CHAPTER I

COMIC MUSE AND THE AMERICAN TRADITION
The beginnings of humour in America are closely connected with the growth and development of the national character, the gradual evolution of America as a nation. The growth of the American nation and that of the laughter went hand in hand.

The Newfoundland was regarded as a wonderful place, an El Dorado, a land of unlimited potentialities and plenty of opportunities for those who wanted to acquire wealth and honour. It was a land flowing with milk and honey where precious jewels and diamonds were in abundance and could easily be found anywhere anytime. Beneath the earth were concealed silver and gold which could be unearthed at one's own convenience. The plants, herbs and roots had medical properties which could cure even fatal and incurable ailments, and wild animals were in plenty for food, and fish, easily obtainable. No one was probably more eloquent about America's salubrious climate and richness of her soil and natural resources than Francis Higginson in his New England's Plantation:

Many that have been weak and sickly in old England, by coming hither have been thoroughly healed, and grown healthful and strong. None can more truly speak hereof... than myself... My friends that knew me can well tell how very sickly I have been, and continually in physic, being much troubled with tormenting pain... and abundance of melancholic humours. But since I came hither... I thank God I have had perfect health, and freed from pain... and whereas before time I cloathed myself with double clothes and thick waistcoats to keep me warm, even in summer time, I do now go as thin clad as any... a sum of New England's air is better than a whole draught of old England's ale.
Of the Aire of New-England with the Temper and Creatures in it.

The Tempe of the Aire of New-England is one special thing that commends this place. Experience doth manifest that there is hardly a more healthful place to be found in the World that agreeeth better with our English Bodies. Many that have been weak and sickly in old England, by coming hither have been thoroughly healed and grown healthful and strong. For here is an extraordinary clear and dry Aire that is of a most healing nature to all such as are of a Cold, Melancholy, Flegmatick, Rheumatick temper of body. None can more truly speak hereof but their own experience then myself. My Friends that knew me can well tell how very sickly I have been and continually in Physick, being much troubled with a tormenting pain through an extraordinary weakness of my Stomach, and abundance of Melancholy humours. But since I came hither on this Voyage, I thank God I have had perfect health.

Facsimile copy of the extract from Francis Higginson's New England's Plantation.
New-England's Plantation.

and freed from pains and vomitings, having a stomacke to digest the hardest and coursest fare, who before could not eat in all mean, and whereas my stomacke could only digest, and did require such drink as was both strong and stale, now keen and do often times drink New-England wines very well, and I that have not gone without a cap for many yeares together, neither dust heene off the same, have now cast away my cap, and do wear none at all in the day time: and whereas before time I cloathed my felle with double cloathes and thicke Waistcoats to keep me warme, even in the Summer time, I doe now goe as thin clad as any, only wearing a light Stuffe Cascoke upon my Shur and Stuffe Breeches of one thickness without Linings. Besides, I have one of my Children that was formerly most lamentably handled with sore breaking out of both his hands and feet of the Inflammasion, but since he came hither he is very well over he was, and there is hope of perfect recovery shortly, even by the vertue whole proprietie of the Aire, altering, digetting and dryyng vp the cold and cluthe humors of the Body: and therefore I think it is a wise course for all cold complections to come to take Physike in New-England; for a fup of New-England Aire is better thena whole draught of old Englands Ale.
This was essentially the exaggerated picture of America presented by the early settlers and similar examples of this kind of glorified America can endlessly be cited from the pages of Ainsop, Morton and Ward. Such a comic magnification and grotesque exaggeration have always been the essential part of the unconscious humour of the colonial promotional tracts from the beginning.

Although America's colonial heterogeneous population, the comingling of miscellaneous ethnic and cultural groups of different countries fighting their way against adverse forces of nature and social adjustment, establishing in new situations and acclimatizing themselves to an altogether an untamed climate, provided them plenty of incongruities of life, thereby abundant and rich material for humour writing; the early settlers had little or no time at all to notice and realize the comic possibilities of those socio-ludicrous aspects available at hand. It took them nearly about two centuries.

The moment they were settled, and found themselves more secured and free, their attention was automatically shifted from the geographical, topographical and hostile environmental description of wilderness, savage creatures and animals to more pleasant aspect of individual character. Sarah Kemble Knight portrayed a gawky Connecticut Yankee and his rough and vulgar Joan whom she once met in a merchant's house in her Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York as
a tall country fellow, with his alfe goes full of tobacco: for they seldom loose their Gud, but keep chewing and spitting as long as their eyes are open—he advance’t to the middle of the room, makes an awkward nod, and spitting a large deal of aromatick tincture, he gave a scrape with his shovel like sho... he hugged his own pretty body with his hands under his arms, stood staring round’d him, like a cat let out of a basket. at least... he opened his mouth and said: have you any Ribbin for hatbands to sell? i pray? the questions and answers about the pay being past, the ribbin is bro’t and opened. pumpkin simpers, cries its confounded Gay I vow; and beaming to the door, in comes jone tawdry, dropping about 50 curtseys, and stands by him: hee shows her the ribbin. law, you, sais shoo, its right Gent, do you, take it, tis dreadfull pretty. 2

Much in the same mode, william byrd ii offered an account of the poor whites he met on his trip to north carolina, in his

History of the dividing line:

surely there is no place in the world where the inhabitants live with less labour than in n carolina... the men, for their parts, just like the indians, impose all the work upon the poor women. they make their wives rise out of their beds early in the morning, at the same time that they lie and snore till the sun has run one third of his course, and dispersed all the wholesome damp. then, after stretching and yawning for half an hour, they light their pipes, and under the protection of a cloud of smoke venture out into the open air; tho’ if it happens to be never so little cold, they quickly return shivering into the chimney corner. when the weather is mild, they stand leaning with both their arms upon the corn-field fence, and gravely consider whether they had best go and take a small rest at the hough: but generally find reasons to put it off till another time.

thus they idler away their lives like solomon’s sluggard, with their arms across, and at the winding up of the year scarcely have bread to eat.

