least of all by Simon's reckoning of the Lewtenant's percentage. The captain himself, like "Yaller-laigs," does not take his military status all that seriously; "Lewtenant Snipes," in on the joke as surely as the reader, has the privilege of concluding the episode with the confidence man's ritual speech:

> "Capting Suggs . . . I've said it *behind you back*, and I'll say it *to you're face*; you're a *gentleman* from the top of your head to the end of your big-toe nail! Less go in and liquor; damn expenses!" (110)

The confidence man's command over Fort Suggs conveys more than its ostensible comedic purpose. Hooper deploys suggestions of real violence throughout these chapters, enlisting historical details when possible to create an undertone of frontier anxiety. The amusing contest between Alligator and Deer Indians degenerates into actual hostilities, reinforcing the narrator's note that in 1836 the Creeks were actually at war. The survival of Captain Suggs and the "Tallapoosy Vollantares" appears more precarious than comic in light of the settlers' migration described in chapter 7, for despite the clearly exaggerated fears of Mrs. Simmons and Mrs. Rollins (83–84), "several persons, residing in the county of Tallapoosa,

were cruelly murdered by the 'inhuman savages'" (82). The ball game the Volunteers attend turns out to be an Indian trap from which they barely escape. These specters of violence remind the reader that life on the frontier is not all confident fun and confidence games; these festivities, like the earlier boasting contest, culminate in a final image of violence and death. Anticipating the renegades' unsportsmanlike conduct, Captain Suggs and his men steal the Indians' ponies and the ball game's purse. Hooper transforms the "biter bit" motif into an ominous confrontation between red man and white. Cocher-Emartee, chief of the Oakfuskees, pursues the "Vollantares," "foaming and furious."

> He was mounted on a borrowed horse, and now loudly howled forth his demand for the restoration of his gallant bay and the shot-bag of silver; protesting that the whole affair was a joke on his part to try the spunk of the "Vollantares"—that he was "good friends" to the white people, and didn't wish to injure any of them.
>
> "Go to h-ll! you d—d old bandy-shanked redskin!" shouted back Simon; "I know the inemies of my country better'n that!"
>
> Cocher danced, shouted, raved, bellowed, and snorted in his boundless rage! Finally, he urged his pony into the water with the intention of swimming across.
>
> "Kumpny form!" shouted Simon—"blaze away at the d——d old *hostile*!" A volley was fired, and when the smoke cleared away, the pony was seen struggling in the river, but there were no Indians in sight. (116–17)

Hooper has ambushed the reader. The dramatic shift in tone signals a redirection of his attention from the humorous antics of a frustrated Indian to the turbulent waters over a dead chief's body.[27] Although the last short paragraph attempts a return to the comic vision of the cheated confidence man (the state legislature refuses to reimburse Captain Suggs for the loss of his horse), the reader's confidence in the narrative's structure has been shaken; the frontier proves dangerous, even when focused through the humorous lens of the confidence man. Indeed, the episode forces the reader to reconsider the dangers of the confidence man and his flush-times frontier.

Captain Simon Suggs can cause death. Penetrating to this level of seriousness, Hooper reveals—if only for an instant—

a chracteristic ambivalence toward the confidence man: though clever, amusing, and life affirming, an enthusiastically anarchic individual, these same qualities threaten not just a representative Indian but the entire structure of civilization, its laws, hierarchies, and fundamental order. That the Tallapoosy volunteers kill Cocher-Emartee suggests the wholesale murder of Indians by whites and strips away the layer of abstraction beneath which Americans feared the Noble Savage. The chief is simply an Indian to be bamboozled and, when he becomes an obstacle, disposed of by force. His death further symbolizes the end of an era; Hooper writes no more of Indians, and it seems far from accidental that Simon Suggs's remaining escapades are attempts to accommodate his renegade frontier style to an increasingly dominant civilization.

Simon Suggs seems up to his old tricks in chapter 10, "The Captain Attends A Camp-Meeting." Hooper redefines his confidence man, dismissing the implications of the Indian incident by the strategy of omission.

> Captain Suggs found himself as poor at the conclusion of the Creek war, as he had been at its commencement. Although no "arbitrary," "despotic," "corrupt," and "unprincipled" judge had fined him a thousand dollars for his proclamation of martial law at Fort Suggs, or the enforcement of its rules in the case of Mrs. Haycock; yet somehow—the thing is alike inexplicable to him and to us—the money which he had contrived, by various shifts to obtain, melted away and was gone forever. To a man like the Captain, of intense domestic affections, this state of destitution was most distressing. "He could stand it himself—didn't care a d—n for it, no way," he observed, "but the old woman and the children; *that* bothered him!"
>
> As he sat one day, ruminating upon the unpleasant condition of his "financial concerns," Mrs. Suggs informed him that "the sugar and coffee was nigh about out," and that there were not "a dozen j'ints and middlins, *all put together*, in the smokehouse." Suggs bounced up on the instant, exclaiming, "D—n it! *somebody* must suffer!" (118)

The reader is directed to a humorous perception of Simon, a penniless—perhaps hen-pecked—family man who retains nothing from his days of military glory save his title. The frontier itself has suffered change, visible in the contrast between the subsistence preaching of the Rev. Jedidiah Suggs and the

affluent evangelicalism of the Rev. Bela Bugg. Their similar names suggest a similarity of purpose while emphasizing the difference in their methods as well as Bugg's greater success. Simon recognizes the threat that the camp meeting poses.

> Amid all this confusion and excitement Suggs stood unmoved. He viewed the whole affair as a grand deception—a sort of "opposition line" running against his own, and looked on with a sort of professional jealousy. (122)

Yet the "grand deception" before his eyes impresses Simon with its magnitude, its efficiency, and its audaciousness.

> A half-dozen preachers were dispensing the word; the one in the pulpit, a meek-faced old man, of great simplicity and benevolence. . . . The rest were walking to and fro . . . among the "mourners"—a host of whom occupied the seat set apart for their especial use—or made personal appeals to the mere spectators. The excitement was intense. Men and women rolled about on the ground, or lay sobbing or shouting in promiscuous heaps. . . .
>
> "Keep the thing warm!" roared a sensual seeming man, of stout mould and florid countenance, who was exhorting among a bevy of young women, upon whom he was lavishing caresses. "Keep the thing warm, breethring!—come to the Lord, honey!" he added, as he vigorously hugged one of the damsels he sought to save. (119, 120)

Though Simon admits that "nater will be nater, all the world over; and I judge ef I was a preacher, I should save the purtiest souls fust, myself" (123), his tastes are primarily pecuniary. Hooper himself intrudes in an uncharacteristic footnote, one that echoes Longstreet's disclaimer in the concluding paragraph of "The Fight," assuring the reader "that the scenes described in this chapter are not now to be witnessed" (122); both he and Simon are amused by these sensual gymnastics, yet clearly separate themselves from them. Bela Bugg challenges Simon's professional reputation, and the minister's caresses for this reason do not invite imitation. Simon, like the new country itself, has matured; he is fifty years old, has a wife and children, and no longer roams the settlements cloaked in anonymity. Instead, he wears "his famous old green-blanket overcoat" (119), and Hooper informs us that at the camp meeting "great was the rejoicing of the brethren, as they sang, shouted, and prayed around him—for by this time

it had come to be generally known that the 'convicted' old man was Captain Simon Suggs, the very 'chief of sinners' in all that region" (124). The captain cannot masquerade any more as General Witherspoon; he also cannot afford to lose his reputation—and his livelihood—to the smooth-talking mechanics of Bela Bugg.

Simon trades on the people's knowledge of his identity to make an asset of a liability. He soon has all the brethren admiring the intensity of his conversion, for as Mrs. Dobbs repeatedly testifies, "Glory to my soul . . . it's the sweetest talk I *ever* hearn!" (127). Simon manipulates the congregation like the Devil himself, winning their confidence by confirming their religious visions.[28] The suspicious Bela Bugg, who believes he is using Captain Simon Suggs to attract donations, Suggs in like manner soothes and then betrays. After arousing the brethren's "pride of Purse," encouraging them to "give *accordin'* to their means" (131), Simon offers them the chance—by donating to his cause more than Snooks and Snodgrass—to appear wealthy to their peers. In each case the confidence man turns his knowledge of human nature against his victims, for it is pride, greed, or a stubborn belief in the truth of their perceptions that make them vulnerable.

The sensuality of the camp meeting, the whipping Mrs. Dobbs promises her Negro slave, and the sheer number of preachers fleecing Tallapoosa County suggest that the frontier is not only changing but also shrinking. As it becomes less open, new pressures find expression through the conventional confidence man. The camp-meeting episode questions the function of religion on the frontier; Hooper seems suspicious of a benevolent, patriotic Providence, and even more doubtful and disdainful of the need for socially confirmed personal revelations. The hypocrisy fundamental to the camp meeting is embodied in the fact of slavery and its attendant cruelty, which haunts Mrs. Dobbs's worshipful screams. And the banal aggressiveness of the preachers reflects a decay in confidence art that can be measured qualitatively (they are merely catching cows with lariats) and quantitatively (their tricks are less honorable duels than wholesale roundups). Although the confidence man has not lost his sense of humor—or his ability to amuse—he must work harder to turn a profit, to triumph over

the greedy and self-righteous, and to maintain his identity against competition as well as authority. Civilization threatens the flush times and the confidence man as the Oakfuskees never did. In fact, the Oakfuskees first fell victim to the forces that spell ruin for the flush times and the confidence man.

Chapters 11 and 12 present direct threats to the comic vision of the confidence man. Indicted for card-playing, Simon faces a prison cell, an ominous physical symbol of civilization. Brought to trial (an occurrence without precedent in Simon's history), he escapes his fate by a trick requiring no confidence and very little art, but not before the reader perceives an imminent end to the days of boom and bust: when Capt. Simon Suggs requires the services of a lawyer to escape from trouble the flush times have been lost. Hooper's last chapter, "Conclusion—Autographic Letter from Suggs," serves as the confidence man's parting shot at the forces emasculating the frontier. The reader finds Simon in the employ of the "Wetumpky Tradin Kumpiny," a chartered, official-sounding organization that specializes in trading worthless company money. Bela Bugg's religious enterprise pales in comparison to the Wetumpky speculations, as does Simon's own. Mr. Chamberlin commissions Simon Suggs to travel to "Urwinton" to buy slaves with valueless Wetumpky currency; his confederate, Mr. Smith, "jist to *start* the thing" (143), attempts to validate for the other traders the company's specie by selling Simon two slaves for eleven hundred dollars. Although the captain passes to gamblers and innkeepers six hundred dollars of Wetumpky paper, he returns to Chamberlin without Smith's or anyone else's slaves. The confidence man uses those who, like Bela Bugg, thought they were using him, for Simon has sold Smith's slaves for one thousand dollars in proven currency and refuses to tender it to his employers. They learn an expensive lesson, that there is no honor among thieves. They also discover, much to the reader's delight, that Capt. Simon Suggs is by far the shiftiest confidence man in the Old Southwest.

Suggs, however, wins only a border skirmish; the scope of the Wetumpky operation signals the diminution of the individual confidence man's chances of future success, for it anticipates the advance of corporate speculators whose only motive is profit and whose ethic is not comical but criminal. The

wholesale buying and selling of slaves, Chamberlin's method of acquiring good currency, links these humorless traders to "the peculiar institution"; though the slave market functions as a convenient plot device, its appropriateness to Hooper suggests at the least the increasing number of plantations worked by slaves, while painting a landscape that differs in broad strokes from his earlier scenes of the frontier. The individual slowly disappears along with the flush times, to be replaced by social institutions and civilization. This impression is strengthened by the epistolary form of the last chapter, which indicates Simon's awareness of the necessity for accommodation: changing with the times, he employs pen and ink instead of his usual gambling "dokkyments," preparing not to fight the law but to become its agent himself. He seeks, Hooper notes editorially, "the Sheriffalty of your county. He waxes old. He needs an office, the emoluments of which shall be sufficient to enable him to relax his intellectual exertions. His military services; his numerous family; his long residence among you; his gray hairs—all plead for him! Remember him at the polls!" (148). Hooper charges the reader to remember the various "services" Captain Suggs furnished; in his own words, immortalized at Fort Suggs, the captain served "*fust* his *country*, and then his *friends*" (110). If Simon is elected to serve the law, the law will never be the same. The captain's hoped-for career anticipates the electoral shenanigans of more successful literary confidence-men-cum-politicians, including Joseph G. Baldwin's Simon Suggs, Jr. (1853), and Henry Adams's Senator Silas P. Ratcliffe (1880). It also ironically foreshadows—and determines—another political failure; Hooper himself was defeated in a race for a House seat in Chambers County because, he theorized, he was "too d—d knowin' about Suggs to be honest himself!"[29]

The story of the confidence man as politician, however, does not rightly belong to Suggs. In the remaining Suggs tales, both published in 1849,[30] the captain is up to his old tricks again, not sitting in Congress. "The Muscadine Story" features Simon pursued by Sheriff Ellis of Dadeville, and the shifty man must ante-up his unpaid hotel bill in "The Widow Rugby's Husband." As in the final story included in *Simon Suggs* (1845), "Daddy Biggs' Scrape at Cockerell's Bend," the com-

bined forces of civilization impinge upon the freedom, fun, and identity of the confidence man; Daddy Biggs, a stand-in for Suggs, complains for more than himself: "D—n it boys, it makes me mad to think how them Chatohospa fellows and the town folks do 'trude on we roover people" (194). That Biggs rather than Suggs is the focus and narrator of the last sketch seems the result not so much of Hooper's desire to dissociate himself from Suggs—the 1849 tales belie that—as it is of Hooper's recognition that he had plotted in *Simon Suggs* a completed cycle of rise and fall: Simon Suggs, the conventional confidence man, begins his adventures in the flush times of the early nineteenth century, recapitulates the frantic economics of boom and bust, and, like the frontier, his home and his haven, suffers eclipse by civilization. Although Simon takes a belated crack at romance in "The Muscadine Story," Hooper recognizes the absurdity of revival: the confidence man has, for Hooper, outlived the frontier, the Oakfuskees, and the flush times of the 1830s and witnesses for the reader the onslaught of urban culture. His fast talk reveals—and only temporarily arrests—the advance of "swindlin missheens" like Bela Bugg's camp meeting, incorporated criminals like Chamberlin and Smith, large-scale plantation slavery, bitter regional politics, "cash-only" hotels, threatening jails, persistent sheriffs, and the concomitant decline of individualism and confidence. For Hooper as for Simon Suggs, the flush times were ended; ahead lay not comedy but civil war.

* * *

Eleven editions of *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* were published in as many years, and W. Stanley Hoole writes that at the time of Hooper's death in 1862 "his name, (or, better perhaps, the name of his chief character) was a household word in every section of the United States."[31] The continued popularity of Hooper's creation is proven by the countless reprintings of Suggs's tales in newspapers, unauthorized collections, and anthologies throughout the nineteenth century; the captain even traveled abroad, appearing in William Jerdan's *Yankee Humor, and Uncle Sam's Fun* and Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *Traits of American Humor, by Native Authors* (1852), both published in London. Often cited along with Thorpe, Field, Sol Smith, and others as a founder

of frontier literature (as John S. Robb did in his preface to *Streaks of Squatter Life*, 1847), Hooper created in Simon Suggs a complex character distinct from his predecessors and contemporaries. In 1857 Rufus N. Griswold praised Hooper's "bold, original and indigenous" sketches,[32] and Henry Watterson more precisely articulated Suggs's uniqueness in *Oddities in Southern Life and Character* (1882). *Simon Suggs* is, he wrote,

> a masterpiece. No one who is at all familiar with the provincial life of the South can fail to recognize the "points" of this sharp and vulgar, sunny and venal swash-buckler. As seriocomic as Sellers, as grotesque as Shingle, he possesses an originality all his own, and never for a moment rises above or falls below it. He is a gambler by nature, by habit, by preference, by occupation. Without a virtue in the world, except his good humor and his self-possession, there is something in his vices, his indolence, his swagger, his rogueries, which, in spite of the worthlessness of the man and the dishonesty of his practices, detains and amuses us. He is a representative character, the Sam Slick of the South; only, I should say, the Sam Slick of Judge Haliburton is not nearly so true to nature, so graphic, or so picturesque.[33]

That Watterson viewed Suggs as not only "original" but also "representative" suggests the nineteenth-century critic's understanding of the captain as a new stable form. Simon Suggs is, in fact, a literary convention that embodies and shapes perceptions of the American frontier, a device, like the term *confidence man*, created in the 1840s to express and control anxieties of boom and bust.

Hooper introduces Simon Suggs by means of conventional literary devices: the episodic structure, the form of a campaign biography, the narrative frame, the contrast between cultured narrator and dialect-spouting "low" characters, and the condescending narrative tone are all easily recognized elements of frontier humor. They structure the reader's response to Simon Suggs, trading upon the reader's familiarity with the works of Nott, Longstreet, Thompson, and others. Within the accepted context of frontier humor, Hooper creates a protagonist who redefines the frontier in terms appropriate to the 1840s, clarifying much of the uncertainty of intention present, for example, in Longstreet's "Georgia Theatrics." Hooper

uses conventions from the 1830s to establish continuity: the frontier prankster, Ned Brace, reemerges as the frontier confidence man, taking its form from a synthesis of earlier models—Capt. John Farrago, Davy Crockett, Thomas Singularity, the Yellow Blossom, and Major Jones all join Ned Brace in contributing features to Capt. Simon Suggs. This multiplicity confirms the absence of a conventional figure and action before Hooper's hero, one that he might have merely rechristened and duplicated. A legion of tricksters, biters, shapeshifters, and rogues also crowds the works of Hooper's contemporaries: S. G. Goodrich's dishonest peddler, Philip B. January's rollicking dragoon, Poe's artful diddlers, Sol Smith's tricky steamboatmen, James Hall's wild backwoodsmen, and William Gilmore Simms's reformed gambler testify to the popularity of shifty sharpers, again demonstrating in their diversity the lack of a conventional literary form.[34] If the captain is in fact the conventional confidence man, there should appear following *Simon Suggs* a certain conformity to Hooper's model.

The example of Simon Suggs is visible first of all in the American public's appetite for editions of the captain's adventures. Obviously aware of Hooper's widespread popularity, the editors of the *New Orleans Picayune*, the *Boston Yankee Blade*, the *Cincinnati Great West*, and the *Baltimore Republican and Daily Argus* (to name a few) frequently reprinted Suggs's tales without a sign of embarrassment. The reading public was not alone in its admiration for Hooper; in addition to Griswold and Watterson, William E. Burton included four Suggs tales in his *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor* (1858), while James Wood Davidson, in *The Living Writers of the South* (1869), ranked *Simon Suggs* above Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* because it was more "uniformly humorous." Of even more importance than critics are the fiction writers who applauded *Simon Suggs*. A minimal list would include Thomas A. Burke, John S. Robb, Sol Smith, Joseph M. Field, T. B. Thorpe, Stephen C. Massett, and William T. Porter, who reputedly held up publication of *The Big Bear of Arkansas, and Other Sketches* (1845) in order to include "How Simon Suggs 'Raised Jack.'" Porter also directs us to a clear example of Hooper's influence within *The Big Bear*. In his introduction to "The

Way 'Lige' Shaddock 'Scared Up A Jack,'" he leaves no doubt as to its origin: "The following sketch was suggested to the writer—a capital Mississippi correspondent to the 'Spirit of the Times'—by Hooper's story (previously given in this volume) of 'How Simon Suggs raised Jack!'"[35] A riverboat sharper bets Lige Shaddock fifty dollars that he can "turn a Jack" at one try, and, when challenged by Shaddock to perform, tosses the entire deck of cards face up on the table. The shifty descendant of Simon Suggs, however, observes, "If there is a Jack in THAT pack, I'll be d—d!" (177). In both title and action, "The Way 'Lige' Shaddock 'Scared Up A Jack'" pays tribute to Hooper's sketch; though he reverses the roles of Simon and Jedidiah, the author retains not only the structure of the snap but also a physical eccentricity of Simon's: "Lige has a way of dropping one corner of his eye and mouth at the same time—I don't know how he does it—it's a way he's got—but whenever you see it, there is *something out*" (176).

Old Tuttle, who appears in Porter's *A Quarter Race in Kentucky and Other Sketches* (1847), also bears Hooper's mark.

> Look at the picture of "Simon Suggs," and you'll see Old T. physically; in the *trial* scene you find him intellectually, and in the camp-meeting scene, morally. Were it not that Old T. never "samples" too much when on business, and fights the "*hoss* b'hoys" instead of the "Tiger," I should say they were one and the same person.[36]

Even the casual reader must note the resemblance at "Buckeye's" insistence. Old Tuttle's sleight-of-horse, as well, seems a variation on the confidence man's formula for fleecing Bela Bugg at the camp meeting, the Creeks at the ball game, and the slave-trading "Wetumpky Tradin Kumpiny": he wins his victim's confidence, allows him to think himself the smarter man, and then reaps the reward of his deception. Old Tuttle has learned more from Suggs than just how to wink at the reader.

Polly Peablossom's Wedding (1851), a humorous collection dedicated to "Johnson J. Hooper, Esq., of Lafayette, Alabama, (author of Adventures of Simon Suggs,) as a token of respect,"[37] contains several confidence games suggesting a close reading of the captain's exploits. Thomas A. Burke's "A Losing Game of Poker" imitates Suggs's method of turning the tables

to turn a profit. Bennett, a gambler, enlists Cole to set up Andy Smith for a stacked deck by pretending to beat Bennett at cards. After winning over one thousand dollars from Bennett, Cole leaves as agreed; he is replaced by the eager Smith, who feels certain that Bennett is a loser. Bennett stacks the deck and cleans out Smith, yet wins only five hundred dollars from his not-so-stupid pigeon. The next day Bennett asks Cole, his decoy, for "a settlement."

> "A settlement! what do you mean? I am not aware that there is anything to settle between you and me."
>
> "Come, come, old hoss, none of your jokes. About that money you won last night; you know well enough what I mean."
>
> "Well, didn't I win it fairly?"
>
> "Why, yes, the playing was fair enough on your part, but you know the cards were stocked, so as to give you the hand you held," said the gambler, who began to feel slightly alarmed at Cole's manner.
>
> "And who stocked them, pray? If you chose to deal me a better hand than you kept yourself, without my asking you to do so, it certainly wasn't my fault."
>
> "I know that," said Bennett, really alarmed at the prospect of losing his money; "Still, it was understood that we were only playing for fun, and I hope you will refund that seventeen hundred, and take half my winnings from Smith."
>
> "I understood the thing, Bennett, in no such way, and shall keep what I won from you, and you are perfectly welcome to *the whole* of what you took from Mr. Smith. Good morning, sir." (48)

Cole springs the "Wetumpky Tradin Kumpiny" reversal quite as neatly as Simon Suggs.

"'Doing' a Sheriff" echoes Hooper's "Muscadine Story," and "War's Yure Hoss?" and "The Thimble Game" recount games of chance not unlike the "soft snap" Simon gets from Jedidiah: in each a confidence man lures the sure but green sucker into an unwise trust in his perceptions. T. W. Lane's "The Thimble Game," moreover, contains a description of "Augusty" that parallels Hooper's in chapter 2 of *Simon Suggs* nearly word for word.

> Augusta was looked upon as Paris and London are now viewed by us. The man who had *never* been there, was a cipher in the community—nothing killed an opinion more surely, nothing

> stopped the mouth of "argyment" sooner, than the sneering taunt, "Pshaw! you ha'n't been to *Augusty.*" The atmosphere of this favoured place was supposed to impart knowledge and wisdom to all who breathed it, and the veriest ass was a Solon and an umpire, if he could discourse fluently of the different localities, and various wonders, of *Augusty.* (*Polly Peablossom*, 28–29)

Finally, John S. Robb's confidence man in "'Doing' a Landlord" (in *Streaks of Squatter Life*, 1847) practices the manipulation of appearances Simon put to use in his Indian speculations with the "Big Widow"; the captain's saddlebags and Tom's trunk are both bulging with rocks rather than bullion.

Simon Suggs clearly formed the confidence man exemplum for Hooper's contemporaries. Recognizable in physical appearance, in speech, and in shifty style, Suggs provided a model that proved eminently imitable, variable, and—in a literary, canonical sense—honorable. Once delineated, the narrative and thematic poetics of the confidence man are reimagined and the convention's structural devices are retooled to express new perceptions by succeeding generations of American writers. Baldwin, Harris, Warren, and Melville all demonstrate in their fictions the confidence they had in Hooper's example.

4 FOUR VARIATIONS OF THE CONFIDENCE MAN

> There is nothing like the elbow room of a new country.
>
> —President John Tyler (1843)

The American confidence man abuses the confidence of everyone he meets for personal advantage. Prowling the flush times, he exposes suspicion, dishonesty, naivete, and greed, marking by his success a pattern of faith betrayed that resembles the frontier cycle of boom and bust. Imitators of Captain Simon Suggs sprang up throughout the Old Southwest, some paying explicit homage to Hooper in collections like William T. Porter's *The Big Bear of Arkansas* (1845). The more talented of Hooper's successors varied the humorous convention, investing it with new meaning while retaining the confidence man's mastery of language, his manipulation of appearances, and his exploitation of ambiguities. Sometimes crossing the development of the confidence man with versions of older traditions of the confidence game, authors like Joseph G. Baldwin, George W. Harris, Herman Melville, and Kittrell J. Warren refocused the convention to express distrust of the flush times and to accommodate historical events ranging from the California Gold Rush to the Civil War. The fiction of these writers illustrates four distinct variations of the confidence man, the scope of the convention's historical development, and the proof of Melville's observation that "in new countries, where the wolves are killed off, the foxes increase."[1]

Simon Suggs, Jr., and Ovid Bolus, Esq.

In 1853, Joseph G. Baldwin marks the development of the confidence man as he defines the flush times.

> In the fulness of time the new era had set in—the era of the second great experiment of independence: the experiment, namely, of credit without capital, and enterprise without honesty. . . .

> The old rules of business and the calculations of prudence were alike disregarded, and profligacy, in all the departments of the *crimen falsi*, held riotous carnival. . . . Swindling was raised to the dignity of the fine arts. . . .
>
> Such is a charcoal sketch of the interesting region—now inferior to none in resources, and the character of its population—during the FLUSH TIMES; a period constituting an episode in the commercial history of the world—the reign of humbug, and wholesale insanity, just overthrown in time to save the whole country from ruin. But while it lasted, many of our countrymen came into the South-West in time to get "a benefit."[2]

"Ovid Bolus, Esq., Attorney at Law and Solicitor in Chancery" records the benefits reaped by a confidence man who is a variation of the Suggsian convention, and whose life epitomizes the flush times in the new country.

> And what history of that halcyon period, ranging from the year of Grace, 1835, to 1837; that golden era, when shinplasters were the sole currency; when bank-bills were "as thick as Autumn leaves in Vallambrosa," and credit was a franchise,—what history of those times would be complete, that left out the name of Ovid Bolus? As well write the biography of Prince Hal, and forbear all mention of Falstaff. (1)

In this first paragraph of *Flush Times*, Baldwin introduces a confidence man whose narrative will be more literary than Hooper's, just as Ovid Bolus will be more literate than Simon Suggs. The vulgar ring to *Simon Suggs* becomes the modulated, latinate *Ovid Bolus*, though as the three meanings of *bolus* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirm, *bolus* rings false upon inspection: "A medicine of round shape adapted for swallowing, larger than an ordinary pill. (Often used somewhat contemptuously)"; "a small rounded mass of any substance"; "a kind of clay." Like Falstaff, Bolus is a blustering windbag, an "Americanized comic braggart," who, as Walter Blair concludes, traces his ancestry back to *The Frogs*.[3] Baldwin claims a numerous and ancient kinship for Bolus.

> Ovid had early possessed the faculty of ubiquity. He had been born in more places than Homer. In an hour's discourse, *he* would, with more than the speed of Ariel, travel at every point of the compass, from Portland to San Antonio, some famous adventure always occurring just as he "rounded to," or

> while stationary, though he did not remain longer than to see it. (8)

Like Bolus's accounts of his adventures in the United States Senate or the Florida war (8–9), this historical catalogue—ranging from pre-Christian Greece to un-Christian Texas—sets up the confidence man as a mock-heroic figure, a boasting opportunist whose tall tales recapitulate the struggle to civilize the new country.

Baldwin's flush times spawn a confidence man different from Simon Suggs. Simon was the proverbial Ugly Man: "His head is somewhat large, and thinly covered with coarse, silver-white hair, a single lock of which lies close and smooth down the middle of a forehead which is thus divided into a couple of very acute triangles, the base of each of which is an eyebrow. . . . Lids without lashes complete the optical apparatus of Captain Suggs."[4] Ovid, in contrast, is "strikingly handsome."

> There was something in his air and bearing almost princely, certainly quite distinguished. His manners were winning, his address frank, cordial and flowing. He was built after the model and structure of Bolingbroke in his youth, *Americanized* and *Hoosierized* a little by a "raising in," and an adaptation to, the Backwoods. He was fluent but choice of diction, a little sonorous in the structure of his sentences to give effect to a voice like an organ. His countenance was open and engaging, usually sedate of expression, but capable of any modifications at the shortest notice. Add to this his intelligence, shrewdness, tact, humor, and that he was a ready debater and elegant declaimer, and had the gift of bringing out, to the fullest extent, his resources, and you may see that Ovid, in a new country, was a man apt to make no mean impression. (6–7)

Baldwin transforms the Suggsian convention into an almost courtly confidence man—an impression reinforced by repeated allusions to Falstaff—a lawyer who preys not on camp meetings and frontier forts but on the moneyed classes of Boston and Cuba (9–13). The new country has changed, and the confidence man with it, adapting himself with a coat of varnish to towns and cities in the legendary style of P. T. Barnum. Polite manners and white gloves offer the sharper a ready-made disguise.

Ovid Bolus perhaps embodies a greater threat than Simon

Suggs. Bolus's accounts of his amorous escapades may admit embellishment in the exact amount of each girl's fortune, but it seems likely that he left one at the altar with a broken heart (9–10) and a sixteen year old on her plantation with more serious "consequences" (12–13). He repeatedly sells tracts of land he does not own (5), and when he stoops to swindle "poor Ben" (10–11), Bolus collects not the one hundred dollars which gladdened Simon Suggs at the camp meeting but sixteen hundred dollars. Bolus's victims, moreover, seem less deserving of shiftiness than Suggs's, in particular because the scope of his snaps extends beyond Hooper's safely distanced comic frontier to the newly installed drawing rooms of civilization. Baldwin uses his confidence man to expose the pretensions of society in the flush times: Bolus trades on his word of honor repeatedly to gain credit, refuses to marry a Bostonian because of her father's aversion to "Bolus's love for the 'peculiar institution'" (10), and rather than marry the pregnant sixteen year old holds fast to a convenient Protestantism, breaks with the Catholic girl, and offers himself as "a martyr to his Religion" (13).

The conventions that Ovid Bolus exploits for profit, however, reveal implicitly that society in the new country is ripe for picking, a condition Baldwin states explicitly in another sketch.

> The condition of society may be imagined:—vulgarity—ignorance—fussy and arrogant pretension—unmitigated rowdyism—bullying insolence, if they did not rule the hour, *seemed* to wield unchecked dominion. (88–89)

Baldwin's flush-times confidence man in fact earns our admiration by his purely verbal manipulation of appearances.

> Some men are liars from interest; not because they have no regard for truth, but because they have less regard for it than for gain: some are liars from vanity, because they would rather be well thought of by others, than have reason for thinking well of themselves: some are liars from a sort of necessity, which overbears, by the weight of temptation, the sense of virtue: some are enticed away by the allurements of pleasure, or seduced by evil example and education. Bolus was none of these: he belonged to a higher department of the fine arts, and to a higher class of professors of this sort of Belles-Lettres. Bolus was a natural liar, just as some horses are natural pacers,

> and some dogs natural setters. What he did in that walk, was from the irresistible promptings of instinct, and a disinterested love of art. His genius and his performance were free from the vulgar alloy of interest or temptation. (2–3)

This is a kind of mock-hagiography, in which Ovid Bolus is satirically enshrined as a higher order of confidence man than those of the Suggsian mold who steal in order to eat. Bolus is an artist of the swindle for whom "the truth was too small" (3), to whom "all ideas were facts" (4), and who "delighted to turn an abstract idea into concrete cash" (5). In this sense he is an ironic doppelgänger to the sketch's narrator, also a maker of aesthetic fictions, from whom Bolus's chicanery elicits only good-humored censure.