To speak the truth, this a thorough aversion to labor that makes people flee off to n carolina, where plenty and warm sun confirm them in their disposition to laziness for their whole lives. 3
Both the passages are the admirable limnings of the life and the *modus vivendi* of the rustics in colonial America: their peculiar indiosyncrasies, their odd manners, queer ways, unseemly living and unhygienic conditions; their strange ascent and curious and unusual use of regional patois, which mark the beginning of the real comedy in America later popularised by Southwestern group of writers.

The writers in America now began to capitalize more on those individualistic traits and local manners of the character which they often found annoying but entertaining. Jonathan, in Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, is boorish, rough and loud, ignorant and unpolished.

Washington Irving's *Knickhacker's History of New York* contains many good comic portraits of this sort. Hendrick Hudson is

a short, square, brawny old gentleman, with a double chin, a mastiff mouth, and a broad copper nose which was supposed in those days to have acquired its fiery hue from the constant neighborhood of his tobacco-pipe.

The physical grotesquerie is rendered equally amusing in Irving's portrayal of Old Governor Wouter Van Twiller of the province of Nieuw Nederlandts when he describes him as

exactly five feet six inches in height, and six feet five inches in circumference. . . . His body was oblong and particularly spacious at bottom . . . His legs were short, but sturdy in proportion to the weight they had to sustain; so that when erect he had not a little the appearance of a beer-barrel on skids. ( *Hi*, p.161 ).
But more amusing is the portrait of the Connecticut
Yankee school teacher in his "The Legend of the Sleepy
Hollow":

He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow
shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled
a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have
served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely
hung together. His head was small, and flat at top,
with huge ears, large green grassy eyes, and a long
snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock,
perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the
wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of
a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and
fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for
the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some
scarecrow sloped from a corn-field.6

Temperamentally lazy, fun-loving, idler and the neglecter
of family liabilities, Rip Van Winkle, the paradigm of all
American males, is the most interesting. Hunting, fishing
and wandering through the forests are the only pleasures he
knows best. What actually distinguishes him from the early
comic portraits and qualifies him as the forerunner of
Southwestern prototypes is his habit of story telling.
Sitting "in the shade through a long, lazy summer's day" he
would talk "listlessly over village gossip, or telling endless
sleepy stories about nothing" (CMI, p.5).

Irving was the first writer who furnished the workable
frame-work to his story, "Rip Van Winkle." Early promotional
tracts had almost all the characteristic traits of a tall
tale—gigantic exaggeration, outlandish descriptions. Sarah
Kemble Knight and William Byrd's comic descriptions of their
characters also contain grotesque dialect and incredible
Characters of a tall tale. Benjamin Franklin's eloquence about the prodigality of American sheep in supplying the wool is a good plot for a tall tale.

The very tails of the American sheep are so laden with wool, that each has a little car or wagon on four little wheels, to support & keep it from trailing on the ground.7

But it needed to be properly worked out in a systematic framework which Irving introduced in his "Rip Van Winkle."

In its essential characteristics and basic structure "Rip Van Winkle" resembles everything in a way that is best in being it a tall tale later practised by the Southwestern humorists. He prefaced his "Rip Van Winkle" and appended a note and postscript to it. Much attention has been given to the authenticity of the story as proclaimed in the epigraph: 'Truth is a thing that ever I will keep' (GRI, p.1). Hence, he has introduced two narrators within a single story. The story moves slowly with a leisurely pace, introducing Rip Van Winkle, his usual haunts in forest and village, his habits, attitude, behaviour and background returning to village and simple village life with the narrator leading his incredible yarn the characteristic authenticity:

I have even talked with Rip Van Winkle myself, who, when last I saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every other point, that I think no conscientious person could refuse to take this into the bargain . . . The story therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt. (GRI, p.15).
Besides *Rip Van Winkle*, the comic writers of this period introduced a variety of comic characters who later dominated the literary scene in the Southwestern comic writings: Irving's Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleep Hollow" is mean and selfish—the greed and gluttony incarnate. Brom Bones, the rastipole is a rogue who outwits Ichabod by the frightening him out of his wits. Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *Sam Slick* is an unmoral trickster who sells an unusable clock for forty dollars, and wins admiration of a hostess by loving and kissing her children. Lowell's Birdofreedom is another rogue who uses his missing limbs, lost in war, as a proof of his patriotism in his campaign for Presidency.

With the realistic portrayals of their characters, the writers of this period never hesitated in recording the ignorant folk's real and vulgar speech. There are many rural and ribald expressions and indelicate phrases interspersed in Royall Tyler's *The Contract*: "tearing fine," "wasted pokily," "feeling Gor," "you look so topping," "by the living jingo" and "he is gone to stretch his leg."

Seba Smith's *Jack* also narrates in his letter how he shakes hands for the President at Philadelphia in his New Englandese:

I took hold and shook for him once in awhile to help him along, but at last he got so tired he had to lay down on a soft bench covered with cloth and shake as well as he could and when he couldn't shake he'd nod to 'em as they came along. And at last he got so beat out, he couldn't only wrinkle his forehead and wink. Then I kind of stood behind him and reached my arm round under his, and shook for him about a half an hour as tight as I could spring. (CFA, p.95)
The speech of Franklin's *Poor Richard* is made up of wise saws and pithy sayings:

"Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all things easy," as poor Richard says; and "He that riseth late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night," while "Laziness travels so slowly that Poverty soon overtakes him," as we read in Poor Richard, who adds, "Drive thy business, let not that drive thee;" and "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."  

The best example of this kind of speech is found in the epigrammatical conversation between Franklin and the Gout:

Franklin: I am convinced now of the justness of poor Richard's remark, that "Our debts and our sins are always greater than we think for."

Gout: So it is. You philosophers are sages in your maxims, and fools in your conduct. (CTA, p.17).

Irving also adopted the similar mode of writing in such sentences: Rip "would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound," "Times grew worse and worse," and "a tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use" (CRII, p.4).