> One thing in Ovid I can never forgive. This was his coming it over poor Ben. I don't object to it on the score of the swindle. That was to have been expected. But swindling Ben was degrading the dignity of the art. True, it illustrated the universality of his science, but it lowered it to a beggarly process of mean deception. There was no skill in it. It was little better than crude larceny. A child could have done it; it had as well been done to a child. It was like catching a cow with a lariat, or setting a steel trap for a pet pig. (10–11)

The narrator chides Bolus for exchanging someone else's land for his own profit, a typical confidence-man trick that reaffirms both Bolus's ancestry and his originality. Necessity forces the con man to return to Suggsian basics.

The flush times themselves prove finite: "Bolus, not having confined his art to political matters, sounded, at last, the depths, and explored the limits of popular credulity."

> The denizens of this degenerate age, had not the disinterestedness of Prince Hal, who "cared not how many fed at his cost;" they got tired, at last, of promises to pay. The credit system, common before as pump-water, adhering, like the elective franchise to every voter, began to take the worldly wisdom of Falstaff's mercer, and ask security; and security like something more substantial than plausible promises. In this forlorn condition of the country, returning to its savage state, and abandoning the refinements of ripe Anglo-Saxon civilization for the sordid safety of Mexican or Chinese modes of traffic; deserting the sweet simplicity of its ancient trustfulness and the poetic illusions of Augustus Tomlinson, for the

> vulgar saws of poor Richard—Bolus . . . departed from a land unworthy of his longer sojourn. (18–19)

The confidence man cannot survive in a new country grown old, or where, following Poor Richard, men no longer bet confidently on dreams. Ovid Bolus must pursue the new country to "the shadow of the San Saba mountains," trusting that poor Ben's money will secure him the "repose" he has "earned" (19). Ultimately, Bolus is no Barnum.

In "Simon Suggs, Jr., Esq.: A Legal Biography," Baldwin uses Hooper's Captain Simon Suggs as security. He parodies Captain Suggs's mock-heroic campaign biography while trading on his name to pique interest and insure recognition; "Colonel" Suggs contributes his biography to what he discovers to be the "vanity" publication of another confidence man, who for a mere one hundred fifty dollars will perpetuate the name of Colonel Simon Suggs, Jr., "and establish yours among the classical names of the American bar" (120). Simon declares he will "enter a nolly prossy q," but suggests the editor "rite to the old man!! May be he'd go in with BARNUM!!! May be he'd like to take TWO chances? He's young—never seen much!! Lives in a new country!!!" (120–21).

In this variation of the confidence man, Baldwin's explicit references to Hooper's fiction confirm a line of descent and, as Susan Kuhlmann notes, serve "as a tribute to the name and fame of Hooper's creation."[5] Unlike "Buckeye," a writer who invokes Hooper's Suggs in "Old Tuttle's Last Quarter Race" (1847), Baldwin ushers Hooper's Suggs into the action of his sketch, staging a game of "seven up" between the elder Suggs and young Simon that not only echoes the game between Suggs and *his* father, Jedidiah, in chapter 2 of *Simon Suggs*, but also intensifies the humor and the reader's pleasure, for here in Baldwin both players are consummate sharpers who self-consciously seem to symbolize the historical development of the new country.

> Since the game of chess between Mr. Jefferson and the French Minister, which lasted three years, perhaps there never has been a more closely contested match than that between these keen, sagacious and practised sportsmen. It was played with all the advantages; all the lights of science were shed upon that game. The old gentleman had the advantage of experi-

From *Flush Times* (1853 edition).

> ence—the young of genius: it was the old fogy against young America. For a long time the result was dubious; as if Dame Fortune was unable or unwilling to decide between her favorites. The game stood at *six and six*, and young Simon had the deal. Just as the deal commenced, after one of the most brilliant shuffles the senior had ever made, Simon carelessly laid down his tortoise-shell snuff-box on the table; and the father, affecting *nonchalance*, and inclining his head towards the box, in order to peep under as the cards were being dealt, took a pinch of snuff; the titillating restorative was strongly adulterated with cayenne pepper; the old fogy was compelled to sneeze; and just as he recovered from the concussion, the first object that met his eye was a Jack turning in Simon's hand. A struggle seemed to be going on in the old man's breast between a feeling of pride in his son and a sense of his individual loss. (129)

The elder Suggs gives Simon his blessing and advises Simon that he is "wasting his genius in a retail business of 'shykeenry' when nature had designed him for the bar" (130); in

fact, Baldwin notes ironically, "many sagacious men predicted that *the law would yet elevate Simon to a prominent place in the public view*" (130).

Although Simon is never hanged, he is scalped by "a green-looking Georgia sucker" (130–31). The trick brings tears to the elder Suggs's eyes, and it makes Simon realize he must accommodate himself to a new age.

> The losses Simon had met with, and the unpromising prospects of gentlemen who lived on their wits, now that the hard times had set in, produced an awakening influence upon his conscience. He determined to abandon the nomadic life he had led, and to settle himself down to some regular business. He had long felt a call to the law, and he now resolved to "locate," and apply himself to the duties of that learned profession. Simon was not long in deciding upon a location. The spirited manner in which the State of Arkansas had repudiated a public debt of some five hundred thousand dollars gave him a favorable opinion of that people. . . . I shall not attempt to describe the population. It was indescribable. I shall only say that the Indians and half-breeds across the border complained of it mightily. (132–33)

Like Ovid Bolus, Simon searches for a new country because "the hard times had set in." He discovers a ragtag region of corrupt cashiers, domestic squabblers, and penny-ante crooks, a land that bears little resemblance to either Hooper's frontier or the fantastically rich Creation State in T. B. Thorpe's "Big Bear of Arkansas" (1841). Simon's Arkansas parodies tall tales of the new country: cold-blooded bribery takes the place of artful fast talk, forgery succeeds impersonation, and the practice of law rather than its avoidance becomes the confidence man's modus operandi.

> Simon abandoned the favorite pastimes of his youth, and the irregularities of his earlier years. Indeed, he has been heard to declare that any lawyer, fulfilling conscientiously the duties of his profession, will find enough to employ all his resources of art, strategem and dexterity, without resorting to other and more equivocal methods for their exercise. (134)

Simon learns "all the arts and contrivances by which public justice is circumvented" (138) and by "the most insinuating manners" establishes himself at the very center of Arkansas

society, tricking a wealthy woman into divorcing her husband and then marrying her himself. From this position he rises quickly to the solicitorship of the state, divorces his now-cumbersome wife for "infidelity," and, taking first the hand and then the lands of a Choctaw chief's daughter, Che-wee-na-tubbe, receives the lucrative appointment of Indian claims agent for the Treasury of the United States.

Simon fulfills the wildest fantasies of Hooper's Captain Suggs, who "waxes old" and "needs an office" (*SS*, 148). Simon does not, of course, look back, but neither does Baldwin. Once Simon is secure in Arkansas, his mention of the elder Suggs ceases. Wolfgang Iser suggests that literary allusions "'quote' earlier answers . . . answers which no longer constitute a valid meaning for the present work, but which offer a form of orientation by means of which new meaning may perhaps be found."[6] In this sense the disappearance of the elder Suggs can be read as a signal that Hooper's confidence man is changed in Baldwin's fiction to speak to new questions in the 1850s. Baldwin's confidence man threatens an inchoate society rather than rude settlements, and he springs his snaps from within. As a successful lawyer rather than a roving scoundrel he gives form to the fear that all American courts are seats of corruption, while as a claims agent Simon suggests that the government is peopled by men seeking not justice but personal profit.

In these instances, Baldwin echoes the satire of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815). Brackenridge perceived before Baldwin that new countries encourage and seem to reward shiftiness, especially when shiftiness clothes itself in the style of democratic forms.[7] In "Simon Suggs, Jr.," Baldwin expresses this apprehension that the most dangerous confidence man is often the most successful precisely because he cloaks his deeds in respectable garments. This change from Hooper's confidence man limits the amount of anxiety that is released in laughter; it becomes characteristic of the confidence man in the 1850s to create tensions that are not fully discharged. Hooper's Simon Suggs "waxes old" and harmless; Baldwin's Ovid Bolus travels to Texas, far enough away to be in memory an amusing character; but Baldwin's Simon Suggs,

Jr., locates himself in Washington, the center of American democracy, standing as a reminder that the confidence man's shiftiness succeeds in the new country.

Sut Lovingood

In the gentlemen's magazines and Tennessee newspapers of the 1850s, George Washington Harris develops characteristics of the southwestern confidence man that differ markedly from Baldwin's. Harris's creation, whose misadventures are collected in the 1867 *Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool,"* shares neither the respectability of Ovid Bolus nor the success of Simon Suggs, Jr.[8] The flush times have become the hard times, but what Sut lacks in social graces he makes up for in "onregenerite pride" (229). And where Baldwin tightened the rhetorical reins of his cultured narrator over his immoral characters, Harris passes the reins over entirely to his vernacular character turned narrator, Sut.

In Sut's Tennessee, victimization is the way of all flesh, and brutality is a means of survival. The world of the *Yarns* is hostile, a nightmarish landscape in which people, animals, and even inanimate objects threaten to transform the self into inhuman things: merely by going to sleep a man can become a corpse in a coffin ("Frustrating a Funeral"), a simple trip to town can turn into a near-fatal dance with a crazed bull ("Taurus in Lynchburg Market"), and a new shirt can strip the skin off a man's back as painfully and professionally as a medieval instrument of torture ("Sut's New-Fangled Shirt"). Point of view is important in this unbalanced universe, as Sut explains in "Sut Lovingood's Daddy, Acting Horse." Sut's father is chased into a creek by an angry swarm of hornets.

> He kep' up a rite peart dodgin onder, sumtimes afore they hit im, and sumtimes arterard, an' the warter wer kivered wif drownded ball ho'nets. Tu look at hit frum the top ove the bluff, hit wer pow'ful inturestin, an' sorter funny; I wer on the bluff myse'f, mine yu. Dad cudent see the funny part from whar he wer, but hit seem'd tu be inturestin tu him frum the 'tenshun he wer payin tu the bisness ove divin an' cussin. (26)

Humor based on others' physical discomfort is a conventional southwestern technique for enduring frontier hardships by

making light of them. In "Old Burns's Bull Ride," as Walter Blair notes, Harris reworks a tale that had been told in print at least since 1834 by Henry Nott, William Thompson, and others,[9] and Sut retells traditional cruel stories of exploded Yankees, broken-up camp meetings, and snake-bit Irishmen (61, 157, 108). Like the snaps of Simon Suggs, these incidents are funny to the safely distanced observer and narrator, but in the *Yarns* Sut himself must cope with personal threats and injuries.

In "Parson John Bullen's Lizards," first published in 1857,[10] Sut tangles with a preacher reminiscent of Jedidiah Suggs and the Reverend Bela Bugg. Like Hooper, Harris uses the popular narrative-frame technique, yet his reversal of Hooper's emphasis on what Kenneth Lynn has called the "Self-controlled Gentleman" shatters the reader's expectations of cruel devilry occurring only within the "cordon sanitaire."[11] The narrative begins with a reward poster for Sut's hide and is controlled throughout by vernacular points of view.

> AIT ($8) DULLARS REW-ARD
>
> 'Tenshun Belevers And Konstables! Ketch 'Im! Ketch 'Im! This kash wil be pade in korn, ur uther projuce, tu be kolected at ur about nex camp-meetin, *ur tharater*, by eny wun what ketches him, fur the karkus ove a sartin wun SUT LOVINGOOD, dead ur alive, ur ailin, an' safely giv over tu the purtectin care ove Parson John Bullin, ur lef' well tied, at Squire Mackjunkins, fur the raisin ove the devil pussonely, an' permiskusly discumfurtin the wimen very powerful, an' skeerin ove folks generly a heap, an' bustin up a promisin, big warm meetin, an' a makin the wickid larf, an' wuf, an' wus, insultin ove the passun orful.
>
> Test, JEHU WETHERO.
> Sined by me,
> JOHN BULLEN, the passun. (48)

"George," who presents this advertisement to the reader, is all that remains of the cultured frame-narrator. He is merely an introductory device, a convenient bridge to help the reader cross over into the fantastic rhetorical world of the *Yarns*. George functions as a model of the reader, an amused listener who, having cut his teeth on Seba Smith's Jack Downing and James Russell Lowell's Hosea Bigelow, surrenders to Sut's

comic misspellings, outrageous dialect, and grotesque actions.

At a Rattlesnake Springs camp meeting, Sut seeks not money, like Simon Suggs, but love. Sitting

> in a nice shady place convarsin wif a frien' ove mine, intu the huckil berry thickit, jis' duin nuffin tu nobody an' makin no fuss, when, the fust I remembers, I woke up frum a trance what I hed been knocked inter by a four-year old hickory-stick, hilt in the paw ove ole Passun Bullin, durn his alligater hide; an' he wer standin a striddil ove me, a foamin at the mouf, a-chompin his teeth—gesterin wif the hickory club—an' a-preachin tu me so you cud a-hearn him a mile, about a sartin sins gineraly, an' my wickedness pussonely, an' mensunin the name ove my frien' loud enuf to be hearn tu the meetin 'ous. (49–50)

Parson Bullen's artless attack symbolizes Sut's vulnerability to forces beyond his control; unlike Simon Suggs, Sut is not the shifty master of easily manipulated dupes. It is Parson Bullen, rather, who has the upper hand, and who makes Sut and his girlfriend the victims of his petty meanness. In exchange for Sall cooking supper for him, Bullen promises not to tell her mother of Sall's sitting with Sut, but once he has eaten he "went strait an' tole her mam" (51). Like Jedidiah Suggs, Parson Bullen embodies a hypocritical authority that delights in inflicting bodily pain—Sut is beaten and Sall is stropped.

Sut's spirit, however, remains unbruised. Pretending repentance, Sut joins the parson's next camp meeting at Rattlesnake Springs. As Parson Bullen's sermon on "hell-sarpints" reaches a crescendo,

> when he wer a-ravin ontu his tip-toes, an' a-poundin the pulpit wif his fis'—onbenowenst tu enybody, I ontied my bag ove reptiles, put the mouf ove hit onder the bottim ove his britches-laig, an' sot intu pinchin thar tails. Quick es gunpowder they all tuck up his bar laig, makin a nise like squirrils a-climbin a shell-bark hickory. He stop't preachin rite in the middil ove the word "damnation" . . . fetch a vigrus ruff rub whar a hosses tail sprouts: then he's stomp one foot, then tuther, then bof at onst. Then he run his han' atween his waisbun an' his shut an' reach'd way down, an' roun' wif hit; then he spread his big laigs, an' gin his back a good rattlin rub agin the pulpit, like a hog scratches hisself agin a stump, leanin tu

> hit pow'ful, an' twitchin, an' squirmin all over, es ef he'd slept in a dorg bed, ur ontu a pisant hill. About this time, one ove my lizzards scared an' hurt by all this poundin' an' feelin, an' scratchin, popp'd out his head from the passun's shut collar, an' his ole brown naik, an' wer a-surveyin the crowd, when ole Bullin struck at 'im, jis' too late, fur he'd dodged back agin. The hell desarvin ole raskil's speech now cum to 'im, an' sez he, "Pray fur me brethren an' sisteren, fur I is a-rastlin wif the great inimy rite now!" (53–54)

In battling "the great inimy" Parson Bullen tears off his clothes, standing before his flock in only "a par ove heavy, low quarter'd shoes, short wollen socks, an' eel-skin garters tu keep off the cramp" (56). Stripped of the vestments of his profession, he vaults—"plum crazy"—over three hundred watchful "sisteren" screaming "take keer ove yerselves, the Hell-sarpints *hes got me*!" (56).

What has got Bullen, of course, is Sut's genius, which temporarily forces the parson out of the redemption business. Sut's trick resembles those of Thomas Singularity or Ned Brace more than those of Simon Suggs. In Harris's fiction, the development of the confidence man recrosses older traditions; having been made a comic butt, Sut assumes the role of prankster to make Bullen play the fool. Categories of normal experience break down as Sut switches roles with Bullen by making his metaphoric religious struggle into a physical, humorous one. Identity is revealed as a precarious substance when Sut transforms himself from victim to victimizer and the parson from a man of the spirit into a scratching animal of naked flesh. At this moment of triumph Sut surely seems "America's Till Eulenspiegel," as Walter Blair notes,[12] yet Sut's financial language echoes the rewards of the Suggsian confidence man, suggesting that in Tennessee profits are registered in different specie: "yere's the way I lifted [Bullen's] note ove han'"; "I paid him plum up fur hit, an' I means tu keep a payin him, ontil one ur tuther, ove our toes pints up tu the roots ove the grass" (51). The new country of the *Yarns* offers reduced opportunities for a confidence man; Polk County lacks the cash necessary for gambling, swapping, and confidence art. Here there are no crops taken to Augusta, and even the parson's eight-dollar reward for Sut's capture is offered "in korn, ur uther projuce, tu be kolected at ur about nex camp-meetin,

ur tharater" (48). Drinking, dancing, fighting, playing pranks, making love—these are the activities available to Sut, for the unstable community could not afford to support a confidence man, who needs both social conventions to exploit and cash to survive. The country around Rattlesnake Springs is poor on both counts, but its poverty and instability promise other kinds of payment.

Sut sees women as one of Tennessee's most valuable resources. In "Blown Up with Soda" (1857)—a variation of Major Jones's courtship of Mary Stallins[13]—Sicily Burns proves as shiny and hard as a new double-eagle.

> "George, did yu ever see Sicily Burns? Her dad lives at the Rattilsnake Spring, clost ontu the Georgia line."
>
> "Yes, a very handsome girl."
>
> "Handsome! that ar word don't kiver the case; hit souns sorter like callin good whiskey strong water, when yu ar ten mile frum a still-hous, hit a rainin, an' yer flask only haf full. She shows among wimen like a sunflower amung dorg fennil, ur a hollyhawk in a patch ove smartweed. Sich a buzzim! Jis' think ove two snow balls wif a strawberry stuck but-ainded intu bof on em. She takes adzactly fifteen inches ove garter clar ove the knot, stans sixteen an' a 'alf hans hi, an' weighs one hundred an' twenty-six in her petticoatail afore brekfus'." (75–76)

George's conventional description, "handsome," Sut perceives as inappropriate; his own language defines her as a precious substance to be admired, measured, and consumed. Sut desires her as Simon Suggs desires to beat "the Tiger," and Sut is similarly blinded by her attractions. She is not, of course, the fulfillment of Sut's fantasies, but a feminine prankster: "'Sutty, luv, I'se got sumthin fur yu, *a new sensashun*'" (80). As he tells George, "'I'd got the idear onder my har that hit wer *lov-powders*, an' I swaller'd the devil red hot from home, a-thinkin that. Luv-powders *frum her*! jis' think ove hit yerse'f solemnly a minit, an' sit still ef yu kin'" (81). The "new sensashun" Sicily gives him is ten doses of soda-powder garnished with nutmeg, a concoction that empties Sut's stomach as readily as the faro bank empties Simon's pockets. Although Simon occasionally plays the fool, an implicit acknowledgement of the confidence man's ancestry, Sut is subjected to repeated bad deals from various sharpers; the Fates themselves

seem to have stacked the deck against him, indicative of a disorder in the comic world of the *Yarns* not present in *Simon Suggs*. Simon contends with his devilish father, but the alluring Sicily Burns makes Sut drink "the devil red hot." Unlike Simon's universe, Sut's is populated by other devils who do get the best of him, in large part because everyone is subject to immiment dislocation by impersonal forces, and in small because there are few social conventions adhered to; Sut can manipulate Parson Bullen by feigning repentance, a characteristic sham of the confidence man, but nothing can save him from the parson's hickory stick. And when Sut himself behaves in a conventional manner, as when he plays the obedient lover to Sicily, he sets himself up for victimization.

When Sicily Burns marries the "suckit rider" Clapshaw in "Sicily Burns's Wedding" (1858), she opens the door to Sut's revenge. Sut drives the Burns's bull into their beehives and then into Sicily's wedding reception; the result is sexual revenge and a reassertion of Sut's mastery over the chaotic universe.

> Sicily, she squatted in the cold spring, up tu her years, an' turn'd a milk crock over her head, while she wer a drownin a mess ove bees onder her coats. I went tu her, an' sez I, "Yu hes got anuther new sensashun haint yu?" Sez she—
>
> "Shet yer mouth, yu cussed fool!"
>
> Sez I, "Power'ful sarchin feelin bees gins a body, don't they?"
>
> "Oh, lordy, lordy, Sut, these yere 'bominabil insex is jis' burnin me up!"
>
> "Gin 'em a mess ove SODY," sez I. (95)

Momentarily satisfied that "her an' him cudent sleep tugether fur ni ontu a week" (96), Sut completes his triumph in "Sut Lovingood's Chest Story."[14] He discovers that although Sicily "never did feel warm tu old Clapshaw" (*HTHT*, 120), she has learned to keep off the chill with Doctor Gus Fabin, a grotesque man "four foot fourteen inches" tall. While spying on the adulterous pair, Sut disturbs their lovemaking and gains his chance: "Ole Gus Fatty" hides in a chest containing two hundred eggs and some lamp black, Sicily "flung on her dress terrectly," and Sut pretends to be too drunk to recognize the obvious. Sicily is glad to fix the "drunk" Sut some dinner, and

while she is gone, Fabin asks if "he"—meaning Sut—is gone. Imitating Sicily's voice, Sut, like Hooper's Daddy Biggs at Cockerell's Bend, paints a picture of imminent apocalypse that sets Fabin to praying; his prayers do no good, however, for Sut has tied the chest to Fabin's huge horse, which Sut has carefully prepared to bring on the Day of Doom by smearing luminous fox fire on it and igniting firecrackers round its head. The horse races off, mixing Fabin, eggs, and lamp black into one unholy stew, and as Sut notes, he never laid eyes on

> the chest nor Gus Fatty arter that nite, an I *dont care a durn ef I never do*. Wonder ef Sicily misses much! Ole Clapshaw believes in "witches, an warlocks, an long nebbed things" more than he does in Sicily an his "growin" skeer ov ghostes keeps him at home o' nights. I railly think he's gettin to be a pious man. Poor Sicily, she's warin thin, her eyes am growin bigger, an she hes no roses on her cheeks. She *cant* laugh, an she *wont* cry. Haint hit orful to think ove? (*HTHT*, 125)

Of course to Sut and the reader it is not "orful to think ove," but humorous. As Milton Rickels concludes, when Sicily "binds herself with the institutions, she becomes respectable and has a social place to lose."[15] In as artful a manner, Sut manipulates the adulterous Sheriff Doltin and Mary Mastin in the "Rare Ripe Garden-Seed" trilogy (227–77). He is able to chasten the sheriff, stop Mary's roaming, and drive away the meddlesome Widder McKildrin because they value their social positions and are confident that the authority of the sheriff's title will mask infidelity.

This is not to suggest with critics like Brom Weber that Sut is an agent of morality or cosmic justice;[16] Sut functions more like the soul of anarchy, the traditional fool or the lord of misrule. Sut seeks not justice but freedom and revenge; like Simon Suggs, he is the agent of a comic deity, one who like Simon's satirizes Sut as well. Sut is, as Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill demonstrate, a subversive character whose language, constructed of fantastic details and incongruous images, serves to "camouflage the underlying anarchy."[17] We are amused by Sut's victimization of Clapshaw largely because of Sut's victimization of language; coinages like *suckit rider*, *insex*, and even the innocent *buzzim* subvert traditionally held

values and engage the reader in a rhetorical conspiracy against order. To decipher Sut's dialect is to share Sut's point of view.

That point of view is achieved by the conflation of the confidence man and the fool into a single vernacular narrator. By this stroke of genius, Harris creates a shifty character who, since he has no need of money, is freer than Simon Suggs,[18] and who, since he tells his own story, never suffers defeat. Although the undeniable butt of Sicily Burns's soda-powder trick, Sut triumphs over his humiliation by exaggerating his own ludicrousness. In retelling the story to George, Sut stresses his own foolishness, his own animal and mechanical characteristics, transforming the painful and embarrassing incident into a humorous narrative, his own comic illusion, his triumph.

> Jis' 'bout the time I wer ketchin my breff, I tho't I'd swaller's a thrashin-meersheen in full blast, wif a cuppil ove bull-dorgs, an' they hed sot intu fitin; an' I felt sumthin cumin up my swaller, monstrous like a hi pressur steamboat. I cud hear hit a-snortin, and scizzin. . . . Thar wer a road ove foam frum the hous' tu the hoss two foot wide, an' shoe mouf deep—looked like hit hed been snowin—a-poppin, an' a hissin, an' a-bilin like a tub ove soap-suds wif a red hot mole-board in hit. I gethered a cherry tree lim' es I run, an' I lit a-straddil ove ole Blackey, a-thrashin his hide like the devil beatin tan-bark, an' a-hissin wus nur four thousin mad gangers outen my mouf, eyes, nose, an' years. (81–82)

Even in defeat, Sut wrestles triumph from the incident by embellishing its fantastic details and casting himself as its outrageous star. He not only survives but overcomes his predicament, conquering threats to the self by transforming them into narrative art. His language acts as a distancing medium by which he separates himself and George from the painful event, turning what was humiliating into what is humorous. Like Simon Suggs and Ovid Bolus, Sut Lovingood uses language to master the new country; Sut creates fictions to control disorder and guarantee survival, substituting for one order of reality in which he is the victim another in which he is a comic hero.

From *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (1867 first edition).

M. Thomas Inge writes that from 1854 to 1869 Sut Lovingood is "a literary figure living partially in a world of reality and mostly in a world of his own making, and an ironical and literal mouthpiece for Harris' political opinions and satirical attacks."[19] Inge is certainly correct in distinguishing between Sut's two worlds; in reality, Sut victimizes preachers, sheriffs, doctors, and all visible representatives of order because they threaten his individual freedom. Sometimes he succeeds, and sometimes he is himself pranked or kicked. In either case, Sut's recreation of the event in bizarre and dislocating language diverts attention from the consequences of these actions: his own pain, seen at this remove, becomes comic, and his cruelty to others—which can culminate in death—becomes a cause for laughter. When George asks what killed Mrs. Yardley, Sut replies, "Nuffin, only her heart stop't beatin 'bout losin a nine dimunt quilt. True, she got a skeer'd hoss tu run over her, but she'd a-got over that ef a quilt hadn't been

mix'd up in the catastrophy" (137). Sut separates commonsense cause from effect; Mrs. Yardley dies because she cares too much for quilts.

Sut's victimization of a normative language, though comic, is itself a threat to the social order, a challenge to conventional modes of expression, perception, and understanding. A favorite rhetorical device of Sut's—the catalogue—mixes categories of being in a fantastic new order. Sheriff Doltin's wife appears initially as a traditional symbol of Christian piety, but Sut's imagery swiftly propels her heavenward in a new incarnation.

> She were boney an' pale. A drunk Injun cud a-red a Dutch almanac thru her nose, and ther wer a new moon ove indigo onder her eyes, away back intu them, fifty foot or so. . . . Her wais wer flat, an' the finger cords on her han's wer mos' as high, an' look'd es tight, and show'd es clar thru the skin, es the strings ove a fiddil. The han' hitself wer white, not like snow, but like paint, and the forkid blue veins made hit look like a new map ove the lan' ove death. She wer a coughin wif her han' on her hart, like she hed no more spittil nur she hed tears, an' not much louder nor a crickit chirpin in a flute; yit in spite ove all this, a sweet smile kiver'd her feeters. . . . Her shoulder blades, as they show'd thru her dress, made me think they wer wings a sproutin fur her flight tu that cumfort and peace she desarves so well. She's a dealin wif death now. . . . *She* is ready, an' *I* raly wish she hed started. (256–57)

Sut's language asserts his mastery of reality, sounding a note of optimism in an almost claustrophobic, menancing universe. His tales prove that the individual can survive, but only if he is willing and able to reorder reality—usually by disordering others' perceptions.

In Henry Clay Lewis's "Curious Widow" (1850), three medical students elaborately wrap up an albino Negro cadaver's face to tempt their curious landlady. They anticipate her cries of horror as she opens the package, confident that the prank will teach her a hard lesson. Their expectations of terrible delight are defeated, however, for she "gazed upon its awfulness in silence as if her eyes were riveted to it forever."[20] After a moment she laughs, then composes herself and notes scornfully, "I was just *smiling aloud* to think what fools these students made of themselves when they tried to scare me with a

dead nigger's face when I slept with a drunken husband for twenty years" (121). The knowledge she possesses is neither entirely comic nor reassuring; yet she stares into the disturbing face, confronts it, reads it, and finally laughs at it to survive, as she had survived twenty years with her drunken husband. It is this knowledge—of drunken husbands, battered flesh, and all the forces that threaten to anniilate and dehumanize the self—that Sut Lovingood shares with the reader and, in the act of sharing, masters. Sut is like the students who dissect life and discover the need to laugh at the grotesqueries they uncover, yet Sut resembles the landlady as well, who, improbably assaulted, laughs in the face of "awfulness" and thereby claims a desperate triumph. Harris collapses both visions of life into one point of view; as Sut explains, "hit am an orful thing, George, tu be a natral born durn'd fool. Yu'se never 'sperienced hit pussonally, hev yu?" (97).

Even the flexibility of the fool's point of view, however, could not withstand the chaos of the Civil War. Like many of his fellow Southern writers, Harris began to lose confidence in the security and superiority that had allowed him to record the fantastic doings of the Frog Mountain community in tales as temporally separate as "A Snake-Bit Irishman" (1846) and "Blown Up with Soda" (1857). Harris's own sense of order, not a fictitious Sheriff Doltin's, had come under attack. After 1860, as Inge concludes, Sut becomes more and more a vehicle for Harris's fears about the uncertain future of the South, a vindictive spokesman bitterly ridiculing Lincoln, Yankees, and humanity in general.[21] Sut's sense of humor evaporates in the "Travels with Abe" satires (1861), "Sut Lovingood Come to Life" (1866), and "Sut Lovingood on the Puritan Yankee" (1866). In Hoss Lovingood's four-part biography of Sut (1868), Harris parodies Jesse Root Grant's biography of his son, Ulysses S. Grant, and, though Harris's imitation is in spots amusing, the Civil War had dealt Harris's imagination a blow from which neither he nor Sut could hope to recover. In "Sut Lovingood's Allegory" (1868), Sut notes that "we aint as *good* as we wer forty years ago. We am too dam artifichul, interprizin an' *sharp*" (*HTHT*, 312). Anticipating the imaginative methods of Twain and Howells, Sut argues "for the sake ove this an' the nex generashun" (*HTHT*, 316) for a return to a simpler,

more traditional way of life like that he portrayed in "The Knob Dance—A Tennessee Frolic" (1846). But in 1869 Harris died, embittered by the Yankee mechanisms of Reconstruction. The past was lost, Harris knew, with the Confederacy; and for Sut Lovingood—an enduring character combining confidence man, prankster, and fool—there would be no recovery.

The Confidence-Man

Herman Melville was not unaware of the conventional form of the confidence man evolving in the literature of the Old Southwest. The popularity and flexibility of the "shifty man" attracted him as they had Johnson J. Hooper, Joseph G. Baldwin, and George W. Harris, while the issue of confidence—how much and what is a "right" confidence?—was central throughout his career. In 1857 the *Boston Evening Transcript* immediately recognized Melville's use of a familiar figure.

> One of our indigenous characters who has long figured in our journals, courts, and cities, is "the Confidence Man;" his doings form one of the staples of villainy, and an element in the romance of roguery. Countless are the dodges attributed to this ubiquitous personage, and his adventures would equal those of Jonathan Wild. It is the fancy of Herman Melville—an author who deals equally well in the material description and the metaphysical insight of human life. He has added by his "Confidence Man" to the number of original subjects—an achievement for the modern *raconteur*, who has to glean in a field so often harvested. The plan and treatment are alike Melvillish; and the story more popularly eliminated [*sic*] than is usual with the author. "The Confidence Man—His Masquerade"—is a taking title.[22]

The reviewer's acknowledgement of the historical and literary ancestors of *The Confidence-Man* anticipates by nearly one hundred years Edward H. Rosenberry's assertions that the novel follows the tradition of frontier humor and that in tracing the evolution of the confidence man from the Old Southwest to the Mississippi, "Ovid Bolus . . . supplies the polish that [Simon] Suggs lacks and narrows the gap between the frontier *picaro* and Melville's metaphysical thimblerigger."[23] Melville does more than simply combine two variations of a frontier convention; he is the first classic American author to

call this figure a "confidence man" and to delineate the full range of his literary possibilities. Paradoxically, this treatment at once establishes the confidence man as a literary convention, insures the term *confidence man* a place in American literature, and yet in a sense exhausts the convention's implications by making them explicit. Melville defines, then so thoroughly exposes, the poetics of the confidence man that he bankrupts its potential. In addition, Melville uses the confidence man to illuminate other conventions drawn from humorous, sentimental, and romantic fiction; he pushes stock devices beyond conventional patterns of expectation and response by connecting them with an all-informing shiftiness, suggesting limits to their ability to convey new meanings or to resolve new anxieties. This technique of exaggerating, warping, or inverting conventions, focused through an ambiguous "Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man,"[24] raises the confidence man to a mythic level, on which "material description" gives way to "metaphysical insight," and on which the comic function of the confidence man is wedded to a serious probing of the shaky foundations of American self-congratulation.

The masquerade of *The Confidence-Man* begins on April Fools' Day, a comic device common in the tradition of frontier humor; in George Washington Harris's "Rare Ripe Garden-Seed," Wat Mastin marries the four-and-one-half-months pregnant Mary McKildrin on the first of April. Harris's joke is based on Wat's physical "ticklin sensashuns," and his description of Wat's appearance is earthy: "Wat felt his keepin right warm, so he sot intu bellerin an' pawin up dus . . . an' a-chompin his teef ontil he splotch'd his whiskers wif foam" (*Yarns*, 230–31). Melville's images are culturally exotic, proper introduction for the "advent" of a "stranger" who is not a familiar, duped, good old boy but a mysterious mute: "At sunrise on a first of April, there appeared, suddenly as Manco Capac at the lake Titicaca, a man in cream-colors" (1). This first sentence of *The Confidence-Man* suggests that conventions will be infused with new meaning and sets the stage for the metaphysical tickling to follow.

Melville's setting on board a Mississippi steamboat is also conventional: T. B. Thorpe's "Big Bear of Arkansas" (1841) is

perhaps the best-known version of the floating stage used by humorists from Sol Smith to Mark Twain. The "heterogeneous character" of Thorpe's passengers differs from Melville's initial catalogue of American types: Thorpe balances geographical, professional, and moral extremes.

> Here may be seen jostling together the wealthy Southern planter, and the pedler of tin-ware from New England—the Northern merchant, and the Southern jockey—a venerable bishop, and a desperate gambler—the land speculator, and the honest farmer . . . beside a "plentiful sprinkling" of the half-horse and half-alligator species of men, who are peculiar to "old Mississippi," and who appear to gain a livelihood simply by going up and down the river.[25]

Melville's introductory list is one-sided:

> Crowds were gathered about the announcement, and among them certain chevaliers, whose eyes, it was plain, were on the capitals, or, at least, earnestly seeking sight of them from behind intervening coats; but as for their fingers, they were enveloped in some myth; though, during a chance interval, one of these chevaliers somewhat showed his hand in purchasing from another chevalier, ex-officio a peddler of money-belts, one of his popular safe-guards, while another peddler, who was still another versatile chevalier, hawked, in the thick of the throng, the lives of Measan, the bandit of Ohio, Murrel, the pirate of the Mississippi, and the brothers Harpe, the thugs of the Green River country, in Kentucky. (1–2)

The passengers on board the *Fidèle* are a motley assortment dominated by chevaliers, or sharpers; Melville's inventory—like his repetition of the term *chevalier*—creates a vision of the world not unlike the frontier flush times prowled by Hooper's Captain Simon Suggs, a comic universe where dishonesty is the norm.

Although a "stranger" boards a vessel in both "The Big Bear" and *The Confidence-Man*, in appearance and in manner Thorpe's Jim Doggett is the opposite of Melville's man in cream colors. Thorpe's backwoodsman bursts upon the *Invincible* like a tornado: "We were startled most unexpectedly by a loud Indian whoop . . . then was to be heard a loud crowing, which would not have continued to interest us . . . had not the hero of these windy accomplishments stuck his head into the cabin and hallooed out, 'Hurra for the Big Bear of Arkansas!'"

(15). Melville's stranger is a mute who slips silently on board the *Fidèle*, attracting attention not by screaming but by means of "a small slate" and four chalked words: "Charity thinketh no evil" (2). The mute is an eccentric even on board a Mississippi steamer, his biblical injunctions differing radically from Jim Doggett's humorous vernacular whoops and boasts in style and intention, provoking not amused acceptance but hostility: "They made no scruple to jostle him aside; while one, less kind than the rest, or more of a wag, by an unobserved stroke, dexterously flattened down his fleecy hat upon his head" (2). Jim Doggett's "Hurra" identifies him as a conventional type—a "horse," "screamer," or "Big Bear"; the mute's slate, however, marks him as mysterious. The serious "tall tales" that appear on the mute's slate, and the rough treatment he suffers at the hands of the crowd, signal the defeat of expectations for a humorous April Fools' Day cruise. The proximity of another introductory slate, a placard warning Melville's "ship of fools" of "a mysterious impostor," adds one more layer of complexity to the mute: is he a pitiful mute worthy of charity, or is he a confidence man, the protagonist of the novel? Is the crowd right or wrong to dismiss him with a series of shrugs? How is the crowd—and the reader—to evaluate the competing claims of the mute's "Charity" signs and the barber's motto, "No Trust"? What are the bases for confidence and suspicion? And what criteria—moral, religious, practical, aesthetic—are adequate to interpret the mute?

The reader, like the crowd, is trapped in a self-reflexive pattern of advance and retreat, one that the narrative voice mirrors in its qualifying rhetoric replete with antithetical suggestions and self-canceling double negatives. As if to accentuate this involuted motion, Melville begins his fiction again, describing the passengers of the *Fidèle* in conventional terms more akin to Thorpe's:

> Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Sante Fe traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in

> cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters . . . jesters and mourners, tee-totalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. (6)

Melville suggests Thorpe's balanced pairs and controlled comic tone, while his emphasis on hunters inverts the characteristic frontier exaggeration of plentiful game. At the head of Melville's "Anacharis Cloots congress" is Black Guinea, another "stranger" who at first seems a stock comic Negro descended from the victim of John Neal's "Yankee Peddler" (1831). In that story, a fast-talking Yankee tosses his trunk ashore, where it crushes the foot of a Negro. Neal's Yankee applies a medicinal "clear grit" to the wound, says a few kind words, and then calmly demands payment for his "ministrations." "'Why, lor a bressa, massa; massa, so good, he neber tink o' takin' notin' o' poor nigger, her?'" The Yankee replies immediately: "'Try me.'"[26] Like Neal's incredulous Negro, Black Guinea arouses comic expectations. Anticipating Charles Chesnutt's Uncle Julius, Black Guinea is loquacious, humorous, and philosophical, a kind of black Jim Doggett who engages the crowd. The narrator's description of him as a cripple "cut down to the stature of a Newfoundland dog" (7) underscores that he poses no threat, his meager collection of pennies and wry conversation labeling him a comfortable object of charity, pity, and curiosity. As the passengers lose interest in him, however, Black Guinea creates a new "game of charity" which, like the slate of the mute in cream-colors, arouses disquieting emotions.

> People would have a bout at a strange sort of pitch-penny game, the cripple's mouth being at once target and purse, and he hailing each expertly-caught copper with a cracked bravura from his tambourine. To be the subject of alms-giving is trying—and to feel in duty bound to appear cheerfully grateful under the trial, must be still more so; but whatever his secret emotions, he swallowed them, while still retaining each copper this side the oesophagus. And nearly always he grinned, and only once or twice did he wince, which was when certain coins, tossed by more playful almoners, came inconveniently nigh to his teeth, an accident whose unwelcomeness was not unedged by the circumstance that the pennies thus thrown proved buttons. (8)

This "singular temptation at once to *diversion* and charity" (8) reveals the fickleness of the crowd and a new complexity to Black Guinea; the crowd delights in the cripple's self-debasing performance, several "playful" fellows hurting and cheating him deliberately, while Black Guinea's invention of the game and his self-control suggest his subtle understanding of human nature and of the ways in which it can be manipulated. Black Guinea proves more artful than the mute: by creating a second attention-getting "diversion" he rekindles the crowd's waning interest and frees from purses a few additional coppers.

The reader faces a problem of identification and response: if Black Guinea is not a simple comedian but an intelligent unfortunate, is the "game of charity" the passengers play anything but grotesquely demeaning? It reduces both Black Guinea and the crowd to a level far beneath the human, revealing their willingness—even their eagerness—to assume conventional roles that are in fact life-denying. Melville demonstrates that the reader's initial evaluation of Black Guinea is limited, a stock response that results in a reciprocal grotesque transformation dramatized by the crowd's sinister penny-pitching. Throughout the novel, Melville's method is to present conventional models of response to apparently conventional figures and actions, and then to illustrate their inadequacy.

The man with a wooden leg appears at the height of Black Guinea's game of charity, satanically putting into words the vague suspicions of the audience concerning Black Guinea's manipulations. Perhaps because the "playful almoners" know they have mistreated Black Guinea, or because they suddenly feel they have been cheated by him—although even if Guinea is a confidence man they have surely received adequate amusement for their buttons and pennies—or simply because they have found a new "diversion," they begin "to scrutinize the negro curiously" (9). Wooden Leg gives the form of substance to suspicion, but the narrator adds, in a characteristically understated observation, "That these suspicions came from one who himself on a wooden leg went halt . . . did not appear to strike anybody present. That cripples, above all men, should be companionable, or, at least, refrain from picking a

fellow-limper to pieces, in short, should have a little sympathy in common misfortune, seemed not to occur to the company" (8–9). The narrator implies that Wooden Leg may have ulterior motives for maligning Black Guinea: bitterness, jealously, or even the fear of beggarly competition. As Wooden Leg discovers, however, once suspicion is unleased, it bites everyone in range, and he is himself the victim of mistrust and abuse.

Individual passengers come forward to defend and condemn Black Guinea and Wooden Leg, acting out vacillating responses of confidence and suspicion: there is no way for them to determine either the honesty or dishonesty—much less the motivation—of Black Guinea or Wooden Leg. Encountered separately, each unfortunate might elicit sympathy, but together they form a kind of thematic double-negative that casts suspicion on each cripple. Black Guinea is shunned, while Wooden Leg, who is so obviously unpleasant and seems clearly the antagonist, is manhandled by the Methodist minister. However momentarily satisfying, these responses prove nothing: Black Guinea and Wooden Leg remain as mysterious as the mute in cream colors. What becomes clear is the individual human complexity of each apparently conventional character; the Methodist is not strictly a "non-combatant," nor is he entirely charitable. Henry Roberts, the "good merchant" who contributes alms to Black Guinea and the man with the weed, is quick to speculate in the stock of the Black Rapids Coal Company. As the man with the weed notes of Roberts, "'There is sorrow in the world, but goodness too; and goodness that is not greenness, either, no more than sorrow is. Dear good man. Poor beating heart'" (20). This ambiguous analysis is characteristic of *The Confidence-Man*. If Black Guinea is a crippled beggar, Roberts seems charitable to trust him with confidence and money, yet if he is a confidence man, should Roberts deny him charity? Is Guinea perhaps not more unfortunate if he merely masquerades? And who is Roberts to judge, a man full of eagerness to speculate in stocks?

Roberts himself offers the reader oblique assistance; the transfer agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company offers to let him see the company's books.

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> "What need to, if already I believe that it is what it is lettered to be?"

> "But you had better. It might suggest doubts."
> "Doubts, may be, it might suggest, but not knowledge; for how, by examining the book, should I think I knew any more than I now think I do; since, if it be the true book, I think it so already; and since if it be otherwise, then I have never seen the true one, and don't know what that ought to look like." (48)

Knowledge cannot be acquired by conventional methods of analysis; Roberts may be a fool victimized by three confidence men in quick succession. Melville dramatizes Roberts's uncertainty by extending it to include the reader. The narrator of Hooper's *Simon Suggs* shares his omniscience with the reader, making him a comfortable silent partner in Simon's confidence games. In "Ovid Bolus," Baldwin's narrator recounts the adventures of a consummate liar. The narrator's amused skepticism about Ovid's more extravagant cons marks off two kinds of fiction, two kinds of confidence games within the tale: the fabulous lies Ovid tells of deceiving beautiful heiresses, and the plain truth of Ovid's conning "poor Ben." The last story, like those of Simon Suggs, the narrator clearly validates. Melville's genius is in the exploitation of the implications of narrative irony in "Ovid Bolus," denying the reader of *The Confidence-Man* a narrative guide who will share with him ultimate knowledge: Melville's narrator never identifies a character as the titular "Confidence-Man," nor does any character include the reader in a celebratory "ho'n." The reader is led to suspect every character's motives, to doubt every conventional appearance, to question the authority or reliability of the narrator, and to mistrust his own complacent patterns of response.

The chapter titled "A Charitable Lady" reveals the uncertainties created by Melville's narrative strategy. The Charitable Lady, "a widow just breaking the chrysalis of her mourning" (37), seems at first a stock victim—like Hooper's Widow Haycock or Harris's Mrs. Doltin—of a conventional confidence man. The man in gray quickly finds loneliness and religiosity to be the softest spots in her nature.

> "You interest me," said the good lady, in mild surprise. "Can I in any way befriend you?"
> "No one can befriend me, who has not confidence."

"But I—I have—at least to that degree—I mean that—"

"Nay, nay, you have none—none at all. Pardon, I see it. No confidence. Fool, fond fool that I am to seek it!"

"You are unjust, sir," rejoins the good lady with heightened interest. . . . "Believe me, I—yes, yes—I may say—that—that—"

"That you have confidence? Prove it. Let me have twenty dollars."

"Twenty dollars?"

"There, I told you, madam, you had no confidence."

The lady was, in an extraordinary way, touched. She sat in a sort of restless torment, knowing not which way to turn. She began twenty different sentences, and left off at the first syllable of each. At last, in desperation, she hurried out, "Tell me, sir, for what you want the twenty dollars?"

"And did I not—" then glancing at her half-mourning, "for the widow and the fatherless. I am traveling agent of the Widow and Orphan Asylum, recently founded among the Seminoles."

"And why did you not tell me your object before?" As not a little relieved. "Poor souls—Indians, too—those cruelly-used Indians. Here, here; how could I hesitate? I am so sorry it is not more." (38)

In her "natural struggle between charity and prudence" (38), the Charitable Lady chooses to contribute. She seems a fool betrayed by sentimental values, for that she has been duped is apparent from the man-in-gray's cause: between 1818 and 1845 the Seminoles engaged in a series of bloody wars with white settlers, which made widows of many women like the Charitable Lady. Nevertheless, insofar as there is a narrative voice in this chapter, it seems to question implicity the motives of the Charitable Lady even as it purports to recommend her.

At the sofa's further end sits a plump and pleasant person, whose aspect seems to hint that, if she have any weak point, it must be anything rather than her excellent heart. From her twilight dress, neither dawn nor dark, apparently she is a widow just breaking the chrysalis of her mourning. A small gilt testament is in her hand, which she has just been reading. Half-relinquished, she hold the book in reverie, her finger inserted at the xii, of 1st Corinthians, to which chapter possibly her attention might have recently been turned. (37)

The extremely qualifying rhetoric here and elsewhere leads us to suspect her purity; the pleasure she experiences in reading

the passages on charity from her "small gilt testament," which she holds "half-relinquished," and in giving twenty dollars to the man in gray is a kind of pleasure analogous to pitching pennies at Black Guinea—it is self-congratulatory, a sanitary gesture like those of the narrator in "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853). In addition, her obvious book-dropping to attract the man in gray and the "sparkle" in her eye as he returns it (37) suggest that she is too forward, "*apparently* . . . a widow" deserving of sympathy but actually a drawing-room confidence woman who is taken by surprise by the man in gray. The narrative voice is at best equivocal.

Determining the proper criteria for judgment becomes a crucial issue in Pitch's encounters with the Herb-Doctor, the Philosophical Intelligence Office agent, and the Cosmopolitan. These meetings form the novel's structural center and introduce the fast-talking Cosmopolitan, who will dominate its last half. Pitch is a Missouri bachelor full of odds and ends of philosophy, a reasonable man who thinks himself logical, prudent, and perceptive. He welcomes technology and worships truth, fusing the two in a progressive image that excludes sentimentalism: "Truth is like a thrasing-machine; tender sensibilities must keep out of the way" (104). The coughing miser is one whom Pitch thrashes with his rigid machinelike truth.

> "Yarbs, yarbs; natur, natur; you foolish old file you! He diddled you with that hocus-pocus, did he? Yarbs and natur will cure your incurable cough, you think. . . . Because a thing is nat'ral, as you call it, you think it must be good. But who gave you that cough? Was it, or was it not, nature?"
>
> "Sure, you don't think that natur, Dame Natur, will hurt a body, do you?"
>
> "Natur is good Queen Bess; but who's responsible for the cholera?"
>
> "But yarbs, yarbs; yarbs are good?"
>
> "What's deadly-nightshade? Yarb, ain't it? . . . But who froze to death my teamster on the prairie?" (91–92)

The Herb-Doctor adopts the Devil's oldest ploy—using the truth for his own purposes—to chasten Pitch.

> "Granting that [the miser's] dependence on my medicine is vain, is it kind to deprive him of what, in mere imagination, if nothing more, may help eke out, with hope, his disease? For

> you, if you have no confidence, and, thanks to your native health, can get along without it, so far, at least, as trusting in my medicine goes; yet, how cruel an argument to use, with this afflicted one here. Is it not for all the world as if some brawny pugilist, aglow in December, should rush in and put out a hospital-fire, because, forsooth, he feeling no need of artificial heat, the shivering patients shall have none? Put it to your conscience, sir, and you will admit, that, whatever be the nature of this afflicted one's trust, you, in opposing it, evince either an erring head or a heart amiss" (94–95)

As the Missouri bachelor concedes, his own words are "pitiless." The Herb-Doctor, whether healer or sharper, justifies the power of confidence. Truth, he argues, is human, intuitive, individual, moral; truth is therefore relative. Two versions of one truth may exist simultaneously and both be judged "true": to Pitch, herbs may prove superfluous, while to the miser, herbs may prove medicinal.

In like manner, the identity of the Herb-Doctor is itself ambiguously multiple: he seems to do a genuinely good deed for the miser, as he has for the bitter soldier of fortune in chapter 19; however, the reader cannot know for certain either his motives or the results of his Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator/ Samaritan Pain Dissuader—he may be but a slick snake-oil salesman. As the auburn-haired gentleman muses, after watching the Herb-Doctor apply his own cure to himself, "May he not be knave, fool, and genius all together?" (78). The Herb-Doctor assumes three roles played separately in earlier fiction by the confidence man (knave), his victim (fool), and the narrator (genius). The Southwest humorists' most innovative confidence-man tales are, like Longstreet's "The Horse-Swap," local versions of the universal "biter bit" motif; the author takes care to separate his cultured narrator from the vernacular-speaking sharpers and to identify for our pleasure all the complexities of the snap. Harris comes close to Melville's strategy of conflation, but in the *Yarns* Sut Lovingood, an uncontrolled gentleman, functions as narrator and guide. In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville's narrator is an unreliable cicerone to the crowds of hunters and hunted who seek not money, like Simon Suggs, nor vengeful fun, like Sut Lovingood, but who, like the Herb-Doctor, seek to determine the source and the limits of American confidence. The narrative

voice in a sense conspires with characters—all of whom seem more or less shifty—not to resolve anxieties concerning appearances but to intensify their metaphysical ambiguities. If Longstreet, Thompson, Hooper, and Baldwin began to evolve a convention of the confidence man by locating the traditional biter in the specific circumstances of the American flush times, thereby demythologizing an archetypal pattern, Melville remythologizes the confidence man, infusing the American convention with universal significance.

Melville's intention and method differ radically from those of his contemporaries. In C. F. Briggs's "Elegant Tom Dillar" (1856), Tom is convinced by the sharp Pete Van Slicer to invest his fortune in Pottawattamy Coal Company stock. The narrator informs the reader of what Tom does not suspect; namely, that Van Slicer is the tool of Ormolu, the auctioneer, who desires to ruin Tom for snubbing his daughter, Fanny.

> Tom was not a spendthrift, nor a gambler; but then he was the merest child in business matters, and had no idea about money transactions beyond drawing his dividends every six months, and contriving to make his income just meet his expenditure. Tom had often wished that his income was larger, for he had long been ambitious of owning a yacht, but was unable to indulge in that costly enjoyment; so, when his young friend, Pete Van Slicer, of the firm of Van Slicer, Son and Co., the great stockbrokers, of Wall Street, one day said to him, as if by accident, "Tom, how would you like to enter into a little speculation, by which you might make a hundred thousand dollars or so?" Tom opened his eyes, and eagerly replied he would like nothing better. . . .
>
> "Trust to me," replied Pete, with a knowing wink, which seemed to Tom so full of sagacity, that he concluded to trust to him, and accordingly gave an order to the firm of Van Slicer, Son and Co., to purchase, for his account, about ten times as many shares of Pottawattamy Coal Stock as he had the means to pay for, Pete undertaking to carry the stock, as he called it, for thirty days, in which time the rise was sure to come.[27]

Briggs's narrator ushers the reader through Tom's inevitable misfortunes, throughout stating clearly the characters' motivations and cueing particular responses; Tom, Ormolu, Pete, and the narrator are conventional figures, typed by their names and deeds, familiar in sentimental, romantic, and

confidence-man fiction. The omnisicent narrator details from conception to conclusion the reasons for and the results of the Pottawattamy Coal stock swindle. The only puzzle, Tom's return to riches, is solved quickly and carefully: Tom dons blackface and works in clubs as an "Ethiopian Minstrel" for money. The winking Pete Van Slicer is a kissing cousin of the confidence men in southwestern humor, but the kinship between these shifty operators and Melville's Herb-Doctor, PIO agent, and Cosmopolitan is more distant: Melville's characters form a new breed intended to pose unsettling questions. How can a confidence man be identified? Which character is "The Confidence-Man"? What is the proper response to a literary convention that has been proven inadequate? What are the foundations of American optimism, and are they securely anchored or erected on the quicksands of an illusory new country? By withholding ultimate knowledge, Melville changes the function of the confidence man, withdrawing from the convention its traditional ability to dispel anxieties in laughter while substituting for the bankrupt form the genus *Confidence-Man*, which reveals fundamental contradictions in American character.

Hershel Parker too eagerly crowns Pitch "the most admirable opponent of the Devil's false, delusive optimism."[28] Pitch's proverbial wisdom—"I have confidence in distrust" (93)—is itself a version of "delusive optimism," and Pitch himself appears a parody of the Davy Crockett–Natty Bumppo backwoodsman. Melville suggests that the heroic frontiersman mediating between nature and civilization is in 1857 no longer an adequate symbol of American experience, nor is the frontiersman able to shrug off contradictions by moving away from society to a new country. His limits as a literary convention become as clear as the Suggsian confidence man's. Pitch's forays into philosophical argument succeed only in directing him in circles and in revealing the inadequacy of his nature: "All boys are rascals, and so are all men . . . my name is Pitch; I stick to what I say" (109).

Pitch does not, of course, stick to what he says. Admitting the logic of the Herb-Doctor in the case of the coughing miser, and placing trust in the PIO agent, Pitch momentarily surrenders his mechanistic vision of the future with the three dollars

he pays out for a thirty-sixth boy. Trapped in the paranoid's labyrinthine universe and unwilling to accept for any length of time the accuracy of even his own judgments without objective proof, he doubts the truth of both confidence and suspicion. Unable to accept an ambiguous reality, he finally reduces himself to a misanthropic bark: "Hands off!" (113). This rejection of humanity, implicitly underscored by his bachelorhood, qualifies Pitch's appeal; his narrow absolutism can only lead him away from humanity. His isolation warns the reader not to demand certainty where none is to be found—in new countries, in the fictional world of *The Confidence-Man*, in life itself. As the man in gray notes, "The suspicious man kicks himself with his own foot" (25).

A fast talker par excellence, the Cosmopolitan announces his arrival with words "sweet as a seraph's" (113), his outrageous ensemble speaking as loudly as the whoops of Longstreet's Yellow Blossom or Thorpe's Jim Doggett. His appearance bewilders Pitch, who reacts as if Harlequin had just stepped from the stage onto the *Fidèle*. The backwoodsman's attempts to identify the Cosmopolitan produce a series of conventional labels; the parti-colored gentleman seems alternately a "touchan fowl" or chattering actor, "Jeremy Diddler No. 3" or "Mr. Popinjay-of-the-world," in league with "metaphysical scamps," or, finally, "Diogenes in Disguise." Pitch is dissatisfied with each of these names, for the Cosmopolitan resists reduction to a type; though the Cosmopolitan offers to hold Pitch's watch while he dances a hornpipe—an old trick of Elizabethan cony-catchers—the Cosmopolitan walks away from him with the injunction to "get you confidence" (120), an admonition Simon Suggs used only after his pockets were full of his victim's money. Pitch, "the discomfited misanthrope" (120), learns nothing from the Cosmopolitan, remains in ignorance of his identity, and finds himself at last abandoned to his inadequate "confidence in distrust." Melville warns that if the reader follows Pitch's example, he too will gain nothing.

In the second half of *The Confidence-Man* the temptation to identify the Cosmopolitan as the novel's title character increases. Pitch is only the first of many to call him a Jeremy Diddler, and the Cosmopolitan's verbal duels with Charlie

Noble, Mark Winsome, Egbert, and William Cream recall the insinuating strategy of earlier sharpers. As "Quite An Original," the Cosmopolitan "is like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all round it—everything is lit by it, everything starts up to it" (205). Characters approach and attempt to identify the Cosmopolitan; the failures—especially of those who like Pitch believe him a sharper—suggest the manipulations of a master confidence man playing a cosmic confidence game in a new country of metaphysical proportions.

As if to confirm the infusion of new meaning into the confidence-man convention, the narrator addresses the reader directly in chapters 14, 33, and 44. In chapter 14 he bemoans the reader's desire for absolutely consistent characters, who are inevitably unlifelike, partially conceived, stock figures. In chapter 33 he defines the ideal reader, one who wishes "nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed" (158). Because he hungers for "more reality, than real life itself can show," the ideal reader willingly surrenders to the enchantment of Harlequin, a figure whose conventional form suggests links to an aesthetic universe of infinite possibility: "It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie" (158). And in chapter 44 the narrator states that the highest accomplishment is the creation of an "original" character, in which "there is discernible something prevailingly local, or of the age; which circumstance, of itself, would seem to invalidate the claim" (205). To give birth to an original like Hamlet or Don Quixote an author must begin with a conventional—or archetypal—figure, circumstance him in a particular time and place, and yet avoid making him either so intensely local or so realistic as to be merely lifelike. Melville follows this oxymoronic process, recapitulating the history of American literary conventions as he explicates his confidence man by pursuing the new country as a national myth: "Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide" (6). Specifically, Melville makes the flush-times confidence man an archetypal American character, giving him universal

rather than merely regional significance, and, in naming him and working through his variations, exhausting the traditional functon of the frontier form.

Charlie Noble, the Cosmopolitan's "boon companion," confirms the Cosmopolitan's originality. Charlie seems a conventional two-bit hustler drawn from the pages of Jonathan H. Green's *Gambling Exposed* (1857), which warns that "when in company, we are too apt to form hasty acquaintances; this frequently, and more especially, occurs with young travellers; and these are the very ones which, above all others, the different classes spoken of [sharpers and confidence men] are constantly on the look-out for."[29] Melville depicts Charlie Noble as a Suggsian confidence man, revealing in the contrast between his inept maneuverings and the Cosmopolitan's consummate artistry the inadequacy of the traditional form. As if to italicize this distinction, the Cosmopolitan rebukes Charlie for his pitiless laughter at "the figure of a pale pauper-boy" (141) and dismisses Charlie as a simple-minded drunk: "Why, Charlie, you are losing your mind. . . . Yes, I think that by all means you had better away, and sleep it off. There—don't apologize—don't explain—go, go—I understand you exactly" (161). The figure Charlie cuts has been, on several levels, exhausted.

Like Charlie Noble, Mark Winsome cannot fathom the Cosmopolitan. In fact, Winsome cannot even identify Charlie as "a Mississippi operator," warning the Cosmopolitan "that he is such, I little doubt, *having had him pointed out to me as such* by one desirous of initiating me into any little novelty of this western region" (168, my emphasis). A bitter parody of a transcendentalist, Winsome applies his "doctrine of labels" without first-hand experience; his calling Charlie a confidence man, and then treating him as such, is irresponsible and reductive, revealing Winsome's limitation of vision and the inadequacy of his philosphical system to explain human experience. Unlike the Cosmopolitan, who packs Charlie off after plumbing his depths, Winsome dismisses Charlie without even testing the water. This is the same method he employs in refusing the Poe-like "crazy beggar" peddling "a rhapsodical tract" (167), whom he labels a scoundrel despite the Cosmopolitan's example of charity. It is also the strategy dem-

onstrated by Winsome's disciple, Egbert, who rejects the Cosmopolitan's entreaties to have confidence in and offer sympathetic assistance to one's friends. Yet in reducing men to labels and human relationships to business transactions, this philosophy fails Winsome's own test of truth: "For any philosophy that, being in operation contradictory to the ways of the world, tends to produce a character at odds with it, such a philosophy must necessarily be but a cheat and a dream" (170). Winsome can use his doctrines to identify neither Charlie, the Cosmopolitan, nor the beggarly poet; his philosophy is merely an intellectual fantasy bearing no relation to the world of men. Like an unindulgent reader of fiction, he refuses to suspend disbelief, expecting the world before him to conform to his rigid preconceptions. As the Cosmopolitan remarks, his system is inhuman, and in comparison makes the games of a confidence man seem genial.

William Cream, the barber of the *Fidèle*, signals the concluding action of the novel. His "gaudy sort of illuminated sign" (3), bearing the legend "No Trust," casts a dim light from chapter 1, where it competes with the mute's small slate. In chapter 42 the barber's emblem is opposed by the Cosmopolitan. The reappearance of the sign points the reader back to the beginning; "No Trust" defines the metaphysical province of the novel within the boundaries of common experience, focusing attention on the oracular barber, an American Everyman, who stands with "'one foot on confidence and the other on suspicion'" (197)—a perfect description of the individual in the new country. The Cosmopolitan suggests that the sign is reductive and untrue, and that for reasonable, intelligent, perceptive men—like William Cream—it is unnecessary and misleading. For in fact the barber does not abide by the letter of his law: "'I don't say, and can't say, and wouldn't say, that I suspect all men; but I *do* say that strangers are not to be trusted, and so,' pointing up to the sign, 'no trust'" (197). His explanation reveals that his motto is neither as simple nor as absolute as it appears; that he knows it is reductive, that he trusts some men while distruting others, marks his own complexity. He is, like Melville, the author of a fiction, a writer who uses what is essentially a convention—the No Trust sign—while recognizing its limitations: it is convenient and

familiar, but it does not tell the whole story. The Cosmopolitan suggests that in taking down his sign—his expectations—the barber will free himself to respond to all men on individual terms, to become Melville's ideal reader, one who though not green is not jaded. William Cream, knowing that appearances can be deceiving, that knowledge can only be gained by engaging men, by having confidence, nevertheless cannot willingly restrain his suspicion of the Cosmopolitan's intentions beyond earshot, and rejects ex post facto the Cosmopolitan's written guarantee of good faith.

> Drawing forth his notification from the drawer, he put it back where it belonged; while, as for the agreement, that he tore up; which he felt the more free to do from the impression that in all human probability he would never again see the person who had drawn it. Whether that impression proved well-founded or not, does not appear. (204)

The old man of the final chapter seems at first to avoid kicking himself with his own foot. He is sympathetic to the Cosmopolitan's doubts, and, a careful reader of the Bible, scrutinizes the passages in question and resolves the anxieties they arouse. Willing, intelligent, and human, he seems the "indulgent" reader the narrator mentions as Melville's ideal audience in chapter 33. However, the old man finds himself easily led into suspicion by a "juvenile peddler," who seems the Devil himself when compared to the wrongdoers of advice books like Augustus Ward Loomis's *Learn to Say No; or, The City Apprentice* (1856). The light of the good book cannot dispel the darkness of distrust, and the old man buys a "traveler's patent lock" and a money belt from the youth. A counterfeit detector the boy gives him dramatizes the problem of confidence his suspicions have created; the Cosmopolitan asks if his money is genuine: "'I don't know, I don't know,' returned the old man, perplexed, 'there's so many marks of all sorts to go by, it makes it a kind of uncertain'" (213–14). The old man seems suddenly a parody of Melville's ideal reader, one of many marks who is thrown into confusion by uncertainty and who responds by rejecting and distrusting all things and all men. Only after he gives up the counterfeit detector does he again respond positively to the Cosmopolitan, and again seem like a reader willing to set aside his expectations.