Lowell is probably a better recorder of native speech than any one else. See how carefully he has reproduced New Englandese in the following stanza from his *The Courtin'*:

"You want to see my Pa, I s'pose?"
"'al * * * no * * * I come desginin'—"
"To se my Ma? She's sprinklin' clo'es
Ag'in to-morrer's i'nin' "9"

Their speech is rich in the use of comic metaphors, similes, evocative images and picturesque phrasings:
RIP "had much ado to hold up [his father's cast-off
galling gaskins], with one hand, as a fine lady does her
train in bad weather" (CTNI, p.4). "low murmur of his
Ichabod Crane's pupils' voice . . . might be heard . . .
like the hum of a bee-hive" (CTNI, p.34). Ichabod's
'sharpen elbows stuck out like grasshoppers' "(CTNI, p.44). Ichabod's "spirits rose with eating as some men's do with
drink" (CTNI, p.46). Lowell also admired the lady in terms
of comic imagery that "she looked full el rosy agin' as the
apple she was peelin' " (CPJNR, p.219). "Then her red come
back like the tide/Down to the Say O' Fundy." (CPJNR, p.220).

The writings of this period are clearly marked by the
element of misogyny. The writers capitalised on the universal
subject of husband and wife relationships; both engaged in
trying to make each other feel ashamed. William Rynd's
description of the North Carolinians quoted above presents
husbands imposing all the work upon the poor women folk, make
them rise out of their beds early in the morning while they
stretch, yawn and smoke till noon. Irving's Rip Van Winkle
is, in fact, representative one of the archetypal American
males; the husband who neglects family liabilities. He
drifts away into the forest when Dais Van Winkle sets him
to work. The following stanza from Lowell's The Courtin'
has the echoes of the same misogynic tendencies:
To say why gals act so and so,
Or don't, 'coud be persumin',
Nabby to mean yes an' say no
Comes natural to women. (CPNJRL, p.220).

The use of a mask is an invariable practice with almost all the American humorists. The educated writers projected themselves through their surrogates. William Byrd created a literate narrator to comment upon the uninhibited and rough activities of the North Carolinians and made them look absurd and ridiculous through antithetical phrasing. He described their vulgar activities in a highly poetic diction: they "stand leaning with both their arms upon the corn-field fence, and gravely consider they had best go and take a small heat at the Hough." [Italics mine] . Franklin's Poor Richard is a literary persona; he also introduced Silence Dogood to throw sly thrusts on Bostonian life. Seba Smith's Jack Downey is the author's persona and many of his ideas are familiar Smith notions. Through Birdosford and Moses, Lowell criticizes war sentiments. Irving put on the mask of an old narrator when he speaks about the upliftment of poor rustics by white men in the following paragraph: The Whiteman

introduced among them rum, gin, brandy and the other comforts of life,—and it is astonishing to read how soon the poor savages learned to estimate these blessings . . . . By these and a variety of other methods was the condition of these poor savages wonderfully improved; they had before been ignorant. (RH, pp.72-73).

Irving's anti-religious sentiments, his irreverence for organized churches are reflected in his incidental cynical remarks in Knickerbocker's History.
But the most important branch of civilization, and which has most strenuously been extolled by the zealous and pious fathers of the Romish Church, is the introduction of the Christian faith. It was truly a sight that might well inspire horror, to behold these savages tumbling among the dark mountains of paganism, and guilty of the most horrible ignorance of religion. It is true, they neither stole nor defrauded; they were sober, frugal, continent, and faithful to their word; but they acted right habitually, it was all in vain, unless they acted so from precept. The new comers, therefore, used every method to induce them to embrace and practise the true religion—except indeed that of setting them the example. (KH, p. 73).

Franklin's identical attitude is well displayed when he advises the priest to provide whisky after every mass as a way to attract larger masses in the place of worship. This undoubtedly lends a touch of black humour to the writings of this period. It is further reinforced by the visitation of Nemesis on Lowell's Birdofredom while he, attempting to capture a black family and sell them as slaves, is himself caught and made to slave. The readers roar with laughter at the sudden reversal of Birdofredom's fortunes. Thus there is always an undercurrent of bitterness. The anguish and pain have in this way been the double foundation of comedy in America down the ages. Americans have thus learned laughing at what is not funny and laughable.
II

The publication of Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* in 1935 opened altogether a new era in the field of American humour. It revealed the kind of comedy which was to develop in the Southern states of America—Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Missouri. Its subtitle: "Characters, Incidents &c., in the first Half Century of the Republic" reveals their interest in a single episode or incident rather than in a consistent or integrated novel-like plot.

The fight, eye gouging, gender pulling, horse-swapping fox-hunting are some of the incidents recorded in Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*. George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood Yarns* is about drinking, wedding, fighting and religious meetings. Johnson J. Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Sassa* deals with cheating, gambling, law circuits, religious camps etc.; Thompson's *Major Jones's Sketches of Travel* is a record of his travel incidents at various places.

In addition to giving their method of writing, the subtitle also claims the beginning of the realistic tradition in American literature. It has been reinforced in the preface to *Georgia Scenes* when Longstreet rightly claims that the
sketches "consist of nothing more than fanciful combinations of real incidents and characters... Some of the scenes are as literally true, as the frailties of memory would allow them to be." 11

Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi* was designed "to illustrate the periods, the characters, and the phases of the society, some notion of which is attempted to be given in this volume." 12 T.B. Thorpe's *The Mysteries of the Backwoods* too had for its subtitle: "Sketches of the Southwest including Characters, Scenery, and Rural Sports." The flattering reception of Thompson's earlier sketches, *Major Jones Courtship*, induced him to publish his next book *Major Jones Chronicles of Pineville*, with an idea "to present to the public a few more interesting specimens of genus 'Cracker'." 13

Hence, most of the characters and incidents depicted therein are directly taken from the real life. The sophisticated humorists soon found the poor whites of the South more entertaining. Rogues, rapscallions, imposters, liars, trick-stores captured their attention for their queer ways and unusual personal idiosyncracies. Longstreet's *Nancy Sniffle* is a rogue who instigates two otherwise good friends with deep affinity to a fight. His "The Horse Swap" is about two unscrupulous horse traders out vying each other. Hooper's *Simon Suggs* is a supreme hypocrite, whose treachery does not spare even his parents. Harris's *'Nat'ral Born'd Fool*, but *Lovingood*, is a greater rogue who likes gluttony, excessive
drinking, molesting and seducing country damsels and dancing people. Melville's *The Confidence-Man* is also about a trickster who manifests himself in multiple guises—a deaf mute, cripple Negro, President and transfer agent of Black Rapids Coal Company, travelling agent of the Widow and Orphan Asylum, a philanthropist, a herb doctor and cosmopolitan duping everyone he encounters. The literature of this period thus set the pattern for the literature of roguery.