The Cosmopolitan "kindly" leads the old man through the darkening cabin toward the novel's final paragraph, as if he himself were the novel's narrator and the weary old man his reader.

Critics have discovered in the final chapter a vision of the apocalypse, yet surely their accomplishment constitutes a scholarly version of the suspicious man's kick. Melville's method is consistently to create expectations which he then frustrates, leaving both his characters and his reader without the knowledge to evaluate the ultimate results of the ambiguous actions in which they participate. The mute in cream colors seems at once an emblem of Christian purity and a mock-emblem, Black Guinea seems a parody of the docile kneeling slave, the account of Colonel Moredock seems a bitter satire of James Hall's progressive "Indian Hating" (1835), and Pitch seems at last a weary Leatherstocking made uneasy by the midcentury "cosmopolitan and confident tide." The reader should be prepared for the inversion of his expectations, for uncertainty, or perhaps, cued by the title of chapter 45, "The Cosmpolitan Increases in Seriousness," for an intensification of ironic comedy. For as Warwick Wadlington correctly notes, the novel's conclusion "is anti-apocalyptic and counter-teleological."[30] Critics who find proof of the novel's black vision in the ambiguous cries of passengers about the apocalypse and the confidence man have missed Melville's point and are led to use such flimsy evidence as the chamber-pot/life preserver to buoy up their theories. Melville uses these obvious devices as ironic, comic comments on the reader's increasingly serious demands for a conventional conclusion, one in which the author will share with him the omniscient knowledge of his story and characters that the reader desires. Hooper, Baldwin, and even Harris put their shifty characters figuratively to rest in the last paragraphs of their fiction (Sut Lovingood actually goes to sleep), and most popular works of the 1850s—from Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854) to Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857)—climax in shared moments of resolution. Melville does not suddenly transform the Cosmopolitan into a conventional confidence man, one who winks knowingly at the reader as he manipulates the old man, nor does Melville ultimately identify the confidence man; he uses the reader's familiarity

with the comic convention to create "more reality, than real life itself can show," or, more precisely, to produce a more "original" and meaningful fiction than his contemporaries.

Ann Douglas concludes that Melville seizes popular conventions as hostages to force the reader to recognize their shallowness.[31] In *The Confidence-Man* Melville holds many hostages, but focuses his imagination through a central convention, the confidence man, to expose the limitations of conventional patterns of expectation and response. Melville unleashes the duplicity of the confidence man tamed by Hooper, pressing upon the reader a maddening authorial uncertainty and substituting for the self-enclosed humorous snaps of Simon Suggs an unsettling panoply of all human relations as potentially dishonest. In this manner *The Confidence-Man* strips off the veneer of self-congratulatory optimism predominant in American culture in the 1850s. The novel likewise militates against the deadwood structures of contemporary literary practice, demonstrating that conventions have become hypocritical aesthetic solutions to fundamental national problems. Melville attempts to expand their ability to carry new meanings by pushing them beyond their traditional limits; the last sentence of *The Confidence-Man* is deliberately antiformulaic, and in this sense H. Bruce Franklin sees the entire fiction as "a grand *reductio ad absurdum* of the novel form itself."[32] Melville transforms the conventional into the original by defeating the reader's expections, dramatizing issues that cannot be resolved in easy, superior laughter; a Suggsian confidence man cannot blink the doubts of the American promise of plenty that were manifest in the sectional, economic, and racial tensions soon to erupt in the Civil War. The failure of writers to interpret the war in the 1860s using the confidence man is implicit testimony that Melville has sounded the depths of the convention's meaning; the rediscovery of the confidence man and his flush times during the Gilded Age confirms the accuracy of Melville's ambiguous prophecy: "Something further may follow of his Masquerade."

Billy Fishback, Confederate Straggler

Like George W. Harris, Kittrell J. Warren was a southern writer who supported the Confederacy in the Civil War; unlike Harris, who limited his efforts to satires of Lincoln and

Grant, Warren enlisted as a private in the Eleventh Georgia Volunteers and engaged in real combat. Of his first two literary attempts, *Ups and Downs of Wife Hunting* (1861) is a comic pamphlet for soldiers like himself that admits kinship to William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones' Courtship*, while the *History of the Eleventh Georgia Vols., Embracing The Muster Rolls, Together with a Special and Succinct Account of the Marches, Engagements, Casualties, Etc.* (1863) is a factual tribute to his comrades in arms. *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler* (1865) owes its form to Longstreet, Hooper, Baldwin, and Harris, and also to Warren's firsthand combat experiences. Billy Fishback is a Confederate army straggler who roams the no-man's-land of the battle-torn South, a confidence man turned vicious by the war who deserts all causes and denies all human virtues. He has none of Simon Suggs's saving sense of humor, Sut Lovingood's knack for outrageous fun, or Ovid Bolus's abilities and polish. The days of Melville's "one cosmopolitan and confident tide" have been destroyed by the criminal realities of the Civil War; Billy Fishback plays potentially lethal games that mirror the unpredictable chaos of the national conflict. He thus dramatizes a fearfully violent new country.

Billy Fishback and Dick Ellis decide to desert the Confederate army before it engages in battle. By agreement, Ellis steals the major's prized horse, and Fishback, who alerts the major, is sent out to recapture the horse and dispatch the thief. The original plan called for Ellis to wait for Fishback a few miles from the camp, and, sure of no one else pursuing them, the two were to escape together. Fishback, however, requests assistance. Taking advantage of the major's order to "kill the villain" who stole his horse, Fishback sends the obedient Jack Wilcox, who is "armed to the teeth" and unaware of the deserters' pact, on Ellis's trail. As he watches Wilcox ride off, Fishback has "a good laugh over this pleasant and amusing little incident."

> "Dick Ellis aint a guine to pester about tellin nothin. That fool Jack's dun turned him over to the tender mersez uv the carron croze. That's a good joke I've got on Dick, maniged to get his branes shot out thout my tellin a word."[33]

Here the story ends, and the natural conclusion to be drawn from the incident is that Ellis has been killed; that Ellis has

by chance not been murdered is revealed forty pages later (87), but this information does nothing to change the reader's horror at Fishback's cold-blooded attempt. This violence is quite different from that in Longstreet's "Georgia Theatrics" or "The Fight" (1835), both of which Warren mentions (30); although Ellis's murder is not in fact accomplished, it is imaginatively accomplished and therefore conveys the discomfort of its execution to the reader.

Warren takes care that no bond of sympathy or humor forms between the reader and the Confederate private: Billy Fishback is no Henry Fleming or Colonel Carter any more than he is Simon Suggs. Fishback is more like Roderick Random, Smollett's eighteenth-century picaro, whom the reader despises with increasing emotion as Random symbolically pistol-whips friends and enemies. Yet unlike Random, who controls the reader's repulsion by telling his own story in the first person, Fishback is introduced within a conventional narrative frame that limits and defines his province.

> I *do wish* I could introduce my hero in a fashionable manner.—yea, verily, I would like to present him sumptuously appareled, reclining gracefully upon a magnificent ottoman,—just resting from the delicious employment of reading (that trans-antropean specimen of splurgey) Macaria. I would have him a grand looking character. Intellect should beam from his lustrous eye, and nobleness peep forth from every lineament of his features. Nature should be in a glorious good humor, smiling graciously upon his first appearance. (5)

The sentimental rhetoric of Warren's narrator contrasts ironically with the "Truth": "With a rather well favored, though remarkably black face, and a stout, robust frame, wrapped in comfortable looking jeans wallowed the immortal William Fishback" (6). The narrator plays with a language unavailable to his "hero," while Fishback's confused admiration of "Captain" Slaughter's oratory marks a limit to his understanding and to the type of role he may assume. To help the illiterate Fishback win the hand of the accomplished and wealthy Miss Callie, Slaughter—for fifty dollars—tells Callie that though Fishback has been courted by the "rich and literary heiress, Miss Julia Evans," Fishback will not be so unprincipled as to marry for money. To do so would be

> "an imitation of Judas—bartering immortality for a sum of money. We are not the owners of the soul, and have no right to vend it—that eternal element has been entrusted to us as custodians only; a truth which we find beautifully illustrated in the parable of the talents—if we bury it in the cumbrous rubbish of filthy lucre, how fearful will be the ulterior consequences? . . . Bribe the needle to play truant to the pole—train the untrameled wind to blow not 'where it listeth'—teach the thirsty sun-beam to leave undrunk the dews of heaven, but this heart must revolve in its allotted periphery, or cease to move."
>
> Although, so far as we know, our hero was wholly unacquainted with any foreign language, he had caught the gist of the conversation, and now ventured his own sentiments on the subject, in the following laconic style: "I'll be dad blasted ef I hadn't ruther try to set on a dozen rotten eggs twel I hatcht the last one uv 'em, as to marry a umurm jest for her munny, and spect to git along; thar aint narry bit o' use a tryin." (58)

Three languages exist in this passage: the allusive, sentimental oratory of Slaughter; the rough, homely dialect of Fishback; and the normative, controlling rhetoric of the narrator. Fishback's attempt to echo the sentiments of Slaughter and Miss Callie is incongruous, and on this level Warren operates within the tradition of frontier humor; with Warren's narrator, as with Harris's George, the reader shares a superiority to the vernacular characters, though unlike Billy, Sut helps the reader as he helps George to new perceptions.

Language is not Fishback's only limitation; several characters offer successful alternatives to his darkly egotistical vision of the world. Captain John Smith, Fishback's superior, combines the masculine virtues of the explorer with the understanding of a parent. Like Melville's myopic Captain Amaso Delano, Captain John Smith stands for American verities: confidence in mankind, belief in original innocence, and loyalty to boon companions. His desire to think well of Billy Fishback leads him to misperceive his malicious nature, and Billy has no trouble getting Smith drunk.

> No sooner were Capt. Smith's eyes closed in the deep sleep of drunkenness than Fishback commenced making an inventory of his pocket-book which was found to contain nine hundred and sixty dollars. Taking out five hundred, he carefully replaced the balance, donned the Captain's uniform and sallied into the street. Arriving in front of Welch's store, he

> suddenly put on a drunken look, pulled his hat over his face, and staggered in. "Keep this fur me twell I git sober" said he, reaching the pocket-book to a man who stood behind the counter.
>
> "What name, Captain?" asked the other, as he took the book in hand.
>
> "John Smith." (36)

It is of course this honest merchant rather than the clever Fishback who appears to the captain to have lightened his wallet. Although Smith hugs the real confidence man to his bosom, Smith's values remain as an antidote to Fishback's.

The narrator himself is robbed by Fishback of a knapsack containing "a testament, the gift of my beloved Pastor, and 'March's Life of Webster,' presented by Linda the morning I left home, with a special charge to 'preserve it as I valued her love'" (42–43). For the most part the narrator provides a model accessible to the reader; he is a southerner, a soldier, and—since he is one himself—understands and sympathizes with Fishback's victims. His intrusions into the text, like his mock-invective against marriage, assure the reader that Billy's tricks are at least narratively circumscribed, that a larger order—moral if not entirely comic—will prevail even though he has been abused. He condemns Fishback's inhuman scavenging, a condemnation symbolized by the narrator's personal emblems of faith in the satchel, while he also satirizes the uselessness of extreme sentimentalism in a parody of wifely chatter: "I want no sugar-lumpshy-plumpshy-sweetness—pox take all finniken, sickening sugar-lumpshy-plumpshy sweetness" (80). Most of Warren's readers would have appreciated and identified with this aggressive masculine voice, neither rotten nor sugary, a voice that in contrast to George Washington Harris's is full of moral optimism. As if to confirm the values of these normative characters, Fishback's schemes—like the vicious twists of war they represent—are hardly ever successful. Mrs. Lane, who believes she has been widowed, awakens from a dream of her husband to find him returned to her in the flesh; her horse, which Fishback had stolen, like Charon escorts her husband home from the land of the dead. Capt. John Smith ultimately learns of Fishback's perfidy and renounces him. Fishback cannot even steal his

friend Slaughter's purse: Slaughter anticipates his plan, makes him overconfident by apparently trusting him, and then catches him, literally, in a steel trap in flagrante delicto. Finally, Fishback contracts smallpox by his own attempt at manipulation, endures prison for his crimes, and, after first hearing that it was only his own suspicion that defeated his plans to marry the wealthy Miss Callie, dies.

This is poetic justice with a vengeance. The narrator's direct entreaties to his "most excellent reader," the reordering of the widow's world by the return of her husband, and the convenient end of the exposed Fishback suggest that Warren may be masquerading as a rough frontier humorist while he is in fact pledged to the sentimental values of writers like Mary Noailles Murfree, Thomas Nelson Page, and Joel Chandler Harris. In Warren's *Straggler*, as in mid-nineteenth-century America, two sets of values coexist. Warren attempts a golden mean, humorously exaggerating the "high" culture of J. Rufus Bates, "Captain" Slaughter, and the pretensions of Major Graves, while simultaneously condemning and satirizing the "low" culture of Billy Fishback.

Mrs. Lane, the unassuming widow, functions even more than the occasionally effeminate narrator or the too-trusting Captain Smith as the work's normative center, a woman who though possessing the conventional sentimental tendencies of her sex nevertheless has the strength to continue and the heart to help others, no matter how mean they are or how mean her circumstances. The narrator describes at length Fishback's first meeting with her, "a woman whose husband had been shot on picket a few weeks before":

> The ruin and dilapidation every where apparent, plainly demonstrated the fact that she, a frail and delicate creature, and one whose manner indicated she had been in better circumstances, was compelled, with her own attenuated hands, to perform all the labor done on the premises. To her he applied for rest, rations and lodging for the night. This application she at first refused, by stating that she had already been taxed beyond her ability in feeding soldiers. But he appealed so piteously that her firmness yielded and her sympathies, (there's no plumb-line can fathom the depth of woman's sympathies,) raised the latch and opened the door to our weary and shelterless hero. She told him that while any part remained of

> the little that was left to her, she could not send away shivering and hungry, those who were engaged in the service to which her husband had sacrificed his life. (11)

Mrs. Lane's honesty, accentuated by her initial refusal to take in one more straggler, seems about to transform a sentimental episode into a realistic drama; yet, as the parentheses confirm, Warren is unwilling to close the door on effusions of sentiment. In fact, within two paragraphs Mrs. Lane is sobbing and groaning over the loss of her husband and her family's inevitable doom. The reader, who at this point believes her husband to be dead (as he imagines Dick Ellis to have been shot), sympathizes with her and admires her strength, her abilities, and her confidence. Her tears he forgives, for Mrs. Lane is not a bloodless martyr from the pages of Sarah Hale's *Godey's Lady's Book*, but a healthy survivor. What she survives, moreover, is the Civil War, not incarceration by a stern father in her room. Warren's impulses toward realism, sentiment, and Southwest humor alternate and intermix.

The Graves family fares none too well at Fishback's hands. Major Graves and his wife lecture their daughters "on the impropriety of encouraging a certain poor suitor, and warmly advocat[e] the claims of filthy lucre, which they appeared to regard as the only 'one thing needful'" (9). These opportunists are the traditional targets of Hooper, Baldwin, Harris, and Melville; Warren treats them in the manner of his predecessors, with Fishback imitating the conventional action of earlier confidence men. The Graveses' speculative greed, akin to Jedidiah Suggs's, lands them appropriately in the poor house. Despite the incongruity between Fishback's appearance and his pose, he convinces them he is a rich Georgia planter by means of false testimony, forged documents, and Major Graves's eagerness to believe in his good fortune.

> The Misses Graves were now wholly forgetful of the fact that they had ever giggled at the comical chat and gawkish manners of our hero. There was nothing gawkish or comical about him. *He was such a nice gentleman,—so original and unaffected—deported himself in such an artless and independent manner, and might be so appropriately said to draw the language in which he conversed, from Nature's pure, unwrought well-spring.* (52)

Their hypocritical change of heart marks the Graves family as fair game for the confidence man's sport. Fishback deflates their pretentions, defeats their aspirations, reduces them to poverty, and brings the reality of the Civil War into their living room: Jack Graves, the major's son, finds himself at the conclusion to the *Straggler* sharing the pest-house with Fishback (96–98). Warren subverts the conventional humor of the confidence man, though his satiric treatment of the Graveses indicates his ability to structure such a world—had he so desired. For the traditional comic order he substitutes lethal disorder, deliberately defeating the reader's expectations. The Civil War, despite the narrative's comic moments, the narrator's syrupy interludes, and Fishback's ultimate failures, is always present; Warren insists that the war maintains its own disorder, over which his own comic, sentimental, and moral vision has only the most tenuous control. This is the "Truth," as he notes, "to which my conscience . . . has rendered me a conquered and loyal subject" (6). The war is a kind of final narrator in *Straggler*, changing the comic to the cruel, the sentimental to the horribly realistic, and redirecting the lives of Warren's characters.

To structure his perceptions of this "Truth" Warren employs devices borrowed from sentimental fiction and frontier humor. The humorists provide the narrative frame, the eccentric vernacular characters, and the detailed action of Fishback's rough adventures. The return of the lover thought dead, the trapping of the fiend in his own trap, and the appropriately agonizing death of the deceiver are traditional sentimental motifs. Warren also uses the picaresque form, supported by humorous stock scenes like the incongruous wedding of Fishback to Miss Callie, and the narrator, digressive and allusive, laces his story with quotations and a full-length parody of Poe's "The Raven" (94–96). Most important is Warren's rendering of the confidence-man convention. Billy Fishback is Simon Suggs impressed into real combat, an Ovid Bolus who cannot escape to Texas, a Cosmopolitan marooned alone, a Sut Lovingood whose soda-powder has been switched to gunpowder.

Fishback's intended victims are not equally deserving of a fleecing. Captain Slaughter, who notes ironically that "I've all

pure confidence in your honesty" (73), is a capital comic gull, an enlisted man's Bela Bugg. And in the Graves household, "the character he had established, the confidence he had enjoyed" (91) entitle Fishback to practice his profession. As Captain Smith, Mrs. Lane, and the narrator are victims who seem innocent of greed, pretention, and shiftiness, the reader finds their losses unamusing, while Fishback's methods—artless theft, for the most part—do nothing to engage the imagination. It is as if Warren were retelling Harris's "Snake-Bit Irishman," substituting a live rattlesnake for the harmless intestine. Despite the reprieve these innocents receive, the threat of the rattler remains; Warren's closing vision of the pesthouse containing Fishback, Slaughter, Jack Graves, and the "laborious" poet Delton reveals that the snake's fangs have not been pulled, that these characters have only death before them. The Civil War has soured the confidence man's sense of fun to a vicious practicality and a self-undoing suspicion—like all the other characters, the confidence man falls prey to the war's appetite. As Richard B. Hauck concludes, Fishback is helpless, "caught forever in absurd circles";[34] he seems genuinely lost in labyrinthine lines of advance and retreat, destined to trip over his own feet in his mad rush to escape the war and a disordered new country. Like Jack Graves, who twice appears in time to thwart Fishback's schemes, the war repeatedly materializes when the confidence man least expects it, confusing and immobilizing him.

That Warren consciously varies the literary convention becomes apparent from his allusions to earlier confidence men. J. Rufus Bates, in his biographical sketch of Fishback, refers to Longstreet's "The Fight" and "Georgia Theatrics"; Fishback is a descendant of Ransy Sniffle and the aggressive Georgia youth (30). Fishback's manipulation of appearances is as shifty as Simon Suggs's, as is his studied avoidance of actual combat—except when the odds are forty to one. Warren quotes from chapter 2 of *Simon Suggs*, noting that an "accident" which befalls Fishback, in the words of Simon Suggs, proves how all was "fixed aforehand" (52). Just before the parody of Poe's "The Raven" (94), the narrator refers to Fishback's friends as his "boon companions," a term like the "fool-killer" Billy cries for (67); both are firmly rooted in the nourishing

soil of frontier humor. And Fishback is clearly another proverbial "ugly man."

Warren's fictional response to the Civil War was immediate, and to focus his perceptions he relied on familiar literary forms: the picaresque, the sentimental tale, and the frontier humorist's sketch. The confidence man he creates is a symbol of the "ruin and dilapidation every where" Warren perceives, the new country burned to chthonic ash. The disorder he chronicles is not the vanishing of Hooper's flush times, the dawning of a corrupt "progressive age" heralded by Baldwin, the cruise of a national "ship of fools" Melville satirizes, or the survival of a rough community that Harris celebrates and ultimately despairs of; rather, Warren imaginatively recreates a civilization returned to chaos and embodies this "Truth" in Billy Fishback. It is because Warren wants to believe in a better world that the confidence man must die, an event unique in the history of his American ancestors. Posing as a doctor aboard a crowded train, Fishback diagnoses a soldier's ailment as smallpox so that "Doctor" Fishback may have a seat. The joke, however, is on Fishback, for the soldier gives the "Doctor" not only his rations and his haversack but also his fatal disease.

In modifying the confidence-man convention so radically, Warren created new problems. A humorless shifty man, like Baldwin's Simon Suggs, Jr., requires firm narrative control, a clearly satiric framing rhetoric providing the reader a consistent normative guide. Baldwin's narrator focuses on Simon, demanding that the reader evaluate Simon's actions. Warren's narrator develops Fishback's victims: the Graves family, for example, Warren portrays alternately as hospitable and hypocritical without integrating these characteristics within coherent personalities, a feat Melville accomplishes brilliantly. Warren's loose characterization also confuses the reader's response to Slaughter, who seems both condemnable and commendable; to Mrs. Lane, who seems both pitiful and pitiable; and to Captain Smith, who seems both foolish and good. The narrator himself, like J. Rufus Bates, suffers momentary attacks of effeteness. These abrupt and almost random shifts of allegiance indicate Warren's unsureness of narrative intention and control; to satirize all characters, including the intrusive

narrator, unsettles the reader as it frustrates his conventional pattern of response. Unlike Melville, Warren varies his purpose and point of view inconsistently. He may have felt that his new materials required him to modify the conventions he had chosen, or he may have found that the conventions were suddenly beyond his control when used to interpret the Civil War. Warren may also have discovered that his feelings about Billy Fishback and the war were more intense than he had anticipated; the bitterness and cynicism that frequently appear in the narrator's satire seem attributable to attitudes the author has not fully structured in fictional form. Finally, it seems most probable that Warren, a Georgia volunteer attempting to convey his perceptions of the war in 1863–1865, was confused, searching for proper literary vehicles, conventions that would present in recognizable form the anxieties he felt about a country torn apart and no longer "new." His narrative ambivalence, the various languages he employs, and the almost sadistic yet moralistic ending in which he dispatches Billy Fishback suggest the competing and often contradictory pressures under which *Straggler* was written, and are themselves evidence of Warren's doubts and fears. These are, of course, moot points; Billy Fishback, confidence man, embodies—however precariously—the adaptation of the comic convention to express the serious concerns of Civil War. Like the nation itself, the confidence man would need time to recover.

5 THE WAR, MARK TWAIN, AND THE FLUSH-TIMES CONFIDENCE MAN

Art is, after all, the business of our country, and war but a passing incident.

—*North American Review* (July 1862)

Deafness,
Impaired Sight,
Noises in the Head,
and
All Diseases
of
the Eye
and
Ear,
Cured
By D. Von Eisenberg, Oculist and Aurist,
with his newly-invented
Eastachion Explorer,
Atherialearinhalator,
and
Von Eisenberg's Eye Fumigator!

—Advertisement, the New York *Evening Post* (19 May 1862)

William Cullen Bryant, praising the Homestead Act of 1862 in the *New York Evening Post*, predicted that "speculators in public lands have now lost their vocation, and [the] right of the people to the free employment of their own property [has been] established. It is one of those victories of peace which are said to be as important as those of war."[1] Moralistic and optimistic, Bryant's language is charged with unintentional irony; the future he envisions—free of conflict and confidence men—is a dream twisted into nightmare by the realities of the Civil War and by the fantastic scandals of the Gilded Age. Less than ten years later, Walt Whitman urges his countrymen to "look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease."

> Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. . . . From deceit in the spirit, the mother of all false deeds, the offspring is already incalculable. . . . The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. . . . The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining today sole master of the field. The best class we show, is but a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians.[2]

Whitman sheds light on Bryant's hasty reduction of complex social issues to easily legislated morality; speaking the hopes of many in 1862, Bryant reveals a desire to avoid confrontation characteristic of the period's bestselling fiction: the Beadle dime novels and Mary Mapes Dodge's *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*, for example, offered escape from reality, posing in their conventional sentimental plots only threats certain to be resolved. The public demanded consolation, confirmation, and—most of all—certainty. Politicians, editors, novelists, and comedians were to provide what the Civil War denied.

Analyzing popular American fiction, Henry Nash Smith concludes, "The passions aroused by the war acted as a forced draft on the development of the confidence and optimism that were so conspicuous in the popular culture of the 1850s. The result was an accelerated coarsening of attitudes."[3] To reassure the population, popular writers polarized good and evil, masking their broadly shared anxieties behind harmless sentimental stereotypes. George W. Bagby, author in the 1850s of the satiric "Mozis Addums" letters, turned to productions like "The Empty Sleeve" during the war.

> Tom, old fellow, I grieve to see
> That sleeve hanging loose at your side;
> The arm you lost was worth to me
> Every Yankee that ever died.
> But you don't mind it at all,
> You swear you've a beautiful stump,
> And laugh at the damnable ball;
> Tom, I knew you were always a trump![4]

In the remaining stanzas Tom marries his true love and lives a long and uplifting life; fear, pain, and anguish disappear before an only slightly qualified pastoral celebration of conti-

nuity in Tom's daughter's marriage. The realities that cannot be ignored are domesticated by simply expressed, emotion-charged "fancies."

The Civil War, which, as Edwin Fussell writes, "destroyed the final vestiges of the American frontier,"[5] destroyed as well the American appetite for fictional characters who represented its ambiguities. The flush times and the confidence man, symbols of anarchic power embodying both humorous and threatening duplicity, were sacrificed on the altar of consolation. At the opposite extreme from Warren's *Army Straggler*, S. Emma E. Edmonds's *Female Spy of the Union Army* (1864) demonstrates how the immoral acts of the confidence man are transformed into heroics. Edmonds's fictionalized narrative of her own exploits celebrates deception, treachery, even murder—when committed for the preservation of the Union. Edmonds condemns as a "wretch" a persistently loyal Virginia woman with whom she exchanges first confidence tricks and then bullets.[6] Edmonds ultimately cures "Her Ladyship" of rebelliousness by the severe application of pistol, harness, and Bible. At no point in *The Female Spy* does the heroine question her own tactics; patriotism, and the need to confirm the righteousness of her cause, license her use of the confidence man's methods.

The confidence man thus becomes either a heroic or a villainous deceiver, his actions judged solely by simplified political and ethical criteria. Ambiguous figures suffer reduction to stereotypes, for in literature, as in life, circumscribed symbols guarantee the comfort that reality denies. The desire for unqualified heroes—one element of the "coarsening of attitudes" Smith notes—manifests itself in the sainthood of Lincoln and the two presidential elections of Grant. Their personal foibles, like those of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee in the South, are forgotten, for in idolizing these leaders the public confirms the values for which so many had fought and died, and by extension images themselves, the rank and file, as local versions of their national heroes. Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *Harvard Memorial Biographies* (1866) and John Esten Cooke's *Wearing of the Gray* (1867) canonize Federal and Confederate martyrs for their "solid conviction and . . . absolute law of conscience";[7] the motivation for these records

appears to be at once to cherish the fallen and to comfort the survivors with assurances that a better future has in fact been unambiguously secured.

The confidence man all but disappears from American fiction as the need to idealize intensifies; the strength of this imperative becomes clear by comparing Henry Ward Beecher's *Norwood; or, Village Life in New England*, published serially in 1867 in the *New York Ledger* and in book form in 1868, and John William De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Seccession to Loyalty*, which *Harper's* declined to serialize but printed in a limited edition in 1867. Both chart the course of love redirected by the Civil War, but the immediate success of Beecher's work dwarfs De Forest's. Beecher's manipulation of cardboard stereotypes appeals to a largely female audience that rejects as threatening De Forest's less sentimental portrayal. Readers approved in Beecher's novel the opportunities for moral refreshment and tearful cleansing, which they had also found in Jane G. Austin's *Dora Darling; or, the Daughter of the Regiment* (1865) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's popular *The Gates Ajar* (1868). Beecher celebrates a pastoral vision as righteous as it is artificial, a ritual presided over by the personification of October, "a victor, content with his victories, and every where shedding abroad the tokens of his royal complacency."[8] *Norwood* dismisses the vagaries of reality *Miss Ravenel* takes pains to point out, and embraces the future with a confidence foreign to De Forest's novelistic vision. The success of *Norwood* indicates the degree to which Beecher correctly read the desire of the book-buying public to live out their fantasies of an unambiguous moral war, to worship heroes whose feet barely touched the clay, to dismiss the ambivalent figure of the confidence man, and to cherish the unrealized dream of a secure present.[9]

Military men are not the only characters to shoulder aside the confidence man. Jay Cooke, the "financier of the Civil War,"[10] shared in the public adulation awarded to Lincoln and Grant. His rise from humble beginnings parallels the rise of those presidents and, like his wartime activities, confirms one of the essential tenets of American democracy—a lowly clerk may achieve material success and national influence. V. L. Parrington describes the impact of Cooke's career on the popular imagination.

> The greatest salesman that the rising middle class had yet produced, a financier who understood the psychology of mass appeal, a propagandist of truly heroic proportions, he was reckoned no other than a magician by all the lesser money-grabbers of the Gilded Age. From nothing he built up a vast fortune. Scrupulous in all religious duties, a kind husband, a generous friend, benevolent in all worthy charities, simple and democratic in his tastes, ardently patriotic, uncreative and unintellectual, he exemplified all the substantial middle-class virtues.[11]

As a symbol of middle-class morality and its rewards, Cooke could not be given enough praise by the American people; their legislators, as well, awarded Cooke's Northern Pacific Railway over 47 million acres of public land. Few anticipated that the brilliant, patriotic, and ever-stable Cooke would be termed a betrayer and confidence man; the exposure of his speculations dealt the popular imagination a blow from which it recovered by embracing transparently heroic fiction.

Although Jay Cooke & Company succumbed to the Crédit Mobilier scandal and the ensuing panic of 1873, the dream of repeating Cooke's rise remained imprinted on the American mind in the novels of Horatio Alger. The moral formula that perseverance and honesty lead inevitably to wealth forms the touchstone of the *Ragged Dick* books, an oversimplification that struck a responsive and reassuring chord in 1867. Drawing upon the sentimental and sensation novel traditions, Alger creates a youthful, lower-class, morally upright hero; Ragged Dick acts out the common fantasy of the upwardly mobile, who triumph imaginatively with him over the perils—moral, social, and financial—of city life. Confidence men prowl this world, but they bear little resemblance to the humorous Simon Suggs. They use the methods of Poe's urban diddlers (1843), yet they do not possess even the redeeming virtue of the complex comedy of Poe's rascals; they are, quite simply, sentimental villains, less engaging even than George Lippard's gothic *Monks of Monk Hall* (1844). As Ragged Dick outwits them—from Chatham Street swindlers to pocketbook counterfeiters—he validates the optimistic morality of the 1860s: Good and Evil—despite the historical exemplum of Jay Cooke—are clearly defined categories of experience, and, even in Alger's comparatively seamy New York, Good will always vanquish Evil. It is of no consequence that Ragged Dick uses

shifty tricks; like Edmonds's female spy, he labors in a just cause against wrongdoers and is thereby absolved of guilt. In addition, like Edmonds's rebel spies, Alger's confidence men are neither comic nor sympathetic: they are wretches. As their defeat is preordained by Alger's adherence to the sentimental values of his audience, the threat these confidence men pose is carefully controlled to heighten the pleasure of Ragged Dick's ultimate victory.