Their much avowed object of presenting realism made the reproduction of local speech and dialect obligatory for them. Almost all of them put in the mouths of their rustic characters that local patois which unmistakably reveals their rusticity. The following passage from Longstreet's "The Gander Pulling" is a good example of the lower class rustics' real speech:

"Come here, Neddy Frator," said he, with a triumphant smile, "let your Uncle Johnny put his potato stealer's hand into that hat, and tickle the chins of them are shiners a little! Oh you little shining sons o' bitches! walk into your Mas' Johnny's pocket, and gingles ..." ( GS, p.127 ).

Harris has allowed his Sut Lovingood to recount the outcome of his lousy tricks in his own eastern Tennessee patois which sometimes attains the characteristic vulgarity of the poor lower class people:

"Wanna that rale low-down, wolf mean? The durnd infunzel, hiperkritikal, pot-bellied, scaley-hided, whisky-wastin, stinkin ole ground-hog."14

Similar passage of forbidden dialect may be cited from Longstreet's "The Fight":
"Who do you call an impudent hussy? you nasty, good-for-nothing, snagle-toothed gaub of fat, you.\n" returned Mrs. D. ( GS, p.57 ).

Melville also recorded the ordinary American colloquial speech in his The Confidence-Man which is very emotive and effective in the following passage on instinctive living:

"When charmed by the beauty of that viper, did it never occur to you to change personalities with him? to feel what it was to be a snake? to glide unsuspected in grass? to sting, to kill at a touch; your whole beautiful body one iridescent scabbard of death? In short, did the wish never occur to you to feel yourself exempt from knowledge, and conscience and revel for a while in the care-free, joyous life of a perfectly instinctive, unscrupulous and irresponsible creature?" 15

It is the introduction of vernacular and its extensive use for comic purposes that makes them the forerunners of Mark Twain.

Nevertheless, one, however, comes across another mode of writing in their works which is strikingly contradictory to their much avowed objective of realism. See the following example from Longstreet's "The Turf":

"No," said I, "I take no interest in its amusement."
"Nor do I," rejoined he; "but I visit it to acquire a knowledge of the human character, as it exhibits itself in the various scenes of life, and with the hope of turning the knowledge thus acquired, to some good account, I am the more desirous that you should accompany me," continued he, "because, as one pair of eyes and ears cannot catch all that passes within a scene so spacious, I shall lose many instructing, interesting, or amusing incidents, without the assistance of a friend; and therefore I wish to enlist your services." ( GS, p.163 ).

This kind of antithetical mode of writing is much more evident in the comic description of their individual characters. Longstreet's description of degenerate Randy Snaffle is quite amusing in this respect:
a sprout of Richmond, who, in his earlier days, had fed copiously upon red clay and blackberries. This diet had given to Raney a complexion that a corpse would have disdained to own, and an abdominal rotundity that was quite unprepossessing. Long spells of the fever and ague, too, in Raney's youth, had conspired with clay and blackberries, to throw him quite out of the order of nature. His shoulders were fleshless and translucent; and his arms, hands, fingers and feet were lengthened out of all proportion to the rest of his frame. His joints were large, and his limbs small; and as for flesh, he could not with propriety be said to have any. Those parts which nature usually supplies with most of this article—the calves of the legs for example—presented in him the appearance of so many well drawn blisters. His height was just eight feet nothing; and his average weight in blackberry season, ninety-five. (GS, p.55).

Harris's Sut Lovingood is

a queer looking, long legged, short bodied, small headed, white haired, hog eyed, funny sort of a genius, fresh from some bench-legged Jew's clothing store. (ELT, p.33).

Hooper's Simon Suggs, Baldwin's Ovid Holus Esq., have also been described in the same comic terms.

Melville also describes the characters on board to New Orleans in much the same identical terms. See his description of the miser:

The miser, a lean old man, whose flesh seemed salted cod-fish, dry as combustibles; head, like one whittled by an idiot out of a knot; flat, bony mouth, nipped between buzzard nose and chin; expression, flitting between hunches and imbecile—now one, now the other—he made no response. His eyes were closed, his cheek lay upon an old white moleskin coat, rolled under his head like a wizened apple upon a grimy snow-bank. (CM, p.76).

The same mode of writing seems to be at work in T.B.

Thorpe's description of American motley crowd on the

Invincible in his "The Big Bear of Arkansas":


Here may be seen jostling together the wealthy Southern planter, and the pedlar 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—professional men of all creeds and characters—Wolvereens, Suckers, Hoosiers, Buckeyes and Corn-crackers, 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. (CTA, p.123).

Such blending of two modes of writing—aristocratic and vernacular—not only reduce their characters to comic level but also serve as a mask for the literate narrator to keep himself detached from the narrated—a characteristic feature of a tall tale. And it should be remembered that Thorpe's present story "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is the superb example of a tall tale. After the general background of heterogeneous passengers on board, the narrator introduces Jim Doggett, his loud hoop, his singular manner and habits, his entry into the cabin and his behaviour. Then the vernacular yarn spinner, Jim Doggett, unfolds his superb lie about his big bear hunt in vernacular in a leisurely pace and meandering manner: "planting in Arkansas is dangerous... I don't plant any more; natur intended Arkansaw for a hunting ground and I go according to natur" (CTA, p.130), boasting of his own hunting skill: "in bar hunts I am numeroos" (CTA, p.131), and his hyperbolic-monomania: "missing that bar so often took hold of my vitals, and I wasted away. The thing had been carried too far, and it reduced me in flesh faster than
an age" (CTA, p.133), until the end of the story is reached:

"My private opinion is, that that bear was an unhuntable bear, and died when his time come" (CTA, p.137). And the literate narrator describes Jim Doggett sitting in "a grave silence" for the death of the bear "had evidently made a strong impression on his mind" (CTA, p.137).

Among other comic devices, the use of comic metaphors and similes was their favourite: "Ole Bullin's eyes war a-stickin out like unto two buckeyes flung agin a mud wall, an' he war a-cuttin up more shines nor a cockroach in a hot skillet." (SLY, p.55). Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is specially notable for comic similies: the bear "loomed up like a black mist" (CTA, p.136); and after shot "the varmint wheeled, gave a yell, and walked through the fence like a falling tree would through a cobweb"(CTA, p.136) and "shook his head as the ball struck it and then walked down from that tree as gently as a lady would from a carriage"(CTA, p.134) and he groaned" in a thicket near by, like a thousand sinners" (CTA, p.136).

Among other things of life that greatly fascinated the humorists in America, religion was the most important. Camp-meetings, churches and preachers held no reverence for them. They frequently satirized and ridiculed religion and the priests who distorted Christian values and doctrines just to suit their requirements for their self aggrandizement. Harris's Sat exposes Parson's false morality in "Parson John Bullin's Lizards" by surreptitiously inserting lizards into his trousers.
when he was sermonising. Hooper also ridicules religion in
the following extract from his "Simon Suggs Attends a Camp-Meeting":

The excitement was intense. Men and women rolled about on
the ground, or lay sobbing or shouting in profligacious
heaps. More than 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. The great object
of all seemed to be, to see who could make the greatest
noise—. . . "Bless my poor old soul!" screamed the
preacher in the pulpit . . . "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, breathing!—come to the Lord, honey!" he added, as he
vigorously hugged one of the damsels he sought to
save. ( SASS, pp.119-120 ).

Such sacrilege was always less censored in America. There
has always been—and still remains—a very strong anti-Roman
Catholic sentiment because of their rejection of priest-ridden
cultures.

However, a distinctive tendency of American humour to
laugh at the suffering of other human beings is abundantly
present in the writings of this period. The readers cannot
resist laughter when Sut is blown up with soap; when two horse
traders in Longstreet's "The Horse Swap" vying with each other
to outwit, get themselves duped in tricky commercial transaction
or when two combatants fighting each other get irretrievably
maimed or when an old woman dies by getting in the way of a
scared horse. All these are tragic incidents and instead of
feeling compassion and pity, the readers laugh—which makes the
comedy of these incidents strikingly black.
These humorists would have actually been forgotten had Mark Twain not appeared on American literary scene and revived that kind of folk comedy which they so successfully developed. This period is indeed a seminal phase in the history of American humour and the writers are native sons of American subsoil.

III

American humour after the Civil War made great strides unexampled before in the history of American literature. The professional "Phunny Phellows" introduced linguistic humour, a great deal of which depended on linguistic devices—quaint spellings, queer sentences, neologism, alliteration, anticlimaxes and parody. The following extract from Artemus Ward is a good example of misspellings and fractured grammar:

Gents, it greeves my hart in my old age, when I'm in "the Sheer & Yeller leaf" ( to cote from Irishf friend Mister MacBeth ) to see that the Show biznis is pretty much plade out.18

Josh Billings' neologism: "The hawk is a karniverous foul, and a chickiniverous one too, every good chance he can git."19 Smith's use of alliteration: "What a proud kulmination and konsumation and koruskation of your politikal hopel."20
all essentially point to their excessive fondness of linguistic acrobatics.

Almost all the literary comedians were keenly interested in the use of anticlimaxes for comic purposes. But the following two examples from Artemus Ward and Josh Billings will probably suffice to establish the points:

Artemus Ward: There's one king in the room who is mounted onto a foamin steed, his right hand graspin a barber's pole. I didn't learn his name.21

Josh Billings: When I see people ov sheller understandings extravagently clothed, i always feel sorry—for the clothes.22

Parody is better represented in Josh Billings' following reversal of the familiar proverb:

Rise arly, work hard, and late, live on what you cant sell, give nothing awa, and if you dont die ritch, and go tu the devil, yu ma sue me for damages. (JBS, p.310 ).

Contemporaneous with literary comedians, local colorists made their beginning whose comedy shows the obvious strain of Southwestern humour in their writings being true and realistic presentation of regional life of a particular time and place. Like Southwestern writers they had a schematic purpose behind their works which they pronounced in their prefaces over and again. Harte wrote "The Luck of Roaring Camp" just to illustrate an era of which California history has preserved the incidents more often than the character of the actors ... an era still so recent that in attempting to revive its poetry, I am conscious also of awakening the more prosaic recollections of survivors.23
Similarly Stowe wrote *Oldtown Folks*:

to interpret to the world the New England life and character in that particular time of its history which may be called the seminal period. I would endeavor to show you New England in its seed-bed. . . . I desire that you should see the characteristic persons of those times, and hear them talk. . . . My studies for this object have been . . . taken from real characters, real scenes, and real incidents.24

Her *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a realistic evocation of Southern plantation life.

And so the language. Bret Harte's characters speak Pike dialect; Stowe's characters can be heard speaking New Englandese and Southern plantation colloquial idiom. The misspelt language of the literary comedians is also the phonetic transcription of a spoken dialect.

The literary comedians also bear close affinity with the earlier school of American humour in their misogynic tendencies. The works of Bill Arp and Josh Billings contain many good examples of it.

*Bill Arp:* This wife business is a very serious business. It is right hard work to play a wife.25

There are many good remarks on women's temperament and behaviour in Josh Billings's sayings:

*Tongue-tied wimin are very scarce and very valuable* (*JBS, p. 258*).

*A good wife is a sweet smile from heaven* (*JBS, p. 273*).
The heart is wise by the head, and we, (who have tried it) all know how persuasively the wife is—especially when she wants something (JBS, p.207).

The humor of exaggeration of oral tradition gets good representation in the following description of the gamblers in Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp":

The assemblage numbered about a hundred men. One or two of these were actual fugitives from justice, some were criminal, and all were reckless. Physically they exhibited no indication of their past lives and character. The greatest scamp had a Raphael face, with a profusion of blond hair; Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner. The term "roughs" applied to them was a distinction rather than a definition. Perhaps in the minor detail of fingers, toes, ears, etc., the camp may have been deficient, but these slight omissions did not detract from their aggregate force. The strongest man had but three fingers on his right hand; the best shot had but one eye. (SPM, p.56).

The description of the gamblers is very much like Thorpe's description of motley crowd on Invincible in "The Big Bear of Arkansas"; in its grotesquerie and absurdity it resembles Longstreet's comic description of Benny Snuffle; its ornate diction represents framework device, a literary mask for the author practised by the Southwestern humorists.