The popularity of the Alger books—extending well beyond his death in 1899—sheds more light on the disappearance of the flush-times confidence man; when his ambiguity appears in a new guise, as in Richard B. Kimball's *Undercurrents of Wall Street. A Romance of Business* (1862), it produces only the smallest ripple. Kimball fails to utilize the stereotypes and moral formulas of Alger's fiction, instead picturing upright businessmen as confidence men, questioning the righteousness of the booster morality underlying American commerce in terms anticipating Whitman's. Though Kimball's hero struggles toward enlightenment and the salvation of honesty toward its close, *Undercurrents* could not compete with the complete fulfillment of *Ragged Dick*; Kimball stirred his readers, as the *North American Review* noted,[12] to analyze the difference between "being" and "appearing" and to doubt the ethics of boosterism, while Alger applauded the fantasies of success and wealth his audience half-believed, never letting them for an instant doubt the imminent fulfillment of their dreams.

The optimism and confidence at the heart of American popular culture conspired to affect as well the humor of the 1860s. A comic tradition took shape complementing the sentimental tradition whose motives it reflected: to comfort, to offer escape, and to reaffirm the values of the middle class. The "coarsening of attitudes" Smith puts forth as an explanation for postwar sentimental fiction suggests as well a broad theory to explain the period's domestication of earlier humor: humor that threatened, that pictured unresolved anxieties—the humor of the shifty confidence man, for example—was unacceptable. The aim of the humorist should not be to illustrate a peculiar reality, as it had been in Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835), but to mask and nullify the often violent peculiarities

of reality in a nonthreatening form; reality had perhaps come to seem too clearly a mirror-image of flush-times chaos. The ambiguities, hypocrisies, and anxieties of reality, exploited especially by antebellum Southwest humorists, were ignored or tamed by a new generation of comedic writers. The Civil War, which intensified the sentimental tradition, changed the meaning of American humor, marking as one of its first casualties the *New York Spirit of the Times* (1831–1861). Following the same impulse as the sentimentalists, 1860s humorists diluted the earlier tradition; in all but a few cases, the snaps of Simon Suggs and his confederates seemed played out by 1861.

W. Stanley Hoole concludes that the Civil War disrupted the popular genre of Southwest humor,

> bending and twisting the chain of continuity in a thousand ways and ultimately rendering the "old" writers all but voiceless against the new and noisy "platform" wit of the years that followed. . . . Out of the West and out of the War came a new laughter, a new product, a new era of national literary humor, sponsored mostly by men who were yet unborn when *Simon Suggs* had sprung full-grown onto the American bookstalls.[13]

The Phunny Phellows turn from the regional models and concerns of their predecessors to address a national audience—largely the same one that rejected De Forest and Kimball—that desired entertainment without ambiguity or anxiety, and confidence rather than confidence men.

Representative of these popular literary comedians, Charles Farrar Browne ("Artemus Ward") takes aim at uncontroversial public butts that were fair game on either side of the Mason-Dixon line: sexless Shakers, polygamous Mormons, pretentious lecturers, and "Speeretooul Sircles." Though he borrows from the Southwest humorists the techniques of comic misspellings, burlesque, exaggeration, and tall talk, Ward avoids their extended descriptions of frontier low life, their unsettling portrayal of physical violence, and their characterization of the irresponsible confidence man. The eccentric persona—Artemus Ward—likewise displays little of his literary ancestors' relish for partisan political satire: "I hav no politics. Nary a one. . . . I'm in a far more respectful bisniss nor what pollertics is."[14] In 1862, the year Bryant proclaimed the death of

speculation and Kimball published *Undercurrents of Wall Street*, Artemus Ward "interviews" Lincoln and demonstrates his allegiance to Bryant's rhetoric of optimism; Ward saves the president from a horde of office seekers, then advises him to give "the whole country a good, sound administration" (185). The traditional jibe at the spoils system, followed by a correctly spelled, moderate appeal for good government, seems naive in light of the recent battles of Bull Run, but the sentiments are certainly sincere. Avoiding historical events is Ward's plan, and to this end he closes his interview with an again-misspelled solicitation: Lincoln should fill his Cabinet with showmen.

> Showmen is devoid of politics. They hain't got any principles. They know how to cater for the public. They know what the public wants, North & South. Showmen, sir, is honest men. . . . A. Linkin, use the talents which Nature has put into you judishusly and firmly, and all will be well! (185–86)

Artemus Ward intends to create "Fun and Sunshine"; humor should provide diversion from the anxieties of national politics—"It is far better to stay in the Sunshine while we may, inasmuch as the Shadow must of its own accord come only too soon."[15] These words could just as properly introduce the sentimental "leaves" of the still-popular Fanny Fern, or serve as a footnote to Beecher's *Norwood*. When the Shadow can no longer be ignored, however, Beecher transforms the war into an ennobling drama—one that does not threaten since it is subservient to the dictates of the sentimental pattern—while Ward transforms it into a comic prop for his persona. An 1864 lecture is instructive.

> I ought, perhaps, to say something about the war. Perhaps I might as well give you the opinion of a gentleman who resides in the rural districts, and who possesses, in the opinion of many, a massive mind. He has watched the progress and conduct of the war closely, and he said, after having carefully read the editorial articles in all the daily papers about it, and consulted minutely and particularly from day to day, the telegraphic dispatches in regard to it, and subscribed more particularly for the New York Herald and its military maps, and in those lucid maps studying the various bases of operations and movements of our armies in the field, and after organizing a War Club in the little neighborhood where he lived, and ex-

> changing opinions with several of his neighbors in regard to the war, and attending the various local meetings that were held, and keeping one eye intently fastened on Washington, and the other intently fastened on the various State Conventions held in the different States, as well as the action of different State Legislatures, and reading carefully the papers published at the capitals of the States, and subscribing for the illustrated papers of New York city, and gazing fixedly on the various bloody battle scenes—after doing all this he said—"he'd be d——d if he knew what he did think about it."[16]

The technique of this passage is to say nothing about the war. Instead, the audience hears Charles Farrar Browne as Artemus Ward tell the story of a massive-minded rural's inability to make any sense at all out of various newspaper accounts of the Civil War. The war itself is placed at six removes as Ward directs attention to the befuddled yet earnest rural gentleman's associative, repetitive, eelish rhetoric. No historical details—the names of battles, for instance—are ever mentioned; rather, Ward substitutes for that threatening reality the harmless disorder of comic confusion. The inability of the bewildered character "to say something about the war" dramatizes a similar potential confusion in each listener's mind, yet the persona functions as a comic butt—a fool—for the safe release of this anxiety in laughter. By insisting on manner rather than matter, Ward leads the audience to the remote, self-enclosed comic universe of the lecture that harmlessly collapses inward upon itself.

David Ross Locke amused Lincoln and Grant with Petroleum V. Nasby, whose escapes from Federal and Confederate conscription satirized hypocrites, cowards, and scalawags of all persuasions. Nasby's nonpartisan evasions of the draft—in Ohio and Kentucky, by way of Canada and New York—focus entirely on his absurd theatrical protests while ignoring their cause.

> Upon a rigid eggsaminashun uf my fizzleckle man, I find it wood be wus nor madnis for me to undertake a campane, to-wit:—
>
> 1. I'm bald-headid, and hev bin obliged to wear a wig these 22 years.
> 2. I hev dandruff in wat scanty hair still hangs around my venerable temples.
> 3. I hev a kronic katarr.

> 4. I hev lost, sence Stanton's order to draft, the use uf wun eye entirely, and hev kronic inflammashen in the other.
> 5. My teeth is all unsound, my palit aint eggsactly rite, and I hev had bronkeetis 31 yeres last Joon. At present I hev a koff, the paroxisms uv wich is friteful to behold.[17]

The war appears a backdrop for this rhetorical magician and escape artist, who first blinks the war and then disappears himself. Nasby presents himself as a man unwilling to be suckered into the losing game of conscription, one who substitutes for actual combat the maneuvers of the southwestern confidence man: disguise, deception, fast talk, and fast feet. But the Suggsian new country has soured, and Nasby is not Captain Simon Suggs; as his own narrator, Nasby cannot make the two-pronged appeal of *Simon Suggs*: Simon creates humor as he triumphs over even more dishonest hypocrites than himself, and Hooper-as-narrator asserts control in his cultivated and precise language. Locke narrows Hooper's comic vision to ensure that each member of his audience, northerner and southerner, will feel superior to Nasby; Nasby is a watered-down version of the Suggsian confidence man, one who evokes only contemptuous laughter. The restricted point of view offers the audience an indirect release of its hostility—toward the renegade Nasby, who enacts a fantasy of escape, and toward the inescapable reality of historical events. Nasby's battles with conscription invoke the threat of Civil War, but offering his escapes as paradigms of experience suggests that the threat can be reduced, reality avoided, and the demonic subdued; Nasby also offers amusement to those who go to war, for they can feel superior to the groveling "low" character who has no moral fiber, no patriotism, and no manhood. In the form of the earlier confidence man Nasby provides innocuous sentimental assurance.

Charles Henry Smith developed the epistolary "Bill Arp" to create "a side show of the Southern side of the War."[18] As Nasby turns the war into a game of hide-and-seek, so Bill Arp transforms the bloody battle of Rome (3 May 1863) into a game of cards.

> Gen. Forrest had been fighting. . . . But the General was not in luck, and had a poor hand, and staked his last dollar. The Yankess had a *Strait*, which would have taken Forrest and raked down the pile, but he looked 'em right in the eye and said "*he*

> *would see 'em and* 4,000 *better.*" The Raid looked at him and he looked at the Raid, and *never blinked.* The Raid trembled all over in his boots, and gave it up. *The General bluffed 'em,* and ever since that game was played the little town close by has been called "*Cedar Bluff.*" It was *flush* times in Alabama, that day, sure. (39, Smith's italics)

By this act of legerdemain—soldiers become dollars in a game of poker—Arp deflects the attention of his audience; he uses the familiar language of the flush-times confidence man to spotlight the comic persona and his rhetorical creation—an alternative to reality, a sideshow. If in Nasby what remains of the southwestern confidence-man tradition is his pattern of rascally escape, in Arp we see only the confidence man's language; this language, however, enacts the shift from threat to comedy, and, because all that remains of the confidence man is his language—not his ambiguity—the transformation is successful, and the horror of battle is nullified.

The novels of Edmonds, Beecher, and Alger contained the Civil War in a conventional pattern of popular fiction, the sentimental romance. Arp controls the war by translating its threats into conventional ludic images reported by an eccentric persona; he reduces reality, offers escape, and thereby pays tribute to the optimism of the sentimentalists. "The minds of the people," he wrote in 1866, "needed relaxation from the momentous and absorbing interests of the war" (5). His comic misspellings—which he wished "reconstructed"—cue the reader to the unchallenging nature of his fiction; though critical of President Lincoln, carpetbaggers, and scavenging troops, Arp's election to the Georgia Senate (150–56) seems to guarantee a happy ending to his trials, and to the trials of the South. His wit, though satiric, owes fealty to the sentimental tradition of moderation and reassurance.

Henry Wheeler Shaw ("Josh Billings") defined humorists like Arp, Nasby, and Ward in a phrase: "Everybody's Friend."[19] In Shaw's Josh Billings the influence of prewar southwestern humor is vestigial, and the displacement characteristic of the Phunny Phellows seems to reach its final variation. Josh Billings consoles his audience with genial philosophy and general social satire. As "Billings Lexicon" illustrates, he reduces complex issues to humorous homilies: "Politicks—The apology ov plunder. . . . Bliss—Happiness bileing over and running

down both sides ov the pot. . . . Quack—A doktor whoze science lays in his bill" (462). Corruption, hunger, and fraud are acknowledged only to be dismissed, and the confidence man survives as a blue-plate special: "Hash—A boarding-hous confidence game" (462). And "Anxiety" Billings defines as "Milking a kicking heifer with one hand, and holding her by the tail with the other" (464). The realities of war and reconstruction seem aberrations deliberately forgotten in the haste to improve life's common fare. Alger's *Ragged Dick* and Billings's *Everybody's Friend* are companion pieces (to say nothing of Billings's annual *Farmer's Allminax*), both confident of the average man's improving status, both appealing to an audience hungry for social approval and for emotional security.

Mark Twain

Reflecting on these literary comedians in his *Autobiography* (1906), Samuel Langhorne Clemens ("Mark Twain") criticized their amiability and lack of content, and seems to have had in mind the authors of all species of false optimism.

> 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. . . . 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. With all its preaching it is not likely to outlive so long as term as that. The very things it preaches about and which are novelties when it preaches about them can cease to be novelties and become commonplaces in thirty years.[20]

Twain is clearly promoting himself at his old cronies' expense, for he himself worked the lecture platform with great facility, took potshots at targets long peppered by Phunny Phellows, and made free use of the comedians' techniques of the comic persona, deadpan delivery, and burlesque. This passage from the *Autobiography* is at once valid criticism, humorous mock-criticism, and the self-questioning musings of Mark Twain. The same strategy informs *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), a travel book that burlesques the banalities of travel books; James M. Cox writes that as the unifying narrative voice is

capable of both nostalgia and mock-nostalgia, cynicism and mock-cynicism, "it is often difficult to tell whether Twain is trapped in clichés or simply exploiting them."[21] In *Roughing It* (1872), the curious practices of Mormons, the joys of silver mining, and the evil of desperados come in for satire that smacks of Artemus Ward and his tribe, yet stock figures repeatedly become complex. The outlaw Slade's arraignment for drunkenness recalls George W. Harris's "Contempt of Court—Almost" (in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*, which Twain had reviewed in 1867), yet Slade's tears, cries, prayers—and hanging—present a problem of interpretation.

> The true desperado is gifted with splendid courage, and yet he will take the most infamous advantage of his enemy; armed and free, he will stand up before a host and fight until he is shot all to pieces, and yet when he is under the gallows and helpless he will cry and plead like a child. . . . I think it is a conundrum worth investigating.[22]

Unlike Artemus Ward's discussion of the Civil War, which is sealed off to be forgotten like an exhausted mine, Twain's investigation of Slade exposes two distinct veins that beg for excavation. Instead of the quick comic capper, however, Twain leaves these two images unresolved in the reader's mind; he is unwilling to solve the conundrum of the desperado. As reality is more complex than a cliché, it cannot be made to vanish when its complexity becomes troubling.

Twain's method is often to bring the conventions of the literary comedians and popular sentimentalists into contact with the earlier tradition of southwestern humor. In chapter 24 of *Roughing It*, he updates Augustus B. Longstreet's "The Horse-Swap" (1835), using the old sketch to explore the new flush times. Longstreet's narrator reports on a duel between frontier confidence men. From his point of view, the result is humorous, for the boasting Yellow Blossom swaps for a horse that is both blind and deaf. The point of view in chapter 24 is not that of Longstreet's simple narrative frame: Twain's narrator is the protagonist, who becomes himself the object of derision because his pretensions to western savvy result in his buying the unrideable genuine Mexican plug. The comic butt, he seems suddenly more like Harris's bamboozled Sut Lovingood than Longstreet's cultured frame-narrator; however, he

retains the rhetorical polish of his ancestor and clearly represents the reader. As the swelling of the narrator is deflated by the shifty westerner (who has only to encourage the narrator's illusions to make him a fool), the reader must question his own preconceptions about the West. In Longstreet's "Horse-Swap," the superiority of the narrator reaffirms the values and superiority of the reader over those of the "low" comic characters; in *Roughing It*, Twain suggests that in some cases both narrator and reader have something to learn. Two ways of seeing—call them eastern and western—have competed in a game of bluff, and the eastern greenhorn has lost. Here, as in the examination of the desperado, what unifies these points of view is the narrative voice. Having been tricked by the wily Pete Ketch, the Yellow Blossom has nothing to say; in *Roughing It*, the narrator who recreates the incident is Mark Twain, who as both protagonist and victim, character and narrator, has everything to say. Twain is himself proof that the tenderfoot's false assumptions can be corrected—need to be corrected—by the "keen-eyed person" (172). East and West, culture and savvy, and past and present are fused in the voice of Mark Twain. Twain makes fun of his own "Miss Nancy" illusions, illustrating in his sad attempt to ride the plug that he did not at the time of its purchase have the skills of the frontier. As he retells the story, however, it is clear that he has managed to survive by claiming the best from both worlds.

> Now whoever has had the luck to ride a real Mexican plug will recognize the animal depicted in this chapter, and hardly consider him exaggerated—but the uninitiated will feel justified in regarding his portrait as a fancy sketch, perhaps. (177)

These two visions of the genuine Mexican plug distinguish two kinds of knowledge, and Twain is careful to present both in qualifying language ("hardly . . . perhaps"); for though the youthful narrator symbolizes greenness, the plug symbolizes the frontier's chaotic energy. Like Slade's hanging, it represents the impulse toward violence that Twain as narrator must first understand and then tame. To accomplish this dual purpose, he turns to the humor of the Old Southwest, modifying the narrative frame, the action of the horse swap, and the characters who perform the contest.

* * *

In *The Gilded Age* (1873), Mark Twain's first novel, traditional devices are again highly visible. The uncertainty that led him to collaborate with Charles Dudley Warner on this full-scale fiction suggests a reason for reliance on conventional models. From the popular novels of sensation and sentiment Twain borrows the plot complications of the adopted orphans and the betrayed maiden, while from Southwest humorists' sketches he draws the credulous Uncle Dan'l and the Suggsian Colonel Sellers. As in *Roughing It*, however, Twain contrasts these modes of perception to achieve a complexity of vision not apparent in the sentimental works of Beecher or the humorous productions of Artemus Ward. Uncle Dan'l's misapprehension of the steamboat as the Lord invokes a stereotype found, for example, in Henry Clay Lewis's "Day of Judgment" (1850). In Lewis's tale, an old Negro at a camp meeting is startled into thoughts of heaven by a band of pranksters who drape themselves in white sheets, set a mule afire, and descend on the meeting.

> White folks riz! De Laud be marsyful! De end of de warld an' de day of judgmen' hab pass and here cums hell rite up de lane! Whoop! I love my Jesus! Master, cum![23]

Twain avoids the contrived situation of the conventional camp meeting terrorized by whites, yet generates humor from Uncle Dan'l's ignorance of technology, his needless terror, and his futile though warmhearted attempt to save the white children.

> Oh, Lord, spah de little chil'en, don't tar de little chil'en away f'm dey frens, jes' let 'em off jes' dis once, and take it out'n de ole niggah. HEAH I IS, LORD, HEAH I IS! De ole niggah's ready, Lord, de old—[24]

The humor in Twain's passage is nostalgic, evoking in Uncle Dan'l's selflessness a persistent myth of the halcyon antebellum South in which slaves desired only to serve their masters; this vein proved pure gold to writers like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris. Twain plays the scene for its humor, following it with a description of the race between the steamboats *Boreas* and *Amaranth*. Rendered almost entirely in dialogue, the familiar action of the race is cut short by the explosion of the *Amaranth*.

> And then there was a booming roar, a thundering crash, and the riddled Amaranth dropped loose from her hold and drifted helplessly away . . . !
>
> As soon as possible the Boreas dropped down to the floating wreck and took off the dead, the wounded, and the unhurt—at least all that could be got at, for the whole forward half of the boat was a shapeless ruin, with the great chimneys lying crossed on top of it, and underneath were a dozen victims imprisoned alive and wailing for help. While men with axes worked with might and main to free these poor fellows, the Boreas's boats went about, picking up stragglers from the river. (38)

The nostalgic image of the past explodes like the *Amaranth* as it touches this realistic reportage: the reader feels the horror of the wreck deeply because of Twain's juxtaposition of narrative modes. After adjusting his expectations, however, the reader is assaulted by a new appeal—to his emotions.

> The wreck took fire. . . . It scorched the clothes, it singed the hair of the axemen—it drove them back, foot by foot—inch by inch—they wavered, struck a final blow in the teeth of the enemy, and surrendered. And as they fell back they heard prisoned voices saying:
>
> "Don't leave us! Don't desert us! Don't, don't do it!"
>
> And one poor fellow said:
>
> "I am Henry Worley, striker of the Amaranth! My mother lives in St. Louis. Tell her a lie for a poor devil's sake, please. Say I was killed in an instant and never knew what hurt me—though God knows I've neither scratch nor bruise this moment! It's hard to burn up in a coop like this with the whole wide world so near. Good-bye boys—we've all got to come to it at last, anyway!" (38–39)

In quick succession, a "little wee French midshipman of fourteen" (39) refuses medical aid and the head engineer curses his brother, who had refused to reduce steam, and—calling him his murderer—"tore a ring from his finger, stripping flesh and skin with it, threw it down and fell dead" (40). Twain manipulates the reader with these detailed sensational descriptions; the humorous pastoral scene and the exciting realism of the race intensify the tragedy of the boy's heroics and the engineer's hatred. The chapter concludes with an emotionless summary.

> A jury of inquest was impaneled, and after due deliberation and inquiry they returned the inevitable American verdict

> which has been so familiar to our ears all the days of our lives—"NOBODY TO BLAME." (40)

These alternating modes wrench conflicting responses from the reader: laughter, excitement, tears, and frustration. Twain's Dickensian fillip—"NOBODY TO BLAME"—heightens the episode's pathos and leaves the question of responsibility unresolved. If we trust the "Author's Preface to the London Edition," however, the blame is easily assigned: "In America nearly every man has his dream, his pet scheme, whereby he is to advance himself socially or pecuniarily. It is this all-pervading speculativeness that we have tried to illustrate in 'The Gilded Age'" (473). American boosterism leads steamboatmen to race, for it flourishes at every level of American society—the engineer who refuses to be beaten by the *Boreas* is motivated by the same impulse as Jay Cooke, Ragged Dick, and Simon Suggs. The new-country spirit has resurfaced.

As Twain contrasts the harmless pastoral of Uncle Dan'l with the horrible reality of the *Amaranth*'s explosion, so too does he contrast the innocuous Colonel Sellers with the threatening Senator Dilworthy. Unlike the Phunny Phellows, Twain returns to the flush times of the Old Southwest for inspiration, hoping to discover the reasons for Americans' "all-pervading speculativeness" and for the continuing spirit of frontier optimism. Col. Beriah Sellers combines these attitudes in the conventional literary figure—absent from the 1860s—of the comic confidence man. He enters *The Gilded Age* trumpeting the flush times of the 1840s and 1850s in a letter delivered to "Squire" Hawkins of Obedstown, East Tennessee.

> Come right along to Missouri! Don't wait and worry about a good price but sell out for whatever you can get, and come along, or you might be too late. Throw away your traps, if necessary, and come empty-handed. You'll never regret it. It's the grandest country—the loveliest land—the purest atmosphere—I can't describe it; no pen can do it justice. And it's filling up, every day—people coming from everywhere. I've got the biggest scheme on earth—and I'll take you in; I'll take in every friend I've got that's ever stood by me, for there's enough for all, and to spare. Mum's the word—don't whisper—keep yourself to yourself. You'll see! Come!—rush!—hurry!—don't wait for anything! (21)

Sellers's optimism, energy, confidence, and language echo those of Hooper's Capt. Simon Suggs. Colonel Sellers's ambiguous promise—"I'll take you in; I'll take in every friend I've got"—cues the reader to the presence of the confidence man. Nancy Hawkins, aware of the colonel's resemblance to the captain, nevertheless notes one important difference in their characters; hearing of Colonel Sellers's letter, she reflects.

> I was afraid of it—was afraid of it. Trying to make our fortune in Virginia, Beriah Sellers nearly ruined us—and we had to settle in Kentucky and start over again. Trying to make our fortune in Kentucky he crippled us again and we had to move here. Trying to make our fortune here, he brought us clear down to the ground, nearly. He's an honest soul, and means the very best in the world, but I'm afraid, I'm afraid he's too flighty. He has splendid ideas, and he'll divide his chances with his friends with a free hand, a good generous soul, but something does always seem to always interfere and spoil everything. I never did think he was right well balanced. But I don't blame my husband, for I do think that when that man gets his head full of a new notion, he can out-talk a machine. He'll make anybody believe in that notion that'll listen to him ten minutes—why I do believe he would make a deaf and dumb man believe in it and get beside himself, if you only set him where he could see his eyes talk and watch his hands explain. (19–20)

Although Sellers's schemes to sell slaves, to invent a perpetual motion machine, to process coal oil, and to market "Beriah Sellers Infalliable Imperial Oriental Optic Liniment and Salvation for Sore Eyes" are unsuccessful, Nancy Hawkins recognizes two truths: first, "that fortunes are made nobody knows exactly how, in a new country" (113); and second, that despite his appearance, Colonel Sellers is "an honest soul" (19). Twain reconstructs the Southwest humorists' confidence man and the new country—yet with a difference; Colonel Sellers is a speculative Don Quixote forever tilting his lance at ephemeral windmills while pursuing the American version of fair Dulcinea—wealth—that waits just beyond the border of the frontier. Sellers is a nostalgic character, a confidence man whose snaps are intended to benefit "every friend I've got."

Twain contrasts the humorous Colonel Sellers with the humorless Senator Dilworthy. An unscrupulous political manipulator, Dilworthy traces his ancestry to Baldwin's Simon

Suggs, Jr., and to Alger's confidence men; denying the frontier, he resembles the sentimental villain and marks the passage of the confidence man into contemporary roles. In this respect, *The Gilded Age*, De Forest's *Honest John Vane* (1875) and *Playing the Mischief* (1876), and Henry Adams's *Democracy* (1880) are sibling novels: all explore the corruption and "all-pervading speculativeness" of postwar American society and focus on a confidence man (or woman) who endangers the lives and fortunes of common men. Dilworthy charts a second course of the Southwest humorists' confidence man, seeming to retain all of Simon Jr.'s negative characteristics and to combine them with those of the sentimentalists' villain.

The juxtaposition of Colonel Sellers and Senator Dilworthy heightens our awareness of the threat Dilworthy poses. In language, action, and intention Dilworthy appears a dangerous fraud. He begins a campaign speech in the town of Hawkeye with the familiar words "Fellow citizens."

> It gives me great pleasure to thus meet and mingle with you, to lay aside for a moment the heavy duties of an official and burdensome station, and confer in familiar converse with my friends in your great state. The good opinion of my fellow citizens of all sections is the sweetest solace in all my anxieties. I look forward with longing to the time when I can lay aside the cares of office—["dam sight," shouted a tipsy fellow near the door. Cries of "put him out."]
>
> My friends, do not remove him. Let the misguided man stay. I see that he is a victim of that evil which is swallowing up public virtue and sapping the foundation of society. As I was saying, when I can lay down the cares of public office and retire to the sweets of private life in some such sweet, peaceful, intelligent, wide-awake and patriotic place as Hawkeye (applause). I have traveled much, I have seen all parts of our glorious Union, but I have never seen a lovelier village than yours, or one that has more signs of commercial and industrial and religious prosperity—(more applause). (157)

Dilworthy's inflated political rhetoric pays tribute to the sentimental cult of optimism, ignoring the realities of Hawkeye. He proves false Bryant's prediction that speculators would lose their vocation; by linking patriotism, commerce, and religion with Hawkeye, he exploits the town's desire to think highly of itself, reaping for a small investment of verbal cant a return of hearty applause. Beneath his smooth speech lies a drinker

who trades upon the popular cause of temperance and a religious hypocrite who is descended from Hooper's Bela Bugg and who prefigures William Dean Howells's fictionalized Joseph Dylks (*The Leatherwood God*, 1916). A champion of industrialism, he can play the frontiersmen for their votes, promoting for his self-interest the Columbus River Slackwater Navigation Company; though he cares nothing for freed slaves, he can pose as a moralist by sponsoring the personally profitable Knobs University bill. His pretentious language—differing markedly from Sellers's enthusiasms—hides his scorn for the traditional values he espouses and cloaks his bid for gain beneath a mantle of public interest.

Breaking from the 1860s sentimental and humorous traditions of consolation, Twain revives the flush-times confidence man of the Old Southwest to illuminate the danger posed by the contemporary practitioner of confidence art. Sellers and Dilworthy are of different times, different modes, and their intersection intensifies the reader's awareness of their characteristics: Colonel Sellers symbolizes the optimism of the past, the freedom of the frontier, and the confidence of the common man (however often misplaced) in himself, his countrymen, and the land; Senator Dilworthy embodies the cynicism of the present age, the restrictions of industrialized society, and the failure of American democracy to secure the new country. These two confidence men, though on parallel courses, signify two incongruent visions of America. Although repeatedly unsuccessful, Colonel Sellers offers an optimism-tempered failure, while Senator Dilworthy's self-serving cynicism receives only a temporary setback and seems bound to subvert the principles of American democracy. Unlike Simon Suggs's victims, Senator Dilworthy's—the Hawkins family, Mr. Noble, the American people—are not thieves and hypocrites; unlike Senator Dilworthy's snaps, those of Colonel Sellers are victimless. In the contrast between Sellers and Dilworthy, nostalgic past and cynical present, individualistic West and mechanized East, lies Twain's narrative method. His satire is modified only at the novel's close and may represent a concession to the pressures of Charles Dudley Warner: the reader may catch a glimmer of hope in Colonel Sellers's ironic determination to join the bar, in Dilworthy's

tumbled house of cards, in the sentimental marriage (and worldly success) of Philip Sterling and Ruth, and even in the death of Laura Hawkins. However, the ending of *The Gilded Age* is tailored to the demands of American "Miss Nancy" culture (from which Twain never entirely freed himself) and seems to indicate the first-novelist's natural fear of the realistic mode and his embrace of sentimental and sensational techniques for security.

* * *

Kenneth S. Lynn has demonstrated that Mark Twain was thoroughly schooled in Southwest humor and wise to the wiles of the confidence man.[25] From *Innocents Abroad* (1869) to *Roughing It* (1872) and *The Gilded Age* (1873), Mark Twain tested, deformed, and discredited the literary conventions of popular sentimentalists and literary comedians through narrative juxtaposition with those of southwestern humorists. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) Twain masterfully engineers collisions of southwest humor, literary or platform comedy, and sentimental, romantic, and realistic fiction to question the contemporary bases of confidence and convention; to accomplish this he reconstructs the antebellum flush times, the source for Twain of cultural contradictions and irreconcilable attitudes which by the 1880s had created what one nineteenth-century analyst termed "American nervousness."[26] Twain uses the confidence man and the issues of confidence he raises to probe the shaky foundations of American optimism, which he perceived to be unfounded, delusional, and ultimately self-destructive. The nostalgic impulse informing the shifty Colonel Sellers in *The Gilded Age* becomes in *Huckleberry Finn* the innocent-seeming critical tool for exposing the violently restrictive cultural attitudes qua stylistic conventions of American society. The southwestern Colonel Sellers and the slick Senator Dilworthy are replaced by characters of greater moral, rhetorical, and behavioral complexity; to Huckleberry Finn all—with the exception of Jim—seem to demand and betray confidence almost randomly, a puzzling amalgamation of conscious confidence men and unconscious hypocrites. Huck subverts this apparent conformity, measuring their inconsistencies from his perspective as a figure marginal to all levels of society.

Huck Finn blends the vernacular language and posture of Southwest humor, the youthful protagonist of the sentimental novelist, and the convention of the good-bad boy popularized by Thomas Bailey Aldrich in *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870). As the novel's self-deprecating narrator he inspires the reader's trust and emphasizes for him the importance of language; language—in particular diction, syntax, point of view, and tone—defines character, as the author comically warns in an explanatory note on dialect, and is itself a way of perceiving and ordering reality.[27] Huck's description of supper with Widow Douglas, for example, reveals far more than two sets of eating habits.

> The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them. That is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.[28]

Huck stresses two styles of life—the widow's rigid culture and his easy anarchy—in these culinary techniques, tying the reader to the vernacular by silently including him on Huck's side of the table while disarming him with the humorous "barrel of odds and ends" language. In Huck's first-person narration, "things get mixed up . . . and the things go better"; beneath his vernacular is an energy at once comic in its rapid shifts and juxtapositions of styles and eager in its anxiously repetitious attempts to record accurately events the boy doesn't always fully understand.[29] Language serves Huck as a vehicle for apprehending experience, while the language of others serves him as an index to their intentions.

Jim's dialect and superstitions are refined versions of those commonly found in southwestern sketches such as Henry Clay Lewis's "Day of Judgment" (1850);[30] his speculations—in a cow that dies, a bank that "busts," a raft that is stolen—stereotype him within the limitations of a "low" comic character, the bumbling Negro who placidly suffers as the butt of condescending, cruel jokes. Huck learns, however, that Jim's language is deceptive, concealing under a humorous veneer

the complexity of an individual. Huck's own conventional language has proven inadequate to interpret Jim. After convincing Jim that their separation in the fog was only a dream (an inversion of the witch-ride prank Tom pulled in chapter 2), Huck is startled by the depth of emotion Jim conveys in dialect.