Literary comedians also speak from behind their pseudonym talkers. Charles Farrar Browne put on the mask of Artemus Ward, David Ross Locke's was Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby, Henry Ward Shaw adopted Josh Billings and Charles Henry Smith spoke from behind Bill Arp.
The literary mask was a disguise that provided them a wide scope to comment upon the aspects of contemporary life—its pretensions and hypocrisy, pride and false values as in Bill Arp's comment:

"Didn't our four fathers fight, bleed and die about a little tax on tea when not one in a thousand drank it? Because they succeeded, wasn't it glory? But if they hadn't, I suppose it would have been treason, and they would have been bowin' and scrapin' round King George for pardon." (FUMD, p.90).

The cynical ethics of success finds an expression when Artemus Ward adds the following sentence as postscript in "One of Mr. Ward's Business Letters" to an editor: "You scratch my back & I'll scratch your back" (AMSB, p.19).

His satire becomes more pungent and his cynicism bitter when he equates politicians and profiteers with actors, and advises showmen to take up politics in "A Romance—William Baker, The Young Patriot."

Josh Billings' remarks about men are full of bitterness and reflect his cynicism:

"Man is a hily addikated animal." (JBS, p.258).

Or:

"Vain men should be treated as boys treat bladders, blo them up till they bust." (JBS, p.258).

Smith's identical attitude and cynical tone is reflected when his Bill Arp speaks for the defeated South:
Looks like there is always somethin' preyin' on somethin', and nothin' is safe from disaster in this subloony world. Flies and bugs and rust prey on the green wheat. Weevils eat it up when it's cut and put away. Rats eat the corn--moles east the gubbers--hawks east the chickens--the minks killed three of our ducks in one night--Cholera kills the hogs--and the other night one of my nabor's mules cum along with the blind staggerers and fell up a pair of seven steps right into my front gate and died without kickin'. Then there is briars and nettles and tred safts and smartsweed and poison that's always in the way on a farm, and must be looked after keerfully, especially snakes, which are my eternal horror, and I shall always believe are sum kin to the devil himself. I can't tolerate such long insects. But we farmers hav to take the bad with the good, and there is more good than bad with me up to the present time. (FUWD, p.92).

The remark is indeed reminiscent of Sut's rationalization about universal evil in Harris's "Rare Rip Garden Seed":

Whar thar ain't enuf feed, big childer roots littil childer outen the troff, an' gobbils up thar part Jis' so the yeath over; bishops eats elders, elders eats common peopil, they eats such cattil es me, I eats possums, possums eats chickins swaller, wums, an' wums am content tu eat dus, an' the dus am the aind ove hit all. (SLY, pp.174-175) all. (SLY, pp.174-1975).

They did not spare religion also. The following extract from Artemus Ward's "The Shakers" ridicules the basic concept of chosenness:

"The Sperret, as they called it, then moved a short fat Shaker to say a few remarks. He sed they was Shakers and all was ekal. They was the purest and seleakest peple on the yeath. Other peple was sinful as they could be, but Shakers was
all right. Shakers was all goin kerslap to the Promised Land, and nobody want goin to stand at the gate to bar 'em out, if they did they'd git ran over. (AMSB, p. 31).

Josh Billings satiric tone and irreverence for religion can be evidenced in his following satirical gibes:

"The mouse kan live anywhare tew advantage, except in a church. They phatt very slow in a church. This goes tew show that they kant live en religion any more than a minister kan. Religion is excellent for digestion." (JBS, p. 103).

Or:

"It takes more time and talent tew be a successful hypokrit than it does tew be a christian." (JBS, p. 261).

Such remarks of the literary comedians replete with shrewd and cynical observation on contemporary life and religion, carrying subdued satiric overtones, lend their humour that quality of blackness which is typical of black humour. Whereas their high flown diction, exaggeration, mask or pseudonym talkers, phonetic speech relate their writings to the well established antecedent American comic tradition of the Southwest.
IV

The writings of the modern period extending from Mark Twain to this day show a strong strain of influence of the older comic tradition. It is especially more evident in the following extract from Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* which shows Sawyer practising the way he would behave with his rival when he meets him:

And he went through the motions of thrashing an imaginary boy—pummeling the air, and kicking and gouging. "Oh, you do, do you? You holler nough, do you? Now, then, let that learn you!" And so the imaginary flogging was finished to his satisfaction.26

See the following scene from Longstreet's "Georgia Theatrics" where a boy practising the art of eye gouging shouts the dialogue of his opponent too:

"You kin, kin you?"

"Yes, I kin, and as able to do it! Boo-coo-ool! Oh, wave snakes, and walk your chokkal Brimstone and—fire! Don't hold me, Nick Stovall! 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'!" (GS, p.6).

Then the boy rising from the fray tells the observer, "you need n't kick before you're spurr'd. There a't nobody there, nor ha'nt been nother. I was jist seein' how I could 'a' foun." (GS, p.7).
Similarly Faulkner’s relationship with the earlier group of writers is also clear in his “Spotted Horses” episode in *The Hamlet*:

They saw the horse . . . whirl and dash back and rush through the gate into Mrs. Littlejohn’s yard and run up the front steps and crash once on the wooden veranda and vanish through the front door. . . . A lamp set on a table just inside the door. In its mellow light they saw the horse fill the long hallway like a pinwheel, gaudy, furious and thunderous. A little farther down the hall there was a varnished yellow melodica. The horse crashed into it; it produced a single note, almost a chord, in bass, resonant and grave, of deep and sober astonishment; the horse with its monstrous and antic shadow whisked again and vanished through another door. It was a bedroom; Ratliff, in his underclothes and once sock and with the other sock in his hand and his back to the door, was leaning out the open window facing the lane, the lot. He looked back over his shoulder. For an instant he and the horse glared at one another. Then he sprang through the window as the horse backed out of the room and into the hall again and whirled and saw Eck and the little boy just entering the front door. Eck still carrying his rope. It whirled again and rushed on down the hall and onto the back porch just as Mrs. Littlejohn, carrying an armful of clothes from the line and the washboard, mounted the steps.