> When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed. (71)

The complexity—and rightness—of Jim's criticism, rendered in the same style as his superstitions, requires Huck to evaluate him anew, now as a friend, rejecting as inappropriate the stock figure of Jim as a harmless, humorous, nonhuman slave. Huck has apparently been confused by the discrepancy between his culturally conditioned expectations of Jim's comic response and the reality of Jim's sharp pain; in addition, Huck is taken aback by the contrast between Jim's style of speech and its substance. Style, an ambiguous word that as Warwick Wadlington notes assumes through countless repetition "near-magical properties,"[31] may not be an accurate, immediate indicator of character or motivation but a conventional, limited mode of expression. Jim's sophisticated manipulation of the culturally loaded word *trash* strikes Huck with the force of a slap in the face; as Lionel Trilling contends, at this point "Huck's one last dim vestige of pride of status, his sense of position as a white man, wholly vanishes."[32] Jim securely asserts his own superiority to "white trash" folks and their malicious tricks while offering Huck the opportunity to transcend the boundaries of Huck's own limiting stereotype; to the son of Pap Finn, Jim holds out the offer of concern, companionship, respect, and responsible, reciprocal love.

Huck questions the language of Widow Douglas, Tom Sawyer, Miss Watson, and Pap Finn in a similar fashion, exposing the "love" each appears to extend as self-serving illusion. Al-

though the widow claims self-righteously that smoking tobacco "was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more," "she took snuff too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself" (7–8). Language must be measured against the actions and values it often hides; the style of love the widow is willing to give is restrictive and is based on her self-satisfying design to "sivilize" Huck. Richard Poirier argues, "It is metaphorically suggested that Tom Sawyer and Widow Douglas are in tacit alliance, and both are indicted by the further suggestion that to be 'respectable' in her terms is the necessary condition for membership in his gang. 'Respectable' society as represented by the Widow is equivalent to a 'band of robbers.'"[33] Without putting undue pressure on this assertion, we can agree that both the widow and Tom insist on remaking Huck, the widow with her Bible and Tom with his romances. That Huck recognizes identical attempts to imprison him becomes clear in the language he uses to reject Tom's tiresome adventures: "It had all the marks of a Sunday school" (17). David E. E. Sloane widens this conspiracy against Huck to include Miss Watson and Pap Finn, both of whom desire "to exploit Huck for . . . egotistical satisfaction."[34] Both demand that Huck behave in a proscriptive manner and assure him not of forgiveness and love but of judgment and punishment for disobedience. Pap's "love" seems at best a device to keep Huck from acquiring what he perceives to be a superior style of culture and at worst a ploy to get for himself Huck's fortune while brutalizing his son physically and emotionally because of his own frustrations. Beneath all these languages lies a threat of violence absent from the relationship Huck develops with Jim. In abstract terms, Jim alone offers Huck the chance to rise above conventional limitations to become a responsible partner in an unconventional relationship based not on upbringing, age, race, or economic class but solely on mutual trust and respect.

The violence in the widow's style is so implicit that it usually passes without notice, the reader confidently accepting at face value Huck's conventional assurance that "she never meant no harm by it" (7). Her hypocrisy over tobacco, however, coupled with her socially condoned intentions, demonstrates how even a good woman can internalize and rationalize

official values that she unconsciously imposes on Huck. Each woman Huck holds up as a paragon of virtue—Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, Mary Jane Wilks, Aunt Sally Phelps—silently supports in broad terms the slave system and propagates it in her efforts to "sivilize" Huck. That readers do not question Huck's adoration illustrates the intention and the success of Twain's narrative point of view: to Huck, their attempts to improve him are in no sense equivalent to enslavement but appear beneficent Franklinian programs to help him achieve a desirable and wholly conventional moral perfection.

Tom's style veils two forms of violence. First, Tom is infected by what Twain tagged in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) the "Sir Walter Scott Disease."[35] By insisting on the fulfillment of his literary romantic fantasies (especially in the novel's closing chapters), Tom literally threatens life and earns a bullet for his adventuring. Second, and more pernicious, Tom enforces conformity to exclusionary social conventions that dehumanize the individual—Huck, Jim, even Tom himself. In this view Tom is, as Poirier contends, the widow's accomplice.

The danger posed by the discrepancy between language and act is most obvious in the behavior of Pap Finn. Echoing Johnson Jones Hooper's shifty Simon Suggs at a camp meeting (as do the king and the duke), Pap pretends to have seen the light; like Pap, Simon testifies to rebirth and receives congratulation all around.

> "Come up, come up; thar's room for all!" cried brother Bugg, in his evening exhortation. "Come to the 'seat,' and ef you won't pray yourselves, let *me* pray for you!"
>
> "Yes!" said Simon . . ."it's a game that all can win at! . . . No matter what sort of a hand you've got," added Simon in the fulness of his benevolence; "take stock! Here am *I*, the wickedest and blindest of sinners—has spent my whole life in the sarvice of the devil—has now come in on *narry pair* and won a pile!"[36]

Pap's dramatic performance mimics the pieties of popular reform repeatedly satirized by Southwest humorists.[37]

> "Look at it gentlemen, and ladies all; take ahold of it; shake it. There's a hand that was the hand of a hog; but it ain't so no more; it's the hand of a man that's started in on a new life, and 'll die before he'll go back. You mark them words—don't for-

> get I said them. It's a clean hand now; shake it—don't be afeard."
>
> So they shook it, one after the other, all around, and cried. The judge's wife she kissed it. Then the old man he signed a pledge—made his mark. The judge said it was the holiest time on record, or something like that. (23)

In the tradition of Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood, Pap counterfeits the conventional sentimental rhetoric of nineteenth-century revelation and consolation characteristic of writers from Mason Locke Weems to Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Just as Jim's low dialect could not long hide his full nature, so Pap Finn's pretense of repentance quickly collapses.

> In the night sometime he got powerful thirsty and clumb out onto the porch-roof and slid down a stanchion and traded his new coat [given him by the credulous reforming judge] for a jug of forty-rod, and clumb back again and had a good old time; and towards daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. And when they come to look at that spare room, they had to take soundings before they could navigate it.
>
> The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way. (23)

Pap's destruction of the room reveals the violence lurking just below the surface of his language and prefigures his drunken antigovernment, anti-Negro tirade which culminates in his attempt to murder Huck (chapter 6). The conventional piety and self-serving racist politics Pap mouths suggest that language is not a substitute for violence but a prelude to it; even the judge's language contains a threat. Words can be used to hide violent truth. The ease with which the widow, Pap, and the judge shift styles indicates that language is part of a conventional pose which, like cooking things separately, may be a device both revealing and concealing values and intentions. Although Miss Watson preaches to Huck about the horrors of blasphemy and says "*she* was going to go to the good place" (8), she betrays Jim's confidence in her: she "awluz said she wouldn' sell me down to Orleans. . . . Well, one night I creeps to de do', pooty late, en de do' warn't quite shet, en I hear ole

missus tell de widder she gwyne to sell me down to Orleans, but she didn' want to, but she could git eight hund'd dollars for me, en it 'uz sich a big stack o' money she couldn' resis'" (39). Miss Watson completes the process of rationalization, betrayal, and hypocrisy by attending a camp meeting. At this point in the novel Huck and Jim inhabit a world endangered not by the obvious confidence men of *The Gilded Age* but by an entire society that seems to have assimilated the confidence man's methods and ethics. The threat is all the more frightening because it parades the streets in the guise of respectability.

The discrepancy between language and act is nowhere more apparent than in chapters 17–18 on the Grangerfords and their feud with the Shepherdsons. Their house, which has "so much style" (82), is ruled by the equally impressive Colonel Grangerford: "Col. Grangerford was a gentleman, you see. He was a gentleman all over; and so was his family. . . . He was as kind as he could be—you could feel that, you know, and so you had confidence" (86). Huck misplaces his confidence, for the colonel's impeccable manners, like his emblematic white linen suit, mask the soul of a madman. The Grangerfords appear to have refinement, religion, and respectability, but it is the forms—the style—the family truly cherishes. The religion of this "handsome lot of quality" is little more than a sentimental cult of death, consecrating the irrational feud and hallowing the "spidery" crayon masterpiece of Emmeline as if it were a death-bed self-portrait. Despite the comfort, kindness, and generosity Huck shares in the Grangerford home, the realities of their feud make him sick and reveal to the reader how bankrupt of ultimate moral values is their natural aristocracy. Huck detects an underlying kinship, moreover, between Emmeline's speedy tributes for the dead and Buck's monomaniacal haste to kill a Shepherdson; both illustrate the obsessiveness that has become normal. Emmeline's pictures always give Huck the "fan-tods" in part because they indicate an unhealthy preoccupation with death as an aesthetic, idealized experience.

> Every time a man died, or a woman died, or a child died, she would be on hand with her "tribute" before he was cold. She called them tributes. The neighbors said it was the doctor

> first, then Emmeline, then the undertaker—the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then she hung fire on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't the same, after that; she never complained, but she kind of pined away and did not live long. (85)

The central place death has assumed during the long years of the feud has blinded everyone (with the exception of Harney Shepherdson, who spares Buck and Huck before he elopes with Sophia Grangerford) to the corrupting influence this unexamined, obsessive focus has on basically good people. The highly stylized graveyard portrait of a distraught lover—"And Art Thou Gone Yes Thou Art Gone Alas"—suggests that the cultural trappings highly visible in the house's style license the feud's code of violence. Death is either casually dismissed or emotionally applauded. In response to Huck's question "Has anybody been killed this year, Buck?" the boy replies, "Yes, we got one and they got one" (89). And when Huck accuses Baldy Shepherdson of cowardice, Buck immediately rallies to his defense: "I reckon he *warn't* a coward. Not by a blame' sight. There ain't a coward amongst them Shepherdsons—not a one. And there ain't no cowards amongst the Grangerfords, either. Why, that old man kep' up his end in a fight one day, for a half an hour, against three Grangerfords, and come out winner" (89). Reminiscent of sentimental rationalizations of death common in Civil War fictions such as Beecher's popular *Norwood*, the Grangerfords' conciliatory program encourages murder though the causes of the "war" are at best dimly understood by individuals. Violence has become so ingrained in their minds that it dominates their lives, warping their love for the dead Emmeline and the eloped Sophia. The slaughter at the river, punctuated by shouts of "Kill Them! Kill Them!," strips away the last shreds of respectability for the reader and for Huck: "It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree" (94).

Huck also voices Twain's disgust at the antebellum cult of sentimentality that linked honor with violence. In *Life on the Mississippi* he argues that stylistic affectations—castles, false culture, Sir Walter Scott, and duels—caused the Civil War. This self-deluding, self-authenticating "Sir Walter Scott disease" made violence a national virtue and, dissociating death

from its context in reality, swept historical (and literary) alternatives aside. Families, individuals, and mobs are encouraged to prove themselves through rites that are socially sanctioned forms of murder. Thus the drunken Boggs, a comic figure lifted from Southwest humor, is honorably gunned down by the aristocratic Colonel Sherburn; honorably, for though Boggs is not armed, he ignores Colonel Sherburn's gentlemanly warning. In like manner, the nation ignored warnings of impending war and accepted the violence of the Colonel Sherburns as heroic. Boggs, the focus of the delighted crowd, poses an institutionalized comic threat; Colonel Sherburn, either taking Boggs at his word or simply bored by him, changes the traditional comedy of the Old Southwest—the boasting or bluffing contest that is often a substitute for violence[38]—into a sentimental tragedy. To this the crowd reacts by threatening to lynch Colonel Sherburn, but their threat, like Boggs's, is all bluster. Twain documents the manner in which sentimental forms of aristocratic pretension come to dominate the humorous tradition of southwestern humor—kill it, in fact—and the manner in which these idealizations—represented by Colonel Sherburn—retain their power. Once Sherburn has been recognized as heroic, an epitome of American culture, and has been awarded a title of public respect ("Colonel"), he has been given the authority to command respect though he publicly commits murder. Obeying the very forms the people have chosen to elevate, Colonel Sherburn triumphs over the lynch mob stylistically.

> The idea of *you* lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a *man*! Because you're brave enough to tar and feather poor friendless cast-out women that come along here, did that make you think you had grit enough to lay your hands on a *man*? Why, a *man's* safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's day-time and you're not behind him. (117)

Huck doesn't wish to dwell on the implications of Colonel Sherburn's evaluation of American manhood, for the colonel seems a cold-blooded killer who successfully defends himself from the crowd by demonstrating the qualities Americans most admire—confidence, individualism, and bravery. Categories of experience break down as a comic drunk becomes a

tragic victim and a cowardly murderer seems suddenly a towering hero. These paradoxical transformations indicate a radical disorder at the center of American culture, one that threatens to wrench Huck from the normative context of referential language and deed and throw him headfirst into a morally chaotic world of violent and ambiguous action.

To define this aberrant society Twain turns directly to the flush-times confidence man. At the center of *Huckleberry Finn* spring up the king and the duke, a counterforce to the violent sentimentality promulgated by Colonels Grangerford and Sherburn. The king and the duke are at first Suggsian confidence men who recapitulate the entire southwestern humorous tradition; in addition to selling teeth cleaner and running temperance revivals, their repertoire of snaps includes, according to them, the following:

> "Jour printer, by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theatre-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn at mesmerism and phrenology when there's a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture, sometimes—oh, I do lots of things—most anything that comes handy, so it ain't work. What's your lay?"
>
> "I've done considerable in the doctoring way in my time [replies the King to the Duke]. Layin' on o' hands is my best holt—for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k'n tell a fortune pretty good, when I've got somebody along to find out the facts for me. Preachin's my line, too; and workin' camp-meetin's; and missionarin' around." (99)

In language, physical appearance, and profession these rogues recall the confidence men of Hooper, Baldwin, Harris, Melville, and a dozen of their cronies from the *Spirit of the Times*. Their games are designed to fleece hypocrites, pretenders, and fools, and as such serve as chastening antidotes to the virulent poisons of the self-righteous society of murdering heroes. Insinuating themselves with Huck and Jim, they create humorous identities for themselves in a ritual ceremony of mock-revelation.

> "Gentlemen," says the young man, very solemn, "I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am duke!"
>
> Jim's eyes bugged out when he heard that; and I reckon

From *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (first edition).

> mine did, too. Then the baldhead says: "No! you can't mean it?"
>
> "Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the title and estates—the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant—I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater." (100)

His companion, however, will not be outdone in invention.

> "Bilgewater, kin I trust you?" says the old man, still sort of sobbing.
>
> "To the bitter death!" He took the old man by the hand and squeezed it, and says, "The secret of your being: speak!"
>
> "Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!"
>
> You bet you Jim and me stared, this time. Then the duke says: "You are what?"
>
> "Yes, my friend, it is too true—your eyes is lookin' at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Sev-

> enteen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette." (100–101)

These caricatures parody the convention of concealed royal birth gracing innumerable sentimental fictions and "Wild Western" Beadle novels. Twain sets up and satisfies comic expectations, using the king's rechristening of Bridgewater as "Bilgewater" to deflate the pretensions of both impersonators. And just as Hooper takes a swipe at the airs of real generals and legislators through the masquerades of "Captain" Simon Suggs, so too does Twain burlesque the posturing of real kings and dukes.

Sharing Huck's point of view, the reader recognizes with him "that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all [though they give Huck a moment's pause], but just low-down humbugs and frauds." Huck's instinct, however, is to play along.

> If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family; and it warn't no use to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him. If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way. (102)

Huck characterizes these four as a "family," asserting and extending the complex relationship he has developed with Jim to include two humorous confidence men. They too must be seen as more than mere stereotypes; they are individuals speaking discrete languages, personalities with human emotions and motives. Yet in lumping the king and the duke with Pap in the phrase *his kind of people*, Huck foreshadows a sinister side to these comedians not immediately apparent: the king and the duke are akin to Pap in having the capacity for violence, and they too interpret selfishly the meaning of the word *family*.

There is little evidence of their violence at the Pokeville camp meeting; only the emotions of the congregation are violent.

> You couldn't make out what the preacher said, any more, on account of the shouting and crying. Folks got up, everywheres in the crowd, and worked their way, just by main strength, to the mourners' bench, with the tears running down their faces; and when all the mourners had got up there to the front

> benches in a crowd, they sung, and shouted, and flung themselves down on the straw, just crazy and wild. (106)

Critics including Bernard DeVoto and Walter Blair have proven that Twain's camp meeting owes more than a nod to Hooper's in style, tone, and action.[39]

> The rest were walking to and fro, (engaged in the other exercises we have indicated,) among the "mourners"—a host of whom occupied the seat set apart for their especial use—or made personal appeals to the mere spectators. The excitement was intense. Men and women rolled on the ground, or lay sobbing or shouting in promiscuous heaps. More then all, the negroes sang and screamed and prayed. Several, under the influence of what is technically called "the jerks," were plunging and pitching about with convulsive energy. (*SS*, 119–20)

Capt. Simon Suggs and the king exploit the communal desire for religious ecstasy, which the *North American Review* called in 1862 "aesthetic religionism": "It is sought for its emotions . . . but when emotion is sought for its own sake, it may become as selfish as the love of money, or the love of fame. We desire the spiritual luxury, and, if it comes not otherwise, it must be got up."[40] This "sentimental pietism" is false, a perverse elevation of style over substance suitable for attack in 1845 (*Simon Suggs*), in 1862 (the *North American Review*), and in 1884 (*Huckleberry Finn*); it defines one variety of religious experience that continues to haunt the American mind, manifesting itself in William Dean Howells's *Leatherwood God* (1916), Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* (1927), and Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) and *The Day of the Locust* (1939), to list only a sample from the early twentieth century.

Mark Twain plays the camp meeting in Hooper's style. The king's counterfeit of a pious conversion imitates that of Simon Suggs, though the king's harangue is narrated by Huck while Simon speaks for himself. The king pretends to be a reformed pirate of the Indian Ocean while Captain Simon Suggs—though he pretends to have "got" religion—delights in manipulating the brethren without benefit of masquerade. The reader's enjoyment of the king's snap is limited by the fact that Twain renders it in the third person; although the congregation may deserve fleecing, Twain wishes the reader to with-

hold complete approval of the king's actions. In other words, Hooper asks the reader to respond directly to Simon Suggs, to triumph with him over the hypocritical congregation and the dangerous Bela Bugg; Twain desires the reader to respond with laughter to the scene, but to maintain enough critical distance from the king to discourage reader-character identification. For this reason the king takes on the self-consciously literary identity of a pirate: he remains at this point a two-dimensional comic character within a larger, conventional, comic structure and does not make the personal demand of empathic approval that Simon Suggs (or Huck Finn) does of the reader. Both confidence men bilk the camp meeting so that they can purportedly begin the good works of the missionary preacher, and as the king concludes (in his one bit of direct discourse), both find the preacher "the truest friend a pirate ever had" (107).

The king and duke's burlesque "Shaksperean Revival!!!" follows the popular tradition of butchered classics[41]: "They laughed all the time, and that made the duke mad; and everybody left, anyway, before the show was over, but one boy which was asleep" (120). The revival, an analogue to the camp meeting, sets the stage for the drunken entrance of Boggs. Twain juxtaposes frontier comedy and frontier violence, suggesting that the inflamed aesthetics of the Arkansas townsfolk encourage Colonel Sherburn to kill Boggs: their "sentimental pietism" casts aside fineness of emotion for intensity of emotion. In the duke's words, "What they wanted was low comedy—and may be something ruther worse than low comedy" (120).

What they get, first of all, is the spectacular murder of Boggs. It is clearly intended to be "worse than low comedy," as is Colonel Sherburn's parallel cowing of the mob. Yet the duke has something different in mind; this town deserves not garbled Shakespeare but his revived revival, "The King's Camelopard or The Royal Nonesuch." The Duke packs the house by printing handbills concluding with the line, "LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED" (120), which the men swallow as a euphemism for *obscene*.[42] They eargerly pay up for three nights, filling the theater as they had filled the street around Boggs, as they had listened to the story of his murder with rapt

attention, and as they had rushed to the house of Colonel Sherburn.[43] The duke "said he could size their style"; what they desire is a dehumanizing show.

> And at last when [the duke had] got everybody's expectations up high enough, he rolled up the curtain, and the next minute the king come a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow. . . . The people most killed themselves laughing; and when the king got done capering, and capered off behind the scenes, they roared and clapped and stormed and haw-hawed till he come back and done it over again; and after that, they made him do it another time. (121)

They are sold in the finest Suggsian tradition. Twain dramatizes a momentary victory of Southwest humor over the cult of emotion and style, which demands that the performance be repeated, like the retelling of Boggs's murder, again and again. In a gesture of poetic justice, the confidence men give the townspeople what they demand. At the Royal Nonesuch, as at the camp meeting, the comic actions of the confidence men offer a corrective to violent sentimentality. In *Simon Suggs* and *Huckleberry Finn* confidence men boil hypocrites in laughter.

Since chapter 19 the novel has been humorously directed by the king and the duke; the heart-wrenching yet conventional sentimental story of Jim's deaf and dumb daughter 'Lisbeth (124–25), however, ushers Huck and Jim into a nightmarish reality. The king and the duke, at first able to exploit the falseness of language and social convention for profit, at last become trapped themselves in the flush-times dream of instant wealth; whereas at the camp meeting or the Royal Nonesuch they had consciously manipulated the forms of society, in the Wilks adventure they succumb to its substance, no longer mimicking but embodying the fantasies of Pap Finn and the violence of Colonel Sherburn. When the king and the duke rationalize selling Jim, they have become part of the culture whose pretensions they had humorously counterfeited. Although they con the naive Wilks girls, Gary Lindberg argues that at this point the king and the duke "must be seen not as peripheral freaks but as stylized exemplars. They help characterize the suckers they exploit, for their methods depend on

a massive public willingness to settle for trumpery."[44] Their poor performance, which "was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (130), reveals a shift in their function and effect. Confidence art, so important to the comedy of Longstreet's Yellow Blossom, Hooper's Simon Suggs, Baldwin's Ovid Bolus, Harris's Sut Lovingood, and Melville's Confidence Man, is made subservient to what Whitman called the "magician's serpent" of moneymaking; with a wriggle the king and the duke assume the position and the imperative of Baldwin's Simon Suggs, Jr., and Warren's Billy Fishback: "By-and-by the thing dragged through, and everything was sold. Everything but a little old trifling lot in the graveyard. So they'd got to work *that* off—I never see such a girafft as the king was for wanting to swallow *everything*" (153).

The desire to reduce everything to sacks of gold marks the absorption of the king and the duke into the heart of society. In contrast to Simon Suggs, they cease to be marginal characters of the frontier and come to represent instead the direction in which the new country as a whole is headed: all will be assimilated into a modern age of hypocrisy, violence, and greed. Although the gradual souring of the confidence man's humor is present throughout the nineteenth century, the king and the duke cause an especially bad taste to linger: not only is the reader made to sympathize with the victimized Huck, Jim, and the Wilks girls, but the sale of Jim defeats the entire imaginative—and moral—journey of the novel. Even Tom Sawyer, who seems to take up the role of comic confidence man at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, betrays Huck and Jim to a figurative ride on a rail. Tom obeys the dehumanizing forms of sentimental culture defined by the king and the duke, Pap, Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, the Grangerfords, Colonel Sherburn, and even the good Phelpses. He supports its style, perpetuates its violence, and cherishes its emblem—a totemic bullet. Yet Tom's prank is but a romantic shadow of the southwestern confidence man's art, a betrayal that he attempts to ignore by reversing the traditional Suggsian exchange of cash: "We had Jim out of the chains in no time . . . and Tom give Jim forty dollars for being prisoner" (225).

Mark Twain reimagines the confidence man, a convention representative of the frontier flush times, to reveal the bank-

ruptcy of the twin traditions of sentimental and humorous consolation that inform his contemporary culture. In *Huckleberry Finn* he contrasts southwestern and sentimental fiction, juxtaposing and conflating the confidence man's conscious manipulation of fraudulent social forms with the sentimental character's unconscious acceptance of them as genuine to create a radical new paradigm of American society. The horror at the center of antebellum culture, the cause of the Civil War and the source of the corrupt Gilded Age, is an infinite capacity for confident self-delusion visible in the history of the confidence man; preaching equality, opportunity, and freedom, society enforces submission to its self-serving, self-destructive conventions. Huck Finn recognizes—as the king and the duke (and Tom) do not—that the confidence man is no longer a marginal predator but a national symbol of American culture. Forsaking mastery of the frontier flush times and betraying the heritage of Southwest humor that spawned him, the confidence man stands self-deceived. Twain's variations on the convention suggest that unlike Huck, who can potentially "light out for the Territory," the confidence man loses much of his flexibility and many of his humorous characteristics as he willingly submits—like the new country itself—to Aunt Sally's attempts to "sivilize" him.

Huck Finn should not be seen as yet another confidence man, though as Gary Lindberg notes he "can disengage principle from practice by his dexterity."[45] He does tell lies, assume false identities, and manipulate morality as easily as persimmons. Yet with the exception of the early tricks he plays on Jim in the style of Harris's Sut Lovingood, Huck's deceptions have an implicit consecration of their own. "All of Huck's freely chosen commitments to one face or another of his varied masquerade," writes Daniel Hoffman, "are given with the ultimate end of protecting Jim and himself from the world."[46] Struggling to survive in what Richard Poirier terms "a whole society built on games, tricks, and illusions,"[47] Huck spontaneously adopts when necessary the colors of the enemy—the language of the confidence man. Warwick Wadlington aptly remarks that "the benign, defensive trickster Huck discovers that he cannot pray a lie,"[48] while Richard Boyd Hauck correctly contends that Huck "never develops a

conscious knowledge of what lies are for. . . . His beautifully constructed defensive lies succeed in keeping Jim safe, but their success does not help expand Huck's vision."[49] Huck must be seen as distinct from the king and the duke, who acquire from the success of their early tricks the confidence to expand their operations past the breaking point in the Wilks episode. On the raft Jim teaches Huck that the confidence man's grammar of humor masks a language of cruelty and betrayal, and it is this lesson that makes Huck uncomfortable with Tom's romantic charade in the novel's closing chapters. His resistance to Tom's shenanigans, through which Jim must suffer as a literal and figurative "prisoner of style" (208), supports Lionel Trilling's assessment that although Huck may be a skillful liar he never lies to himself.[50] Self-delusion ultimately delimits the convention of the confidence man. The power of Huck's appeal resides in his uncanny ability to transcend literary and cultural stereotypes, even such a protean and practical form as that of the confidence man.

In Twain's later fiction, Hank Morgan is a Franklinian pragmatist whose confident manipulations result in massacre, while the switched infants Pudd'nhead Wilson never satisfactorily sorts out suggest a vision of fate not entirely subject to the confidence man's legerdemain. In the fragments that Albert Bigelow Paine collected and revised as *The Mysterious Stranger* in 1916, the confidence man has become a fantastic being operating in an abstract realm of mythic forces. The confidence man emerges from these pages as Satan, a recombination of the convention with larger traditions. Although Twain himself never finished the manuscripts, Satan's dramatic revelation—that all is "a grotesque and foolish dream"[51]—suggests that to resolve the issues of confidence and convention his fictions raised, Twain was forced to resort to sleight of hand. And as Huck Finn concludes, "I been there before."

6 FROM THE NEW COUNTRY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

> "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"
>
> —Jay Gatsby (1925)

In *The Leatherwood God* (1916), William Dean Howells explores the limits of frontier optimism and the capacity for self-delusion exposed by one version of the American confidence man. Joseph C. Dylks, Howells's confidence man, was a historical figure in the drama of the flush times; as such, he formed the perfect focus for the realistic novelist who desired to recreate and appraise the enthusiasms of the formative 1820s. In composing the novel, Howells explicitly used Richard H. Taneyhill's history of Joseph Dylks, an evangelical trickster who in 1828, claiming to be God Almighty, promised to bring down the New Jerusalem in Leatherwood Creek, Ohio. Howells summarized Taneyhill's account in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1871), included the Leatherwood incident in his own *Stories of Ohio* (1897), and closely followed Taneyhill's research in *The Leatherwood God*. Clearly Howells viewed Joseph Dylks as an index to a vanished age.[1]

Richard Taneyhill—an editor, lawyer, and antiquarian—proposes a rational explanation for Dylks's success notable for its common sense and for its applicability as a general law: the Ohio farmers were simply duped.

> Religious impostors have flourished in almost every portion of the historic period. Nor is this remarkable, when we reflect that man, universally, is disposed to give credence to marvelous stories, to put faith in sanctimonious pretensions, and to refer whatever he does not understand to some supernatural agency. These religious cheats have always found ready subjects to impress with their views, however visionary, and to mold into material to promote their ulterior schemes and purposes, however absurd and wicked.
>
> Such an imposter was Joseph C. Dylks. (7)

As a historian, Taneyhill locates the cause of the Leatherwood incident in nineteenth-century expansionism: the flush times encouraged scoundrels like Dylks to con Americans whose understanding, hope, and faith had been severely tested by conditions in 1820s Ohio. Second- and third-generation settlers had lost the initial driving purpose of their pioneer forefathers and had not yet developed as a community the stabilizing secular comforts of civilization. Their desire for a better world made them easy marks for an evangelical confidence man who promised the ease and splendor of heaven on earth.

Writing of Dylks in the period immediately following the Civil War, Taneyhill represents the Ohio farmers as innocent victims of aggression whose 1828 crisis of faith reflects his own doubts about America in 1870. To him there is nothing amusing in delusion and betrayal, nothing humorous in this historical kinsman of Hooper's Simon Suggs. In fact, despite Dylks's failure to perform promised miracles, despite his trial by the community as an impostor, and despite his flight from Leatherwood to Philadelphia, as late as 1870 Taneyhill interviewed people who firmly believed that Dylks was in truth God Almighty. To Taneyhill—and to Howells—this credulity and naivete typify in microcosm the spirit of the past (and present) new country.

Howells underscores his novel's historical foundation in a "Publisher's Note" (2), but asserts as well his freedom from the historian's strict fidelity to events, reproducing, paraphrasing, or inventing incidents in pursuit of his artistic ends.[2] Distant from both Dylks's 1820s and Taneyhill's 1870s, he apprehends the meaning of the Leatherwood God from several points of view, infusing the Ohio advent with national significance. Through Matthew Braile—the normative "Squire" with whom the fiction's narrative frame opens and closes—Howells analyzes Dylks's appeal from a psychological perspective at once more individual and more universal than the historian's.

> "You see," [Braile] resumed after a moment, "life is hard in a new country, and anybody that promises salvation on easy terms has got a strong hold at the very start. People will accept anything from him. Somewhere, tucked away in us, is the longing to know whether we'll live again, and the hope that we'll live happy. I've got fun out of that fact in a community

> where I've had the reputation of an infidel for fifty years; but all along I've felt it in myself. We want to be good, and we want to be safe, even if we are not good; and the first fellow that comes along and tells us to have faith in him, and he'll make it all right, why we have faith in him. That's all." (156–57)

Though no less moral than Taneyhill, Howells is less quick to condemn the impostor, his ready subjects, and the new country, tempering the excited judgments of David Gillespie and the Herd of the Lost—to say nothing of Jane Gillespie and the Little Flock—with Braile's cautious common sense. Early in the novel Howells's tone is in fact less accusatory than nostalgic; like Mark Twain surveying a sleeping town, Howells initially indulges in an almost pastoral impulse.

> Already in the third decade of the nineteenth century, the settlers in the valley of Leatherwood Creek had opened the primeval forest to their fields of corn and tobacco on the fertile slopes and rich bottomlands. . . . The name passed to the settlement, and then it passed to the man who came and went there in mystery and obloquy, and remained lastingly famed in the annals of the region as the Leatherwood God.
>
> At the time he appeared the community had become a centre of influence spiritual as well as material, after a manner unknown to later conditions. It was still housed, for the most part, in the log cabins which the farmers built when they ceased to be pioneers, but in the older clearings, and along the creek a good many frame dwellings stood, and even some of brick. The population, woven of the varied strains from the north, east and south which have mixed to form the Middle Western people, enjoyed an ease of circumstance not so great as to tempt their thoughts from the other world and fix them on this. In their remoteness from the political centres of the young Republic, they seldom spoke of the civic questions stirring the towns of the East; the commercial and industrial problems which vex modern society were unknown to them. Religion was their chief interest and the seriousness which they had inherited from their Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Moravian ancestry was expressed in their orderly and diligent lives; but in the general prosperity the stringency of their several creeds had so far relaxed that their distinctive public rite had come to express a mutual toleration. (3–4)

In the novel's first two paragraphs Howells recreates an idyllic vision of Leatherwood, Ohio, in 1828; it is an imaginative vision still powerful in 1916, a symbolic landscape evoking a

lost Golden Age characterized by recently won "ease of circumstance" and "general prosperity." To Howells, Leatherwood typifies both the initial material success of nineteenth-century pioneers and the persistent frontier spirit of mutability and yearning. The juxtaposition in narrative sequence and style of Matthew Braile's domestic satisfaction and the "curious doin's" at the camp meeting, for example, illustrates the breadth of Leatherwood's "mutual toleration," which blankets the "infidel" and the faithful, the intellectual and the unsophisticated, in "general prosperity." Abel Reverdy's account to Braile emphasizes stylistically disparate responses to post-frontier conditions; the energies of the people, no longer necessary to tame the wilderness, find an outlet in revivalism.

> "Yes, sir . . . he had 'em goin' lively, about midnight, now I tell you: whoopun' and yellun', and rippun' and stavun', and fallun' down with the jerks, and pullun' and haulun' at the sinners, to git 'em up to the mourners' bench, and hurrahun' over 'em, as fast as they was knocked down and drug out. . . . They had eight camp-fires goun' instead o' four, on top of the highest stageun's yit, so the whole place was lit up as bright as day. . . . 'What shall we pray for?' and just then there come a kind of snort, and a big voice shouted out, 'Salvation!' and then there come another snort,—*Hooff!*—like there was a scared horse got loose right in there among the people; and some of 'em jumped up from their seats, and tumbled over the benches, and some of 'em bounced off, and fell into fits, and the women screeched and fainted, thick as flies. . . .
>
> "What was it? A man! A stranger that nobody seen before, and nobody suspicioned was there till they hearn him give that kind of a snort. . . . He was in his bare head, and he had a suit of long, glossy, jet-black hair hengun' down back of his ears clean to his shoulders. . . . He was dressed in the slickest kind of black broad-cloth, with a long frock-coat, and a white cravat. He had on a ruffled shirt, and a tall beaver hat, the color of the fur, and a pair of these here high boots, with his breeches strapped down under 'em." (7–8)

Side by side with the narrator's image of pastoral (albeit progressive) tranquility, Braile's scornful "Hoonch," Dylks's horselike "Hooff," Abel's low vernacular, and the emotionalism of evangelical revelation express harmlessly channeled, eccentric points of view. The cavorting, jerking, and bellowing of the camp meeting, rendered by Abel and undercut by Braile, harken back to the rough sketches of Southwest humor, while

Dylks's first appearance as a slick mysterious stranger conjures up visions of traditional confidence men like Longstreet's Yellow Blossom, Melville's Cosmopolitan, and Twain's king and duke. Howells blends literary and historical elements to recreate the flush times.

The community's intensity of emotion—released in the camp meeting and visible, though repressed, in the Brailes' grief over their son's death—makes them susceptible to manipulation. Dylks's preaching at the temple dramatizes their vulnerability to a confidence man who appeals to their hunger for salvation.

> He gave out a passage of scripture, as a sort of text, but he did not keep to it; he followed with other passages, and his discourse was a rehearsal of these rather than a sermon. His memory in them was unerring; women who knew their Bibles by heart, sighed their satisfaction in his perfectness; they did not care for the relevance or irrelevance of the passages; all was scripture, all was the one inseparable Word of God, dreadful, blissful, divine, promising heaven, threatening hell. Groans began to go up from the people held in the strong witchery of the man's voice. They did not know whether he spoke long or not. (21)

The uncritical ones emotionally approve Dylks's stylistic "perfectness" without examining its intention; their ecstasy of faith denies the validity of all but self-fulfilling visionary claims. Isolated from the rest of the community by their desire for immediate consolation, they lose the ability to discriminate rationally between sincere religious faith and fanatical frenzy, surrendering volition to the confidence man's "strong witchery." Matthew Braile ridicules his neighbors' excesses and trances, while Dylks's slick Bible-quoting act and Abel Reverdy's wide-eyed account of the "curious doin's" implicitly criticize those who would mistake this confidence game for the humorous tricks of Simon Suggs or Sut Lovingood. Initially presented in comic terms, Dylks is suddenly characterized by his symbolic apposition with a bat (19), while his evil nature is fully disclosed in his conversation with David Gillespie.

> "Listen here, Joseph Dylks! I know what you're after here because you always was: other people's money. I've got some

> money; I've got three hundred dollars saved up since I paid off the mortgage. If you'll take it and go"—
>
> "Three hundred dollars! No, no! Keep your money, old man. . . . I work my work. . . . I come from God."
>
> Gillespie looked at him as he paced back and forth. "If I didn't know you for the common scoundrel that married my sister against my will, and lived on her money till it was gone, and then left her and let her believe he was dead, I might believe you *did* come from God—or the Devil, you—you turkey cock, you—stallion!" (26–27)

Having previously taken advantage of Nancy Gillespie, Dylks seems suddenly to combine the most threatening aspects of two conventional literary types—the confidence man and the sentimental villain. As Howells portrays him, Dylks is at once a smooth-talking betrayer, an animal shouting his horselike "Hooff," and an avatar of the Arch-Deceiver himself. He succeeds, Howells's narrator concludes, because

> in that day of remoteness from any greater world the people of the backwoods longed to feel themselves near the greatest World of all, and well within the radius of its mysteries. They talked mostly of these when they met together, and in the solitude of their fields they dwelt upon them; on their weekdays and workdays they turned over the threats and promises of the Sabbath and expected a light or a voice from on high which should burst their darkness and silence. (41)

This constant hunger for earthly proof of a providential design, a natural response to the uncertainties of backwoods life, leaves the people of Leatherwood open to exploitation. Peter Hingston, a wealthy widower, finds comfort in his new role as a saint; the brothers and sisters of Dylks's Little Flock discover new joy in the belief that they will never die; even Matthew Braile, who calls the Leatherwood God a "rascal," admits a similar yearning, keeps a coon given him by a boy who reminds him of his dead son, and wields his irony like a club against the inevitable. Using a repetitive, highly allusive language, Dylks tempts the community by appealing to the longing for ultimate certainty, offering an everlasting life of luxurious ease, all the rewards of heaven with none of its sacrifices; all this he pledges to "the faithful," beguiling the Little Flock into a corrupt, a self-centered false hope and a violent, self-righteous faith: "They accepted the differences which parted

husband, wife, parent and child, and set strife between brothers and neighbors as proof of his divine authority to bring a sword; they knew by the hate and dissension which followed from his claim that it was of supernatural force" (52). The threat of this confidence man is greater by far than that posed by his literary kinsmen, for he appeals to the most natural and best impulses of good people in such a gradual fashion, inflaming their hopes and fears, that his ascension from teacher to prophet to God Almighty seems reasonable. Why not expect a new covenant in a new country? Why not a nineteenth-century revelation in the Promised Land? Why not the New Jerusalem in Leatherwood, Ohio?

Dylks rhetorically fulfills the implicit American dream of rebirth without death and wealth without work, yet at the novel's structural center he attempts empirically to convince the community of his divinity by publicly performing a miracle. From his apparent failure to create a seamless raiment, *The Leatherwood God* pivots to conclusion: Jim Redfield tears out a patch of Dylks's hair, proving that his "prophecies of doom to those who should lay hands upon him had been falsified" (97). Jane Gillespie—representative of many believers—is wooed from her confidence in Dylks by this evidence that his claims are merely rhetorical, inflated to the level of unassailable truths by her own religious and sexual desire. Having lost his aura of supernatural authority, the confidence man is arraigned before and acquitted by Matthew Braile, the justice of the peace, and, in a continuing parody of Christ's trials, Dylks escapes to wander in the wilderness.

Howells's omniscient narrator records Dylks's thoughts to expose the confidence man's fraudulence to the reader.

> The place where the hair had been torn from his head burned like fire; it burned like the wound of a man whom he had once heard tell how it felt to be scalped by an Indian . . . and Dylks pitied himself that it should be so with him, and cursed himself for his unguarded boast that any one who touched a hair of his head should perish. He promised that if God would show him a little mercy, and send a raven with something for him to eat, something warm, or send him a cup of coffee, somehow, or even a raw egg, he would go forth before the people, get up in the Temple amidst his believers and declare himself a false prophet and a false god. (109)

Dylks's similar confessions of confusion to Nancy Gillespie (110–14) and Matthew Braile (116–21) emphasize his impotence; as Haskell Springer points out, this narrative technique of repetition "purges . . . even the slightest suggestion of supernatural agency in connection with Dylks."[3] The failure of the Leatherwood God to live up to his promotion, however revealing of his confidence game to the reader, has less effect upon the Little Flock, who as Dylks admits would rather martyr him than renounce their consoling new faith (114, 116–17). This obsession is quite different from the passion for money, revenge, or sport characteristic of the gulls of conventional literary con men: to his victims, Capt. Simon Suggs swears, "I'll be d——d if you'll forget me," implying an ironic, belated revelation of his snaps; although Howells adumbrates the conventional appearance of Dylks's pose—one that places him in the company of Simon Suggs, the Cosmopolitan, Sut Lovingood, and the king and duke—Howells stresses, as does Taneyhill, that the survivors of the Little Flock as late as 1870 persist in mistaking Dylks's empty rhetoric for divine truth. This blindness is a permanent affliction and seems especially horrifying because self-inflicted; they ante up their faith and lose not dollars or pride but (in conventional Christian terms) the hope of ever discovering divine truth.

The members of the Little Flock are not the only ones who are self-deceived. Howells explores the confidence man's inner drama, concerned equally with his psychology and the mechanics of his game, and reveals that Dylks is himself cut off from other men and from God; he confesses his shaky confidence in his divinity to Matthew Braile, yet as the squire makes clear, this confidence man cannot even claim the distinction of originality.

> "Why, you poor devil, you're not in any unusual fix. It must have been so with all the impostors in the world, from Mahomet up and down! . . . That's the way it's always gone: first the liar tells his lie, and some of the fools believe it, and proselyte the other fools, and when there are enough of them, their faith begins to work on the liar's own unbelief, till he takes his lie for the truth. . . . Why, you poor bag of shorts!" he said, "I could almost feel sorry for you, in spite of the mischief you've made. Why, *you* oughtn't to be sent to the penitentiary, or even lynched. *You* ought to be put amongst the county idiots in the poorhouse." (118–19)

Braile's recognition that the Leatherwood God deserves pity marks a new variation of the American confidence man as a literary convention; Dylks is the victim of the very forces he employs to win and betray the confidence of others. Although Mark Twain suggested this characteristic of the con man in Huck Finn's sympathy for the tarred and feathered king and duke (a punishment considered for Dylks), it is Howells who expounds upon his pathetic self-delusion; unlike Colonel Sellers and Captain Suggs, Joseph Dylks has no comic resilience.

Howells surveys the development of nineteenth-century America using the historical confidence man, Joseph C. Dylks, to focus his fictional examination of the progressive dangers of frontier self-reliance, millenarianism, evangelicism, and sentimental piety. In *The Leatherwood God* he charts a growing awareness that the confidence man's drama is not comedy but tragedy: Dylks begins as a snorting, Southwest humorist's sharper; becomes a smooth-talking, serious threat to the social order; suffers exposure and is variously hated, pitied, and still believed; and, taking his confidence game "Over the Mountains," survives his death-by-drowning to become a local legend. These four stages may serve as an abbreviated history of the confidence-man convention, sketching not only what Howells calls the "psychological evolution" of Joseph Dylks but also the evolution of the convention's form and function in nineteenth-century American fiction. In addition, these stages act as a condensed review of nineteenth-century frontier history. What is striking is that they form a consistent pattern of confidence given, confidence betrayed, and confidence nonetheless reaffirmed. Howells locates his novel in the 1820s, grounds it in historical events, because he perceives that period to be fundamental to an understanding of American optimism. The flush times gave rise to an intense individual and collective faith in the opportunities of the new country. The New Eden appeared in 1828 to be immediately and personally realizable because the frontier wilderness was rapidly giving way to farms, because a democratic society had been successfully established, and because it seemed that nothing was beyond the abilities of the American determined to achieve his dream.

Yet Howells also perceived—as Taneyhill perceived in 1870—that the nineteenth century was a period of betrayal,

during which many Americans chose slavery over democracy, sectionalism over nationalism, materialism over millenarianism, and illusion over reality. To Howells this created a pattern of betrayal repeated again and again in the nineteenth century. It is to Howells's credit that he understood this betrayal to be self-inflicted and insidiously tenacious: Joseph Dylks and the people of Leatherwood betray themselves, betray their dream, and nevertheless insist on the reality of their vision. Howells suggests that this insistence is the root of American optimism and that the myth of the realized—or realizable—American Eden, like that of Joseph Dylks, is still potent and dangerous in 1916. Its power Howells locates in the historical and imaginative development of the new country; its danger lies in its tendency to seduce Americans from an often hard reality to a comfortable, self-righteous, self-congratulatory illusion.

The ultimate proof of the persistence of American optimism may be found in the conclusion of *The Leatherwood God*. For although Matthew Braile notes the burned, abandoned temple (155), the closed hotel (152), and the decimating fever (158), symbols of Leatherwood's religious, social, and physical decay, Howells bows to the dictates of nineteenth-century sentimentalism, concluding his novel with the optimistic assertions that Joey Dylks-Billings has grown up to be the "best man" in Leatherwood, that Jim Redfield and Jane Gillespie are blessed with children, that the Reverdys, like the Brailes, survive with their good humor and love intact, and that the confidence man is ultimately a curious—but nonetheless harmless—"superstition" (159). In fact, despite Howells's recognition that the confidence man is a symptom of diseased American optimism, he chooses narratively to deny it, asserting lamely a belief in the power of domestic virtues, in the myths that every reasonable American can discover the truth and that the destiny of America is determined by providential design. Calling *The Leatherwood God* a "romance," a contemporary review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* states wryly that it "sets all [Howells's] pet theories to naught, and it proves how impossible it is for any man, no matter how strong he may be in the faith, to practice always what he preaches."[4] Or it may be that Howells adheres to a larger pat-

tern of American history characteristic of 1828, 1870, and 1916, a persistent assertion of faith in the confident new country; for as the novel reveals the historical dangers of delusion, it also insists on both literary and cultural optimism.

Epilogue

The American confidence man is a product of the 1840s, the boom-and-bust flush times, and the ambiguous and shifty new country. In less than one hundred years the confidence man appears on the southwestern frontier, rises to prominence as a symbol of the new country, becomes aligned with the archetypal trickster, falls victim to the Civil War, reappears amid the boosterism of the Gilded Age, and disappears into the twentieth century.

The popularity of confidence-man fiction, of the term as a name for historical criminals, and of P. T. Barnum's soft sells suggests a fundamental American habit of mind. The interaction between popular literature and popular culture in the nineteenth century engendered the corresponding literary and cultural conventions known as the *confidence man* to express a basic perception of the new country. Simon Suggs and P. T. Barnum both exploit the hunger for confidence in the self and the suspicion of duplicity in others. The form itself, the conventional nature of the confidence man, offers a familiar model of response: the reader of *Simon Suggs* knows that the tales are fictions, self-contained snaps of foolish and greedy men; he laughs at their greed, their blindness, and Simon's skillful manipulations, enjoying from a safe distance his own feelings of superiority. The viewer of the Feejee Mermaid likewise willingly enters the familiar structure of the curio museum to savor his knowledge of Barnum's artistic manipulation of the gullible. The formal limits of each as a fiction make the potentially disturbing encounter with a confidence man safely amusing.[5] The threat to the self is only a mock-threat; like the dangers suffered by heroes and heroines of sentimental fiction, the threat merely heightens the reader's or viewer's pleasure, for the form assures him from the start that all will end well.

Evert A. Duyckinck quotes with approval in 1849 a descrip-

tion of a historical confidence man in the *Merchants' Ledger* that discovers a reassuring optimism in duplicity.

> That one poor swindler, like the one under arrest, should have been able to drive so considerable a trade on an appeal to so simple a quality as the confidence of man in man, shows that all virtue and humanity of nature is not entirely extinct in the nineteenth century. It is a good thing, and speaks well for human nature, that, at this late day, in spite of all the hardening of civilization and all the warning of newspapers, men *can be swindled.*[6]

To name a particular kind of criminal a confidence man is enough; the confidence man as a cultural convention seems fixed, a term that purports to explain but does not explore specific forms of dishonesty. As a cultural convention it retains even today an assumed meaning that licenses the use of the term *confidence man* to describe, delimit, and dismiss discrete species of historical and fictional tricksters. As a literary convention, however, the confidence man leads a more focused life, the newly imagined tensions producing the need for further speculation and new fictions. Whether the predisposition of Americans toward confidence men is a result of the Puritan distrust of appearances and habit of introspective analysis or a natural response to the scope and scale of the new country itself, the confidence man must be recognized as a coherent literary expression of conflicting, deeply felt, nineteenth-century attitudes.

The twentieth century marks an end to the confidence man as a distinct literary convention. Inextricably tied to the new country, the confidence man vanishes along with this imaginative frontier. The exact date of these disappearances is of course impossible to determine with confidence, but one is tempted to speculate. The completion of the four geological and geographical United States surveys of the West, 1867–1879, certainly had the power to transform the unknown into the familiar, just as the defeats of chiefs Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull in 1876 symbolically opened the West for safe settlement. 1876 further offers itself as the United States Centennial, an obvious benchmark for the numerically minded. The last great land rush occurred in Oklahoma in 1889, which gains credence as an apt date in light of the bulletin issued by

the superintendent of the census for 1890: "Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports."[7] The year 1893 marks not only the opening of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition and the beginning of a national panic but also Frederick Jackson Turner's delivery of his famous analysis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," to the American Historical Association. Turner's concluding statement speaks for itself.

> Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. . . . For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not *tabula rasa* . . . and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence. . . . And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.[8]

The 1920 census revealed that for the first time in history the urban population exceeded the rural population, while the stock market crash of 1929 surely put an end to many dreams. The Spanish-American War (1898–1899) proclaimed the entrance of the United States into global politics, and in retrospect sharply contrasts with the disillusioning world wars of the twentieth century. The years 1917 and 1941 record major passages in the death of American innocence.

The twentieth century registers the death of both the new country and the confidence man. Some of the best American fiction is peopled by tenuous survivors inhabiting an anti-Eden of unconfidence. Hemingway's Nick Adams returns to the American West, himself a battered archetype, only to discover that the new country, Nature itself, has been charred, corrupted, its redemptive powers radically reduced. The resi-

lience characteristic of the new country, the confidence man, and the nineteenth century has disappeared, the regenerative American humor has been replaced by the unconscious security of habit, and the sense of limitless personal possibility celebrated by Turner has been constrained by the impersonal forces Henry Adams perceived as early as 1904.[9] Confidence—in America as new country or in the self—seems in short supply. When a recognizable confidence man appears, such as Pat Stamper in William Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940), he functions as a nostalgic device signaling the end of the new country, of humorous horse swaps, and of a coherently ordered nineteenth-century world, and the advent of modern America, of humorless business deals, and of an increasingly disordered twentieth century. Snopesism makes explicit the implications of shiftiness adumbrated in Brackenridge's Kickapoo impostor, in Hooper's Bela Bugg, and in Twain's Senator Dilworthy; to quote Brackenridge, "These things are now reduced to a system."[10] Flem Snopes and his clan form a vast, nearly faceless, emotionless machine that dispassionately victimizes everyone in Frenchman's Bend. The point of view is external to Flem, for Faulkner perceives this confidence man as an indecipherable mystery symbolic of cosmic chaos. In a new country rapidly becoming a shadow of its former size and power, cut up and sold and forgotten, the psychological maneuvers of a shifty operator recede from prominence, replaced by the drama of his normative victims. Flem appears less a conscious confidence man than a tool or emblem of the impersonal forces that are systematically destroying the new country.

F. Scott Fitzgerald reveals another modern version of the confidence man in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a dealer in liquor and fixes who creates a new identity out of whole cloth. Yet Jay Gatsby is tied—as few nineteenth-century confidence men are—to numerous partners and business associates; as Poe noted in 1843 of a diddler, "Should he ever be tempted into magnificent speculation, he then, at once, loses his distinctive features, and becomes what we term 'financier.'"[11] Gatsby is in Poe's terms related more to Theodore Dreiser's Cowperwood, Drouet, and Sister Carrie, and suggests the impossibility of confident, successful, humorous snaps in twen-

tieth-century America. Furthermore, Gatsby is, like Dreiser's characters, like Sinclair Lewis's Elmer Gantry, like Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts and so many modern manipulators, a victim of his own unrealizable visions—visions that are essentially those of a vanished new country. Gatsby and his compatriots come to be pathetic figures like Howells's Joseph Dylks, self-deluded and self-betrayed, or seem to be pitiful victims betrayed by a vision of the new country that retains only the power to delude rather than to fulfill. Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway identifies Gatsby's betrayal with the land itself and with the process of historical change.

> And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.[12]

The point of view, which is initially external to Gatsby's psychology, becomes internal and aligns itself with Gatsby's vision in unconscious empathy. Nick sees the new country as Gatsby saw it, as the Dutch sailors saw it, an icon promising fulfillment of "all human dreams." As Leo Marx contends, "Here, for the first time, Nick locates the origin of that strange compound of sentiment and criminal aggressiveness in Gatsby. . . . It also represents the curious state of the modern American consciousness. It reveals that Gatsby's uncommon 'gift for hope' was born in that transitory, enchanted moment when Europeans first came into the presence of the 'fresh, green breast of the new world.'"[13] Nick—and the reader—discovers that the new country continues into the modern world only as a nostalgic motive force. Gatsby has become the victim not of a positive or ambiguous new country (as had been the case in much nineteenth-century fiction), but of a negative, pandering new country, which in Fitzgerald's deliberately historical context seems to have been all along the predator or confidence man in a cosmic game with man. At the moment

Gatsby freely places confidence in his dream, he loses control over his fate and consigns himself to betrayal and death.

In "Sincerity and Authenticity" Lionel Trilling proposes that "the hypocrite-villain, the conscious dissembler, has become marginal, even alien, to the modern imagination of the moral life."[14] Susan Kuhlmann maintains that the twentieth-century individual "is pointedly denied the full and reliable knowledge of life that is the *sine qua non* of the confidence man."[15] Although shifty characters are no strangers to modern American fiction, Trilling and Kuhlmann are correct in arguing that these manipulators share little of the form and function of conventional nineteenth-century confidence men. When twentieth-century versions of the confidence man appear (for other than nostalgic or purely historical purposes), they usually don one of three often-overlapping guises: They may be secondary characters whose main function is to reveal the helplessness and alienation of the protagonist as victim.[16] Alternately, they may appear as self-deluded manipulators who fall prey either to the social forms they initially juggle or to their unfounded confidence in their control over their own destinies.[17] Last, shifty characters may act as symbols of the forces of universal disorder, victimization, and betrayal that seem representative of the modern age.[18]

Each appearance reveals the reduced status of the confidence man as a distinct, central literary convention. To function as successful protagonist the confidence man requires not only knowledge, as Kuhlmann contends, but also a society fluid enough to penetrate and yet stable enough to evince shared ideals, normative values, and predictable social roles. Captain Simon Suggs can masquerade as General Witherspoon because he can anticipate and imitate how a general would act in a society that reveres pig-driving military men. One of the ironies of the nineteenth-century new country is that though it encouraged individuals to create new identities, as Henry Adams noted, "individuals were important chiefly as types."[19] The relevant characteristic of types is their function as conventional labels of identity; though convenient to social intercourse, these labels are masks of individual identity and can be assumed or dropped for positive or negative, social or antisocial purposes: like Simon Suggs, Mark Twain's

king and duke sail under various false colors and succeed because the broad outlines of types are easy to imitate. Huck Finn, likewise, can become George Jackson, and Jim can be disguised as a sick Arab; the reader may see one pair of impostors as positive and one as negative, yet Twain insists that both pairs draw their ability to masquerade and the naturalness of masquerade from the same source: a society in flux that categorizes individuals as types. Given this state of affairs, American society in *Huckleberry Finn* opens itself to fraud and defrauds individuals of identity.

In much twentieth-century American fiction, the norm is often the bizarre or the abnormal, and individuals do not appear to fit conventional preconceptions of behavior and motivation. The modern norm seems suddenly to have become the world at war, as in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973); or, the world seems to be an absurd theater in which identity itself is nearly impossible to maintain, as in William Gaddis's *The Recognitions* (1955), Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), or Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1979). These norms, like the categories into which modern confidence men fall, are not discrete but overlapping and interpenetrating, as evidenced by such works as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The fictional worlds created by twentieth-century American writers differ markedly in several respects from those nineteenth-century worlds of Hooper, Melville, and Twain from which they appear to evolve. First, Hooper's *Simon Suggs* is a closed, comic world that consciously and precisely limits the reader's involvement by positioning him outside the action and distancing him by language from direct involvement. Modern fictions insist that their worlds, governed by their norms, are at the least open to the reader's world; the function of history in *V.* is to suggest a correlation between that fictional world and the reader's, thereby mounting a substantial noncomic threat to the reader. In one sense the reader's point of view is assimilated into the fiction, becomes internal rather than external. Or, the fictional world appears so authentic in detail and event that the reader mistakes it for reality, or begins to suspect that his previous con-

ceptions of reality are not as true as this fictional rendering; or perhaps the reader finds in this fiction an order and coherence (albeit traditional disorder) he instinctively craves and finds missing from his own. The absurd, the bizarre, and the abnormal begin to seem the norm in the wake of World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and wars that are not wars. At this point we have entered what R. W. B. Lewis calls the apocalyptic era, "Days of Wrath and Laughter";[20] the reader senses that reality is becoming fictional, that his world may have already been transformed into the world of *V.*

Identity in the twentieth century is no longer, as it was in the nineteenth century, the stable, demonstrable bastion of individual consciousness. As Max F. Schulz concludes, "In the twentieth century the self as definable entity has vanished in the ironic acceptance of a world without metaphysical center, one fragmented into multiple realities."[21] In Pynchon's *V.* Benny Profane wants desperately to conform to a comic type, the schlemiel, to give himself a sense of identity; Herbert Stencil has only the blurred traces of identity bequeathed him by his father, Sidney; V. herself appears the identityless embodiment of the inhuman; Pig Bodine repeatedly breaks the obvious stereotype through charitable deeds of friendship or by discussing Sartre's notion that modern man impersonates identity; and even nineteenth-century myths and fictions lose some of their integrity as Pynchon burlesques Davy Crockett's superhuman feats (Profane pissing out the sun) and Ahab's quest for Moby-Dick (Profane's hunt of albino alligators in New York sewers). Authentic, original, individual action has vanished. Allbee, the doppelgänger to the protagonist in Saul Bellow's *The Victim* (1947), sums up the modern view: "The day of succeeding by your own efforts is past. Now it's all blind movement, vast movement, and the individual is shuttled back and forth."[22]

As modern fictional characters confront a norm that has no respect for individual identity and that threatens to destroy the self altogether, the confidence man as a convention loses his particular advantage and recedes from prominence. The confidence man, who prides himself on an intimate knowledge of human nature in general and on his acute awareness of individuals and types in particular, cannot adapt to an ab-

surd, disordered, impersonal modern world; to operate effectively himself—and to serve as a useful fictional device—he requires confidence in social forms, confidence in his perception and imitation of specific types of individuals, and confidence in others' recognition of the individual roles he counterfeits. Even if collective reality in the Gilded Age came to seem a systematic confidence game, as Gary Lindberg argues,[23] in the nineteenth century there were still discoverable, consistent rules by which individuals could play or refuse to play: this is the state of affairs, after all, on board Melville's *Fidèle*. If a character is baffled by or suspects the Cosmopolitan, he can retreat and disengage himself from that emblem of temporary ambiguity. But when identity, motives, and behavior are apparently random, without predictable order or discoverable purpose, when as in Barth's *End of the Road* Jacob Horner has lost faith in the Cartesian technique of self-authentication, our best writers then envision the individual not as a confidence man but as his victim, a tenuously surviving heir to what Richard B. Hauck terms "A Heritage of Corpses."[24] Without control over his own destiny and without the confidence necessary to manipulate others, the victim-as-Everyman suffers the universal kick of a cosmic foot. At best, the victim may be Pynchon's Oedipa Maas, awaiting revelation of order, disorder, or cabal at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), or Thomas Berger's Reinhart, searching for an integration of identity as he stumbles through the rubble of Western civilization in *Crazy in Berlin* (1958); at worst, he is Mailer's initiated, disillusioned DJ in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), or West's Lemuel Pitkin, betrayed, dismembered, and destroyed while seeking the American Dream in *A Cool Million* (1936). As Ihab Hassan concludes, the individual has become "The Victim with a Thousand Faces":

> The World, in our time, seems to have either vanished or become a rigid and intractable mass. The anarchy of nihilism and the terror of statism delimit the extremes between which there seem to be no viable mean. Mediation between Self and World appears no longer possible—there is only surrender or recoil.[25]

In contrast to nineteenth-century fictions, which may reward surrender with riches or alternately punish surrender with a coat of tar-and-feathers, twentieth-century fictions most often

equate surrender with death. Laughter—and there is undeniably much laughter—is no longer a pleasurable response to incongruity or shiftiness shared by writer, reader, and character, but has become the near-hysterical response of writer, reader, and character to a perception of their common fate as butts of a humorless joke. The reader is forced to recognize an all-too-accurate image of himself in Pynchon's SHROUD or in the maddened victims of "Dr. Know-All Pierce-All" in West's *Day of the Locust*. Recoiling in shock, the reader joins West's Tod Hackett in laughing and noisemaking, an admission that he is trapped like Poe's victims in a nightmare of individual disintegration, the victim of a modern humor not of profit but of loss.

This shift completes the formal possibilities of the confidence man as a literary convention; to envision the victim as fictional protagonist marks a return to the broad picaresque tradition of *Don Quixote*, *Roderick Random*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Modern Chivalry*. The American confidence man appears and disappears in the nineteenth century. Yet he will always profit from fast talk, delight in flush times, and insist on confidence in a shifty country that for him—and for us as we read—continually becomes new.

APPENDIX

The Confidence Man in Nineteenth-Century America

Below are given some nineteenth-century avatars of the confidence man, including related texts, tracts, events, and commentaries.