The scene is very much reminiscent of breaking of Sicily Burns’ wedding by a blinded bull in Harris’ *Out* Lovingood Yarns:

"He cum tail fast agin the ole two story Dutch clock, an’ flotch hit, bustin’ hits runnin geer oten hit, the littil wheels e-strudlin over the floor, an’ the bees even chasin them. Nex pass, he flotch up agin the foot ov a big dubbil inijine bedstead, rarin hit on aind an’ punchin one ove the posts thru a glass winder. . . . Claspaw’s ole man war es deaf es a dogiron, an’ not at the aind ov the tabil, nex tu whar ole Sock busted thru the wall; tail fas’ he cum agin her cheer, a-hislin her an’ hit ontu the tabil. . . . an’ thar set ole Misses Claspaw, a-straddl ove the top ove the pile, a-fitin bees like a mad wind-mill, wif her calliker cap in one han, fur a wapun, an’ a cract frame in tuther, an’ a-kickin, an’ a-spurrin like she war ridin a lazy hoss arter the doctor, an’ a-screamin rape, fire, an’ murder, es fas’ es she could name ‘em over." (SLY, pp.79-80)
Thus much of the humour of Twain and Faulkner is folk comedy of oral tradition—a technique so popular and beloved to the Southwestern humorists. There are many good examples of tall tales both in Twain and Faulkner. *The Incidents about buffalo-hunt in Roughing It*, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," and "Jim Baker’s Blue-Jay Yarn," in Mark Twain; the anecdote about Andrew Jackson’s descendants in *The Mosquitoes*. Pat Steiper outstricking Ab Snopes in horse trading in *The Hamlet*—a favourite subject for humour writing to Southwestern humorists—in Faulkner are some of the good tall tale plots.

Like the Southwestern writers whose leading characters are usually the lower-class white settlers, Twain and his contemporaries preferred to write about the poor whites. Twain’s loafers of the Arkansas village in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are lazy and shiftless, brutal and sadistic; Pap Finn is a tramp, a thief and drunkard, the King and the Duke are the imposters par excellence. Faulkner’s protagonists are usually those who rank lowest in society. *Flem Snopes in The Hamlet* is unredoubtable rogue, greed and avarice incarnate. *V.K. Ratliff* is a shrewd paddler. *Erskine Caldwell’s characters in Tobacco Road* are Southern degenerate farmers and share croppers who are often brutal and lazy, rough and vulgar.
Another legacy of the earlier school of humour
is the realistic reproduction of odd folk's real speech.
In this respect Mark Twain reigns supreme. His Huckleberry
Finn, according to his own admission in the Preface, is an
amalgamation of different dialects spoken in the South:
"the Missouri Negro dialect, the extreme form of the
backwoods Southwestern dialect, the ordinary "Pike County"
dialect, and four modified varieties of this last."28

His characters are made to reveal themselves in a
speech which can be called their own. See in the following
extract Jim's growing impatience at the idea of his being
free on reaching Cairo:

"Pokey soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say;
it's all on account o' Huck; it's a free man, en I
couldn't ever ben free of it hadn't ben for Huck;
Huck done it. Jim won't ever forget you, Huck;
you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de
only fren' ole Jim's got now." (HF, p.309)."

Faulkner is also a true recorder of native speech of
the Southern poor whites. His characters can also be heard
speaking rustics' colloquial idiom. See V.K.Ratliff
narrating Ab's being gyped in the art of horse trading in
his own words:

"The "Thadhorsei" I hollered. "He's changing
colour!"

"He was sober then. He was both out of the
wagon then and Ab's eyes popping and a bay horse
standing in the traces where he had went to
sleep ... a black one. He put his hand out like
he couldn't believe it was even a horse and touched
it at a spot where the reins must every now and then
just barely touched it ... and next I knew that
horse was plunging and swerving... Then there was
the sound like a nail jabbed into a big bicycle tire.
It went whishhhhhhhh and then the rest of that shiny fat black horse we had got from Pat Stamper vanished. I don't mean me and Ab was standing there with just the mule left. We had a horse too. Only it was the same horse we had ... swapped Beasley Kemp the sorghum mill and the straight stock for two weeks ago. (The Hamlet, p. 41).

Caldwell's degenerate Jeeter Lesters speak a language most befitting to their status which abounds in ribald expressions and vulgar phrases. Listen Dude talking to Jeeter about Ellie May:

"Ellie May's acting like your old hound used to do when he got the itch ... Look at her scrape her bottom on the sand. That old hound used to make the same kind of sound Ellie May's making, too. It sounds just like a little pig squealing, don't it?" 29

Mark Twain who began his career and first got recognition as a literary comedian, his works naturally contain the elements of verbal humour typical of literary comedians. The following one example from his A Tramp Abroad is enough to show his indebtedness:

The captain of the raft, who was as full of history as he could stick, said that in the Middle Ages a most prodigious fire-breathing dragon used to live in that region, and made more trouble than a tax collector. He was as long as a railway train ... (Comic simile). His breath bred pestilence and conflagration, and his appetite bred famine (exaggeration). He ate male and female impartially, and was exceedingly unpopular ... (anticlimax and understatement) So the most renowned knights came from the four corners of the earth and retired down the dragon's throat one after the other." (anticlimax) 30

Faulkner's works also abound in comic similes: Houston "could see her now, tall, tall like chimney and with little more shape, standing at the fence" (The Hamlet, p. 176)

Snape had "a short scraggle of iron-grey beard as tight
and knotted as a sheep's coat" (The Hamlet, p. 97); Hula's exposed "thighs between dress and stocking-top looking as gigantic and profoundly naked as the dome of an observatory" (The Hamlet, p. 95).

Parody is widely practised by James Thurber. His morals appended at the end of his tales and fables are the deliberate reversalism of familiar proverbs: "Early to rise and early to bed makes a male healthy and wealthy and dead!"3) "He who sometimes hesitates is saved" (VT, I, p. 179), "Don't count your boobies until they are hatched" (VT, I, p. 185), and "You can fool too many of the people too much of the time" (VT, I, p. 159).

The affinity of Twain and Thurber with Southwestern writers is further strengthened in their sly thrusts at Catholicism and conventional religiosity—a subject so favourite to Harris, Hooper and Longstreet. The following confession-scene in Huckleberry Finn recreates in spirit and tone Hooper and Harris's camp meeting scenes quoted earlier:

'It's the brazen serpent in the wilderness! Look upon it and live!' And people would shout out, 'Glory! Amen!' And so he (preacher) went on, and the people groaning and crying and saying amen:

'Oh, come to the mourners' bench! Come, black with sin! (Amen) come, sick and sore! (Amen) come, lame and halt; and blind! (Amen) come, poor and needy, sunk in shame! (Amen) come, all that's worn, and soiled; and suffering!—come with a broken spirit! come with a contrite heart! come in your rags and sin and dirt! the waters that cleanse is free, the door of heaven stands open—oh, enter in and be at rest! (Amen, glory, glory hallelujah)! (HF, p. 357).
Thurber’s flippancy about religiosity becomes more evident in such incidental remark from his fable, “The Sat Who Got the Hell Out”:

a best-selling inspirationalist was dragging God down to the people’s level. Usurers moved silently among the rapt listeners, selling copies of the speaker’s books: Shake Hands with the Almighty, You Can be Jehovah’s Pal and Have You Taken Our Eternity Insurance? The speaker was saying ‘Have a little talk with the Lord while you’re waiting for a bus, or riding to work, or sitting in the dentist’s chair. Have comfy chats with the Lord in the cosyporners of spare time’ ( VT, II, p.368 ).

Another important subject for comedy—husband-wife antagonism—assumes alarming dimensions in the writings of the present day. Many of Thurber’s morals: “The male was made to lie and roam, but woman’s place is in the home” ( IV, I, p.163 ); “Never allow a nervous female to have access to a pistol, no matter what you’re wearing” ( IV, I, p.143 ); reflect his misogynic tendencies. His tales: “A Couple of Hamburgers” “The Breaking Up of the Winships”, “The Shrike and the Chipmunks” present men suffering at the hands of cantankerous and aggressive wives. His pictorial humour in a series of seventeen cartoons, “The War Between Men and Women” and the stories, “The Cathedral Seat” and “The Unicorn in the Garden” portray cruel and unfriendly wives finally outsmarted.

The meek and innocent looking husbands ultimately turning the tables on their tormenting wives delighted thousands of the readers. The humour of Twain and Faulkner is also of upset expectations. The readers heartily laugh
when the King and the Duke in Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* are caught red-handed in their attempts to rob the three sisters of their cash money or when the redoubtable Frea Snopes is finally outtricked by the Negroes in Faulkner’s *The Town*, as they do when Sut is blown up with soda or Birdofreedom is slaved by the Negro family.

Nevertheless, the moments of black humour are hardly missing from their writings. The blind hero worship of the owl in Thurber’s *The Owl Who Was God* and the moral of “The Truth About Toads”: “Open most heads and you will find nothing shining, not even a mind” (TV, II, p.363), are replete with irony and contempt which made Twain call humanity “the damned human race.” Twain, soon after finishing *Huckleberry Finn*, wrote to Dean Howells: “Isn’t human nature the most consummate sham and lie that ever was invented? Isn’t man a creature to be ashamed of in pretty much all his aspects? Is he really fit for anything but to be stood up on a street corner as a convenience for dogs?”

Twain’s such universal condemnation of mankind finds expression in Huck’s denunciation to be civilized. It is further intensified in his “The Car Soliloquy” when he provides Nicholas II keen and painful insight into human nature who having stripped off his dress stands before a looking-mirror and finds himself shockingly repulsive.
A lank, skinny, spider-legged libel on the image of God! ... waxwork head—the face, with the expression of a melon—the projecting ears—the knotted elbows—the dished out breast—the knife-edged shin—and then the feet, all heels and joints and bone-sprays, and imitation X-ray photograph."

The grotesque description of the Czar is very much in conformity with the earlier comic descriptions of Hans and St., which is concealed under the imperial garb and titles which confer on him, the authority, dignity, respect and status befitting to the Czar:

"Clothes and title are the most potent thing, the most formidable influence, in the earth. They move the human race to willing and spontaneous respect for the judge, the general, the admiral, the bishop, the ambassador, the frivolous earl, the idiot duke, the sultan, the king, the emperor." (TCS, p. 322).

Hence he decides: "There is but one restorative—clothes I will put them on" (TCS, p. 326).

His *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* portrays Hank Morgan's helplessness to uplift the English people who, in spite of his best efforts, continue the same sort of life rooted in superstition, ignorance, violence and cruelty. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, David Wilson is shocked to find caste system taking place of democracy on Dawson's Landing.
Faulkner also shows plundering, robbing, hypocrisy, and violence as characteristically the essential human traits in such remarks in *The Reivers*:

- - - who serves Virtue works alone, unsaid in a chilly vacuum of reserved judgement; where pledge yourself to Non-virtue and the whole countryside boils with volunteers to help you.34

Faulkner's cynicism can not, however, be identified with Twain's later pessimism, yet he has presented a man in his true colours. For this purpose he has contrasted his low characters to high folk in *The Sanctuary*, but his prostitutes and drunkards, the depraved people are better than the respectable aristocrat daughter of Mississippi Judge.

Caldwell has also treated cruelty and grotesquerie comically in his *Tobacco Road* in Dude's exhumation of his grandfather's corpse from his grave, in his light hearted amusement at the half flesh covered skull which shows his irreverence for the elderly dead.

Such a light treatment of the grotesque and the painful as well springs of laughter imparts their writings
that wryness which is typical of black humour.

But in respect of other technical devices—language, characters, framework, narrative, comic similes—the relationship of Twain, Faulkner, Caldwell and Thurber with the Southwestern humorists is clear and unmistakable.

Comedy in Steinbeck's works especially those which are about the poor whites of California: The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown, Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, Cannery Row, East of Eden and Sweet Thursday manifest similar strong strain of folk comedy and traditional humour popularised by Southern or Southwestern writers. How much of the material and techniques of the frontier humour Steinbeck has exploited for comic effects is the subject to be discussed here in the subsequent chapters.
NOTES


10 Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, *America's Humor*, p.179.


17 Baldwin, *Flush Times*, pp.3-7.