1801 – Sarah Wood, *Dorval; or, the Speculator.*
1803 – The character "Jeremy Diddler" appears in John Kenney's English farce, "Raising the Wind."
1805 – *The Gamesters; or, Ruins of Innocence. An Original Novel Founded in Truth.* By Caroline Matilda Warren.
1808 – Mason Locke Weems, *Life of George Washington With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen,* "6th edition" (contains the fanciful story of the cherry tree).
1809 – "A Miserable Prejudice—Yankee Tricks," in the *Port Folio* (December), by Matthew Carey.
1812 – Mason Locke Weems, *God's Revenge Against Gambling, Exemplified in the Miserable Lives and Untimely Deaths of Persons of Both Sexes, Who Had Sacrificed their Health, Wealth, and Honor at Gambling Tables,* 2d ed.
1815 – Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry* (first collected ed., 4 vols.)
1818 – Mason Locke Weems, *The Drunkard's Looking Glass* (contains the "Awful History of Young Dred Drake"), "6th edition."
1819 – Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."
1824 – James Nelson Barker, the tragedy "Superstition."
1826 – The *Confession* of Jereboam O. Beauchamp, an account of "the Kentucky Tragedy." (See Charles Fenno Hoffman, *A Winter in the West* (1835), 2:332–43.)
1828 – The advent of Joseph C. Dylks in Leatherwood, Ohio. (See Richard H. Taneyhill, *The Leatherwood God (1869–1870) in Two Versions,* and William Dean Howells, *The Leatherwood God* (1916)).
1829 – James Kirk Paulding, "The Yankee Roué."
1830 – Seba Smith begins the "Jack Downing" letters in the *Portland Courier.*
1831 – John Neal, "The Yankee Peddler."
1832 – James Hall, "Harpe's Head" and "The Seventh Son."
1833 – Augustus Baldwin Longstreet begins publishing several "Georgia Scenes" in the *State Rights Sentinel.*
– Seba Smith, *The Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing of Downingville, Away Down East in the State of Maine.*

1834 – Asa Green, *The Perils of Pearl Street; including a Taste of the Dangers of Wall Street, by a Late Merchant.*
– Exhibition of Maezael's automatons in New York.
– *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee, Written by Himself.*
– Henry Junius Nott, "Thomas Singularity" and "The Counterfeiters."
– *American Protestant Vindicator* warns of Jesuit missionaries masquerading as puppeteers and showmen (24 December).
1835 – Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, &c., in the First Half Century of the Republic.*
– Moon Hoax. In the New York *Sun* Richard Adams Locke reported the discovery of men and animals on the moon by Sir John Herschel.
1837 – Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods, or the Jibbenainosay.*
– Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker; or, the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick.*
1838 – *Humbugs of New-York: Being a Remonstrance Against Popular Delusion; Whether in Science, Philosophy, or Religion. By David Meredith Reese, M.D.*
1839 – George Pope Morris, *The Little Frenchman and His Water Lots.*
1841 – Samuel G. Goodrich, "The Peddler."
1842 – P. T. Barnum, the Feejee Mermaid hoax.
1843 – Edgar Allan Poe, "Diddling Considered As One Of The Exact Sciences."
– William Tappan Thompson, *Major Jones's Courtship.*
1844 – Charles Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit.*
– Johnson Jones Hooper begins Simon Suggs tales in *East Alabamian.*
– George Lippard, *The Monks of Monk Hall.*
1845 – Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers.*
– E. Z. C. Judson begins publishing *Ned Buntline's Own.*
– William T. Porter, editor, *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Sketches* (including tales by Hooper, Robb, Smith, etc.).
– William Gilmore Simms, "The Last Wager, or the Gamester of the Mississippi."
1846 – John S. Robb, *Streaks from Squatter Life, and Far-West Scenes . . . by "Solitaire."*
1847 – Joseph M. Field, *The Drama in Pokerville.*
– William T. Porter, editor, *A Quarter Race in Kentucky, and Other Sketches* (including tales by Harris, Lewis, January, etc.).

– John S. Robb, "'Doing' a Sheriff."
1849 – The Gold Rush begins.
– The term *confidence man* appears in articles in the *New York Herald* (8 July) and the *Literary World* (18 August).
1850 – Henry Clay Lewis ("Madison Tensas"), *The Louisiana Swamp Doctor.*
1851 – Thomas A. Burke, *Polly Peablossom's Wedding* (including tales by Hooper, Robb, Lane, etc.).
1853 – Joseph Glover Baldwin, *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi.*
1854 – George Washington Harris begins publishing Sut Lovingood tales in William T. Porter's *Spirit of the Times.*
1855 – P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P. T. Barnum.*
1856 – C. F. Briggs, "Elegant Tom Dillar."
– Augustus W. Loomis, *Learn to Say No; or, the City Apprentice.*
1857 – *Gambling Exposed. A Full Exposition of All the Various Arts, Mysteries, and Miseries of Gambling. By the "Reformed Gambler," Jonathan H. Green.*
– Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade.*
1858 – William E. Burton, *The Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor.* 2 vols.
1862 – Richard B. Kimball, *Undercurrents of Wall Street. A Romance of Business.*
1864 – S. Emma E. Edmonds, *The Female Spy of the Union Army.*
– Richard M. Johnston, *Georgia Sketches.*
1865 – Kittrell J. Warren, *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler.*
1867 – Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick.*
– Henry Ward Beecher, *Norwood; or, Village Life in New-England.*
– George Washington Harris, *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (collected ed.).
1871 – Henry Clay Lewis, *The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the South-West,* and John S. Robb, *Streaks of Squatter Life, and Far-West Scenes* (republished in one volume by T. B. Peterson).
– Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas.*
1872 – The Great Diamond Hoax.
1873 – Samuel Langhorne Clemens and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day.*
1875 – Henry Brooks Adams, *Democracy: An American Novel.*
– Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings.*
1882 – Henry Watterson, editor, *Oddities of Southern Life and Character* (including selections from *Georgia Scenes, Simon Suggs, Flush Times,* etc.).

1884,– Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *Adventures of Huckleberry*
1885 *Finn*.
1887 – George H. Devol, *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi*.
1899 – Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman*.

NOTES

Chapter 1: The New Country

1. *New York Literary World*, 18 August 1849, 133. For a complete discussion of the confidence man's appearances in 1849, see Johannes Dietrich Bergmann, "The Original Confidence Man."

2. Review of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 April 1857.

3. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker, p. 28.

4. William C. Spengemann, *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789–1900*, p. 6.

5. See Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World—American Culture: The Formative Years*, pp. 7–8.

6. Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America*, p. 191.

7. Quoted in ibid., p. 101. On promotion literature see ibid., pp. 87–103, and Jones, *O Strange New World*, pp. 179–93.

8. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison, p. 76. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *OPP*.

9. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, the Ecclesiastical History of New England*, pp. 537–51. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *MCA*.

10. *Original Narratives of Early American History: Winthrop's Journal, "History of New England," 1630–1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer, 2:315–18.

11. *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton, p. 53.

12. Quoted in Franklin, *Discoverers*, p. 55.

13. Quoted in Merle Curti, *Human Nature in American Thought: A History*, p. 26.

14. Quoted in ibid., pp. 28–29.

15. See Jones, *O Strange New World*, pp. 157–58.

16. See especially Milton M. Klein, "Corruption in Colonial America"; and Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature*, pp. 117–18.

17. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Larabee et al., pp. 167–68.

18. Richard B. Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism: Confidence and the Absurd in American Humorous Fiction*, pp. 64–65. See also Melville's characterization of Franklin as shifty in *Israel Potter* (1854–1855).

19. Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, p. 36. See the fine discussion of many American tricksters in chapter 3, "The American Hero: His Masquerade."

20. Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*, pp. 12–13. I am indebted throughout to this excellent study, especially to chapters 1 and 2.

21. Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, *called* J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 43.

22. See Gary Wills's stimulating analyses throughout *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.*

23. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience,* p. 1.

24. Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination,* p. 34. This rigorous, challenging work has obviously been of great use to me in Chapter 1.

25. See Hoffman, *Form and Fable,* pp. 93–96.

26. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth,* p. 19.

27. Crèvecoeur, *Letters,* p. 46ff.

28. Quoted in Smith, *Virgin Land,* pp. 42–43.

29. Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West,* p. 4.

30. See Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage,* p. 25.

31. On the myth of the "Great American Desert," see Smith, *Virgin Land,* chapter 16.

32. See Crèvecoeur, *Letters,* pp. 54–55.

33. Quoted in Lindberg, *Confidence Man,* p. 118.

34. Quoted in ibid., p. 94.

35. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie: A Tale,* in *The Works of James Fenimore Cooper,* 5:1–3, 445–46. See also Crèvecoeur, *Letters,* pp. 46–56; the disparaging comments of Byrd and Woodmason quoted in Curti, *Human Nature,* pp. 34, 36; Flint's remarks in Lindberg, *Confidence Man,* p. 118; and Tocqueville's attack in Kammen, *Season of Youth,* pp. 3–4. "Harpe's Head," by James Hall, can be found in his *Legends of the West* (1832, 1853).

36. On the frontier as place and process see Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage,* p. 25 and passim; on the frontier as location and direction see Fussell, *Frontier,* p. 4.

37. Quoted in Boorstin, *The National Experience,* p. 239.

38. Quoted in Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage,* p. 59.

39. Quoted in ibid., p. 59.

40. Boorstin, *The National Experience,* p. 219.

41. Morris's story is collected in William E. Burton, ed., *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor,* pp. 152–54.

42. The important section of Kirkland's *Western Clearings* is reprinted in ibid., pp. 273–77.

43. Quoted in Boorstin, *The National Experience,* p. 162.

44. Quoted in Kammen, *Season of Youth,* pp. 3–4.

45. Quoted in Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage,* p. 27.

46. For a fine analysis of George Washington and Davy Crockett as paradoxical American symbols see Boorstin, *The National Experience,* pp. 327–56.

47. Ibid., p. 332.

48. Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosy Volunteers . . . ,* p. 12.

49. Gary Lindberg kindly shared with me in 1977 a chapter outline of *The Confidence Man in American Literature,* from which I profited both consciously and unconsciously; most of my own work had been completed by the time his book reached me, thereby saving me from the temptation to modify my argument. Another fortunate late arrival was Karen Halttunen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870,* especially chapters 1, 2, and the epilogue. See also Susan Kuhlmann, *Knave, Fool, and Genius: The Confidence Man As He Ap-*

pears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction; Richard B. Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism: Confidence and the Absurd in American Humorous Fiction*; Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature*; and John G. Blair, *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction: A Rogue's Gallery with Six Portraits*. For other useful treatments of confidence men, confidence games, and related shifty figures, see Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of National Character*; Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*; Victor M. Hoar, "The Confidence Man in American Literature"; Jesse Bier, *The Rise and Fall of American Humor*; and Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, *America's Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury*.

50. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin, p. 502.
51. Quoted in Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*, p. 54.
52. Quoted in ibid., pp. 55–56.
53. Ibid., pp. 230–31.
54. Quoted in ibid., pp. 70–71.
55. Ibid., p. 78.
56. Blair and Hill, *America's Humor*, pp. 50–52.
57. P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself*, p. 355.
58. Quoted in Harris, *Humbug*, p. 217.
59. Kuhlmann, *Knave, Fool, and Genius*, pp. 123–29.
60. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, p. 10 and passim.
61. Ibid., pp. 10–11.
62. Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, p. 158.

Chapter 2: The Early Tradition of Confidence Games

1. See Wendy Martin, "The Rogue and the Rational Man: Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Study of a Con Man in *Modern Chivalry*."
2. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin, p. 11. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
3. See ibid., p. 3: "I shall consider language only, not in the least regarding the matter of the work."
4. *Pittsburgh Literary Examiner and Western Monthly Review*, June 1839.
5. William H. Gardiner, unsigned review of *The Spy* by James Fenimore Cooper.
6. "The Yankee Roué" is collected in Paulding's *Tales of the Good Woman. By a Doubtful Gentleman.*
7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, ed. Henry Steele Commager, p. 279.
8. Gardiner, review of *The Spy*, pp. 257–58.
9. Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, pp. 199–200. Both "The Indian Wife" and "The Frontier House" are collected in *The Legendary*, ed. N. P. Willis; "The Backwoodsman" appears in Hall's *Legends of the West*. See also the persuasive study by Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*.
10. Andrew Lang, as quoted in Walter Blair, *Native American Humor*, p. 70.
11. *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, ed. Mitford M. Mathews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), attributes the first use of the phrase, "half man, half horse, and half alligator," to Washington Irving,

History of New York: "It is for similar reasons that the back-woodmen of Kentucky are styled half man, half horse, and half alligator by the settlers on the Mississippi, and held accordingly in great respect and abhorrence."

12. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 281–82.

13. Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 1:54.

14. William T. Porter, as quoted in Norris W. Yates, *William T. Porter and the "Spirit of the Times,"* p. 18.

15. Blair, *Native American Humor*, p. 91.

16. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, &c., in the First Half Century of the Republic*, pp. 30–31. Subsequent references will be to the first edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

17. Edgar Allan Poe, review of *Georgia Scenes*.

18. Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, p. 64.

19. Faulkner's Flem Snopes, Kittrell Warren's Billy Fishback (1865), and "Lige" Shaddock (appearing in Porter's *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Tales*, 1845) are only a sample of Ransy Sniffle's offspring who acknowledge explicitly their progenitor.

20. W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, pp. 14–58, especially p. 26.

Chapter 3: The Emergence of the Confidence-Man

1. James Hall, *Legends of the West*, p. 5.

2. Charles Fenno Hoffman, *A Winter in the West*, vol. 1, preface, n. p. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

3. Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 177–78. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

4. Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley*, pp. 449–50.

5. Quoted by Hershel Parker in his edition of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, p. 79, n. 2.

6. For a full account of Joseph C. Dylks, see Richard H. Taneyhill, ed., *The Leatherwood God (1869–1870) in Two Versions*; and William Dean Howells's novel *The Leatherwood God*.

7. See David Meredith Reese, M.D., *Humbugs of New-York*; and Robert D. Bamberg, ed., *The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp*.

8. Sophia's sister, Elizabeth, had translated a laudatory French essay on Mesmer, and Sophia's dentist, Dr. Fiske—who shared her father's practice—regularly treated his patients with hypnotism. Hawthorne, however, came to distrust the "magnetic miracles" and implored Sophia "to take no part in them. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on thee, of which we know neither the origin nor the consequence, and the phenomena of which seem rather calculated to bewilder us, than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being . . . it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it" (letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody, 18 October 1841). See also Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), especially chapter 13 and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), chapter 23. Following Hawthorne's advice, Sophia did not allow herself to be hypnotized; nonetheless, her headaches ceased almost immediately after she married. For a critical survey of mesmerism in this period, see Taylor Stoehr, "Hawthorne and Mesmerism," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 33 (1969), 33–60.

9. Crockett's "Useful Coonskin" is available in David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee.*

10. See Gamini Salgado, ed., *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets: An Anthology of Elizabethan Low Life* for Robert Greene's essays.

11. Edgar Allan Poe, "Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, 3:870. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

12. Jeremy Diddler appears in John Kenney's *Raising the Wind* (1803), collected first in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Collection of Farces* (1815) and, more accessibly, in Michael R. Booth, ed., *English Plays of the 19th Century* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969–1973), 4: Farces.

13. See George Lippard, *The Monks of Monk Hall*, ed. Leslie A. Fiedler, and George H. Devol, *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi*. For an extremely readable book on Ned Buntline's long career, see Jay Monaghan, *The Great Rascal: The Life and Adventures of Ned Buntline*. The paragraph's last quotation is from *Gambling Exposed. A Full Exposition of All the Various Arts, Mysteries, and Miseries of Gambling. By the "Reformed Gambler," Jonathan H. Green*, p. 64.

14. Jonathan Culler, "Literary History, Allegory, and Semiology," p. 262.

15. Anonymous review in the *American Quarterly Review* 17 (1835): 178–79.

16. For a thorough and excellent discussion of the first appearances of the term *confidence man* in print, see Johannes Dietrich Bergmann, "The Original Confidence Man."

17. Culler, "Literary History," p. 262.

18. For this flexible model of literary continuity and change I am indebted to Wolfgang Iser, "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature."

19. *Spirit of the Times* 13 (9 September 1843): 326. For more information on the relationship between Hooper and Porter, see Norris W. Yates, *William T. Porter and the "Spirit of the Times,"* chapter 2; and W. Stanley Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs: The Life and Times of Johnson Jones Hooper.*

20. The phrase *valueless action* of comedy I have borrowed from a very different context in Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy*, p. 36.

21. Hooper's second sketch for the *East Alabamian*, "Our Hunt Last Week," Porter borrowed in 1843 for the *Spirit of the Times*. Like "Taking the Census," this humorous piece was well received; the *Spirit* even reprinted excerpts from it, retitled "The Biters Bit," in July 1844. Editors of such geographically diverse publications as the *Nashville Daily Gazette*, the *New Orleans Picayune*, and the *Boston Yankee Clipper* reprinted Hooper's sketches from the *Spirit*, and Hooper suddenly found himself with a national reputation.

22. See Robert Hopkins, "Simon Suggs: A Burlesque Campaign Biography." Hopkins argues that Hooper directly parodies specific biographies of Andrew Jackson, deriding Old Hickory's military and political achievements.

23. Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosy Volunteers*, p. 12. All future references to Hooper's work, unless otherwise indicated, will be from the first edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

24. See William Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience*, for an excellent discussion of the fool's role.

25. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, pp. 92–94.

26. Although the reader may find it hard to believe that Simon has a wife and children (chapter 11), he never betrays a woman for profit like Eggleston. Simon also mourns the simplicity of the Indians (74), yet argues that if someone is going to take them, why shouldn't he?

27. Whether Cocher-Emartee is actually killed is irrelevant; the Tallapoosy Vollantares intended their volley to kill the chief.

28. Like the Devil, Simon must have his little jokes; for example, he thoroughly enjoys befuddling the congregation as he parodies their pretentions to divine revelation.

> "And then," continued Suggs, "I wanted to git off, but they hilt me, and bimeby I felt so missuble, I had to yonder"—pointing to the mourners' seat—"and when I lay down thar it got wuss and wuss, and 'peared like somethin' was a-mashin' down on my back—"
>
> "That was his load o' sin," said one of the brethren—"never mind, it'll tumble off presently, see ef it don't!" and he shook his head professionally and knowingly.
>
> "And it kept a-gittin heavier and heavier, ontwell it looked like it might be a four year old steer, or a big pine log, or somethin' of that sort—"
>
> "Glory to my soul," shouted Mrs. Dobbs, "it's the sweetest talk I *ever* hearn! You Sukey! aint you got John yit? never mind, my lady, I'll settle wi' you!" Sukey quailed before the finger which her mistress shook at her.
>
> "And arter awhile," Suggs went on, "'peared like I fell into a trance, like, and I seed—"
>
> "Now we'll get the good on it!" cried one of the sanctified.
>
> "And I seed the biggest, longest, rip-roarenest, blackest, scaliest—" Captain Suggs paused, wiped his brow, and ejaculated "Ah, L-o-r-d!" so as to give full time for curiosity to become impatience to know what he saw.
>
> "*Sarpent*! warn't it?" asked one of the preachers.
>
> "No, not a sarpent," replied Suggs, blowing his nose.
>
> "Do tell us *what* it war, soul alive!—whar *is* John?" asked Mrs. Dobbs.
>
> "Allegator!" said the Captain.
>
> "Allegator!" repeated every woman present, and screamed for very life. (126–27)

29. Quoted by Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs*, p. 66. In 1861 Hooper was more successful, and was elected secretary of the Southern Congress, soon to become the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America. Hooper lost even this job, however, when two houses were formed of the Congress.

30. "The Muscadine Story; The Unwritten Chapter in the Biography of Captain Suggs" first appeared in the *Spirit of the Times* 19 (24 March 1849): 55. When Hooper became the editor of the *Chambers County Tribune* in September 1849, he contributed to that paper the last Suggs sketch, "The Widow Rugby's Husband; A Story of Suggs."

31. Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs*, p. 176.

32. Rufus W. Griswold, *The Prose Writers of America*, p. 546. Griswold directs his praise to Longstreet, Thompson, Thorpe, and Morgan Neville (who wrote of Mike Fink) (p. 37).

33. Henry Watterson, *Oddities in Southern Life and Character*, p. 39.

34. These examples, typical of frontier humor, are chosen more or less at random: S. G. Goodrich ("Peter Parley"), "The Peddler" (1841); Philip B. January ("The Man in the Swamp"), "A Rollicking Dragoon Officer" (1843); Poe,

"Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" (1843); Sol Smith, "A Bully Boat and a Brag Captain" (1845); James Hall, "Peter Featherton" (1845); and William Gilmore Simms, "The Last Wager, or The Gamester of the Mississippi" (1845). For a wider contemporary sampling, see Griswold, *Prose Writers* (1857); William E. Burton, *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor* (1858); and James Wood Davidson, *The Living Writers of the South* (1869).

35. William T. Porter, ed., *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Sketches*, p. 175. All references to tales appearing in *The Big Bear* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

36. "Old Tuttle's Last Quarter Race," by "Buckeye," in William T. Porter, ed., *A Quarter Race in Kentucky and Other Sketches*, p. 118. All references to tales appearing in *A Quarter Race* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

37. Thomas A. Burke, *Polly Peablossom's Wedding and Other Tales*, p. 5. Burke also included Hooper's "Shifting the Responsibility" in this volume (143–45). The tales referred to are Burke's own "A Losing Game of Poker" (44–48) and "'Doing' A Sheriff" (98–101); "War's Yure Hoss?" by "a Missourian" (41–43); and Lane's "The Thimble Game" (28–40).

Chapter 4: Four Variations of the Confidence Man

1. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker, p. 2.

2. Joseph Glover Baldwin, *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi. A Series of Sketches*, pp. 81, 85, 91. Subsequent references will be to this first edition of *Flush Times* and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

3. Walter Blair, "Americanized Comic Braggarts," p. 335.

4. Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, pp. 10–11. Subsequent references will be to this first edition of *Simon Suggs* and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

5. Susan Kuhlmann, *Knave, Fool, and Genius: The Confidence Man As He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*, p. 30.

6. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature," p. 30.

7. See Brackenridge's satire of democratic treatymakers among Kickapoo "Indians," in *Modern Chivalry*, pp. 55–62.

8. George Washington Harris. *Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool."* [] *Warped and Wove for Public Wear*, p. vii. Subsequent references unless otherwise noted will be to sketches revised by Harris and collected in this edition of the *Yarns* and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

9. Walter Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 242–43.

10. Milton Rickels includes a fine bibliography listing the first known publication date of Harris's fictions in *George Washington Harris*, pp. 145–47, which I have followed throughout this chapter.

11. Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, p. 64.

12. Walter Blair, *Native American Humor (1800–1900)*, p. 101.

13. Rickels, in *George Washington Harris*, p. 30, notes Harris's debt to Thompson; the name *Stallins* may have been lifted from Longstreet's "The Fight."

14. "Sut Lovingood's Chest Story" can be found in M. Thomas Inge's excellent edition of Harris's previously uncollected works, *High Times and Hard Times: Sketches and Tales by George Washington Harris*. Subsequent

references to this edition will be cited in the text using the abbreviation *HTHT*.

15. Rickels, *George Washington Harris*, p. 53.

16. See Brom Weber's introduction to *Sut Lovingood*, pp. ix–xxix.

17. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, *America's Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury*, p. 216.

18. Rickels, *George Washington Harris*, p. 103.

19. Inge, *High Times*, p. 106.

20. The most available edition of Lewis's fiction is John Q. Anderson, *Louisiana Swamp Doctor: The Life and Writings of Henry Clay Lewis*. All references to "The Curious Widow" are from this collection and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

21. Inge, *High Times*, p. 106; see pp. 222–31 for an analysis of Harris's satires. See also Donald Day, "The Political Satires of George Washington Harris," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 4 (December 1945): 320–38, for a broader interpretation of Harris's political inclinations.

22. *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 April 1857.

23. Edward H. Rosenberry, *Melville and the Comic Spirit*, p. 175.

24. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker, p. 6. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

25. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "The Big Bear of Arkansas," in William T. Porter, ed., *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Characters and Incidents in the South and South-West*, p. 14. Subsequent references to "The Big Bear" will be from this collection and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

26. John Neal, "The Yankee Peddler," in William E. Burton, ed., *The Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor*, pp. 78–79.

27. C. F. Briggs, "Elegant Tom Dillar," in ibid., pp. 423–24. Melville's stories of Charlemont and China Aster, as well, seem to be parodies of conventional sentimental sketches like those of Briggs and his confreres; for a wider selection of contemporary fiction, see Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Prose Writers of America*.

28. *The Confidence-Man*, ed. Parker, p. 133, note 3.

29. Jonathan H. Green, *Gambling Exposed*, p. 106.

30. Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature*, p. 165.

31. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, chapter 9, "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader," pp. 289–326, especially pp. 299–302, 314–20.

32. H. Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology*, p. 153.

33. Floyd C. Watkins, ed., *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler. By Kittrell J. Warren*, p. 46. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

34. Richard B. Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism: Confidence and the Absurd in American Humorous Fiction*, p. 69. Hauck is one of the few modern critics to notice Warren's *Straggler*; though I am unwilling to see Fishback as a prototypical "absurd" antihero, Hauck's reading is perceptive and stimulating.

Chapter 5: The War, Mark Twain, and the Flush Times

1. William Cullen Bryant, "Free Homesteads," p. 89.

2. Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in Floyd Stovall, ed., *Walt Whitman: Prose Works 1892*, Vol. II, pp. 369–70.

3. Henry Nash Smith, "The Scribbling Women and the Cosmic Success Story," p. 60. See also his *Democracy and the Novel: Popular Resistance to Classic American Writers*, especially pp. 3–15, 56–74.

4. George W. Bagby, "The Empty Sleeve" (stanza 1), rpt. in James Wood Davidson, *The Living Writers of the South*, p. 28.

5. Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West*, p. 301.

6. S. Emma E. Edmonds, *The Female Spy of the Union Army*, especially pp. 82–97.

7. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Introduction to *Harvard Memorial Biographies*, p. v. Cooke echoes these characteristic sentiments almost word for word.

8. Henry Ward Beecher, *Norwood; or, Village Life in New England*, p. 541.

9. Henry Nash Smith, in *Democracy and the Novel*, 57–58, notes that the *New York Ledger* had a circulation of three hundred thousand and that the book rights to *Norwood* were bought for thirty thousand dollars.

10. See E. P. Oberholtzer, *Jay Cooke, Financier of the Civil War.*

11. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 3:42.

12. "Moral Types of Mankind," unsigned review of *Undercurrents of Wall Street: A Romance of Business.*

13. W. Stanley Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs: The Life and Times of Johnson Jones Hooper*, p. 177.

14. Charles Farrar Browne, *Artemus Ward: His Book*, pp. 176–79. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

15. Charles Farrar Browne, "Vale," *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, 10 November 1860, p. 3.

16. Reprinted in Edgar M. Branch, "'The Babes in the Wood': Artemus Ward's 'Double Health' to Mark Twain," pp. 965–66.

17. In Walter Blair, *Native American Humor (1800–1900)*, p. 410.

18. Charles Henry Smith, *Bill Arp, So Called. A Side Show of the Southern Side of the War*, pp. 5–6. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

19. Henry Wheeler Shaw, *Everybody's Friend, or; Josh Billing's Encyclopedia and Proverbial Philosophy of Wit and Humor*, p. iii. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

20. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, p. 273.

21. James M. Cox, "*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*: The Machinery of Self-Preservation," p. 95.

22. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *Roughing It*, pp. 103–4. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

23. Henry Clay Lewis, "The Day of Judgment," in John Q. Anderson, *Louisiana Swamp Doctor: The Life and Writings of Henry Clay Lewis*, p. 106.

24. Samuel Langhorne Clemens and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, ed. Bryant Morey French, p. 28. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

25. Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwest Humor*, especially chapter 6. See also Constance Rourke, *American Humor*; Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*; and Walter Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn.*

26. George Miller Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Conse-*

quences. In Beard's view Americans were the victims of rapid urbanization and technological advances.

27. See James M. Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*, p. 160.

28. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, p. 7. All references will be to this modern edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

29. See Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America*, pp. 119–30.

30. Henry Clay Lewis's "Day of Judgment" can be located in John Q. Anderson, *Louisiana Swamp Doctor: The Life and Writings of Henry Clay Lewis*.

31. Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature*, p. 247.

32. Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, p. 107. See also Wadlington's fine analysis of social hierarchy in *Confidence Game*, pp. 261–262.

33. Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*, p. 182.

34. David E. E. Sloane, *Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian*, pp. 135, 141.

35. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi*, chapter 46, "Castles and Culture," and chapter 38, "The House Beautiful." See also Walter Blair's discussion in *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 285–99.

36. Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, p. 129. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text using the abbreviation *SS*.

37. In addition to Hooper's "The Captain Attends A Camp-Meeting" and Lewis's "Day of Judgment," the most memorable sketch is George Washington Harris's "Parson John Bullen's Lizards" in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*.

38. See Walter Blair, "Americanized Comic Braggarts."

39. DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, p. 255, and Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 279–84. I disagree with Kenneth Lynn's conclusion that "in Hooper's story, the Confidence Man is a symbol of the age; in Chapter XX of *Huckleberry Finn*, he is a freak" (*Mark Twain and Southwest Humor*, p. 225).

40. "Moral Types of Mankind," p. 123.

41. For historical ancestors of the king and the duke, see Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, p. 498, and David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture 1800–1850*, pp. 48–49. Other useful treatments of Shakespeare and frontier theater include Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, pp. 85–87, and William G. B. Carson, *The Theatre on the Frontier: The Early Years of the St. Louis Stage*, especially pp. 246–306.

42. Walter Blair traces the possible evolution of this incident in *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 316–21. An oral version of the episode that makes its obscene character obvious is reported by Wallace Graves, "Mark Twain's 'Burning Shame.'"

43. An excellent discussion of the people of Bricksville and their entertainments is found in Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature*, p. 194.

44. Ibid., p. 195.

45. Ibid., p. 197.

46. Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, p. 345.

47. Poirier, *World Elsewhere*, p. 185. See also Lindberg, *Confidence Man*, p. 197.

48. Wadlington, *Confidence Game*, p. 252.

49. Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism*, pp. 148, 150.
50. Trilling, *Liberal Imagination*, p. 101.
51. William M. Gibson, ed., *Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, p. 405.

Chapter 6: From the New Country to the Twentieth Century

1. Richard H. Taneyhill, *The Leatherwood God (1869–1870) in Two Versions*; and William Dean Howells, *The Leatherwood God*, intro. Eugene Pattison. Subsequent references will be to these editions and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
2. For fine discussions of Howells's use of Taneyhill's accounts see Eugene H. Pattison, "From History to Realism: Howells Composes *The Leatherwood God*," and his Introduction to the Indiana University Press edition of *The Leatherwood God*, pp. xvii–xxiii.
3. Haskell S. Springer, "*The Leatherwood God*: From Narrative to Novel," p. 196.
4. E[dgett] E[dwin] F[rancis], "Mr. Howells's Vigorous Romanticism/The Great Apostle of Realism Writes a Romantic Story of Events in His Native Ohio," 2:8.
5. Barnum seems to have had no illusions about the Feejee Mermaid; it was an oddity and hence a moneymaker. See *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself*, pp. 230–42, especially p. 235: "Assuming, what is no doubt true, that the mermaid was manufactured, it was a most remarkable specimen of ingenuity and untiring patience." Some people, of course, may have expected and perceived a "real" wonder of the world; in either case, the museum offered a safe environment in which to view the curiosity.
6. *New York Literary World*, 18 August 1849, p. 133.
7. Quoted by Frederick Jackson Turner in *The Frontier in American History*, p. 1.
8. Ibid., pp. 37–38.
9. See *The Education of Henry Adams*, especially chapter 34, "A Law of Acceleration."
10. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin, p. 57.
11. Edgar Allan Poe, "Diddling Considered As One of the Exact Sciences," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, 3:870.
12. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 182.
13. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, p. 360.
14. Quoted in John Blair, *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction: A Rogue's Gallery with Six Portraits*, p. 131.
15. Susan Kuhlmann, *Knave, Fool, and Genius: The Confidence Man As He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*, pp. 128–29.
16. A representative selection might include Nathanael West's Shrike (*Miss Lonelyhearts*, 1933), Ralph Ellison's Rinehart (*Invisible Man*, 1952), Joseph Heller's Milo Minderbinder (*Catch-22*, 1961), Saul Bellow's Dr. Tamkin (*Seize the Day*, 1956), John Barth's Doctor (*End of the Road*, 1961), and Flannery O'Connor's Hoover Shoats (*Wise Blood*, 1952).
17. William Dean Howells's Joseph Dylks heads this list, which is made up of such diverse figures as F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatz (*The Great Gatsby*,

1925), Sinclair Lewis's Elmer Gantry (*Elmer Gantry*, 1925), Nathanael West's Lemuel Pitkin (*A Cool Million*, 1934), Flannery O'Connor's Haze Motes (*Wise Blood*, 1952), Norman Mailer's Rojack (*An American Dream*, 1965), and William Gaddis's JR (*JR*, 1975).

18. Into this category fall William Faulkner's Flem Snopes (*The Hamlet*, 1940), Thomas Pynchon's V. (*V.*, 1963), the protagonist of Jerzy Kosinski's *Steps* (1968), and Robert Stone's Antheil (*Dog Soldiers*, 1974).

19. Henry Brooks Adams, *History of the United States During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 9:222.

20. R. W. B. Lewis, "Days of Wrath and Laughter," in his *Trials of the Word*, pp. 184–236.

21. Max F. Schulz, *Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties*, p. 52.

22. Saul Bellow, *The Victim*, p. 70.

23. Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature*, pp. 203–208. See also Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Man and Painted Woman: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870*, p. 210: "In the success mythology of twentieth-century corporate America, the confidence man has been effectively welcomed into the mainstream of American middle-class culture."

24. Richard B. Hauck, *A Cheerful Nihilism: Confidence and the Absurd in American Humorous Fiction*, pp. 237–45.

25. Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*, p. 327.

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Optical resolution	600 dpi
Color settings	24 bit color
File types	tiff

Source information

Content type	text
Format	book
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Notes	

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