

“Prodigious Poop”:  
Comic Context and  
Psychological Subtext  
in Irving’s  
*Knickerbocker History*

JONATHAN A. COOK

**J**N Diedrich Knickerbocker’s *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809) Washington Irving produced the first great narrative of the comic imagination in America.<sup>1</sup> A carnivalesque jeu d’esprit that can be read on a number of levels, the *Knickerbocker History* is a high-spirited burlesque of antiquarian learning and local history that both celebrates and spoofs the legendary half-century of Dutch colonization in the new world;<sup>2</sup> it is a humorous critique of

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<sup>1</sup> The present essay concerns itself with the original 1809 edition of Irving’s *History*, generally agreed to be the best, most outspoken version Irving published: in subsequent editions Irving added and elaborated comic episodes but blunted the edge of his satire and bowdlerized the bawdy in order not to offend his audience. For a full analysis of Irving’s five substantive revisions (1812, 1819, 1824, 1829, and 1848), see Michael Lawrence Black, “Washington Irving’s *A History of New York* with Emphasis on the 1848 Revision,” diss., Columbia Univ., 1967. For a shorter account, see the introduction to *A History of New York*, ed. Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black, vol. 7 of *The Complete Works of Washington Irving* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), pp. xv-ixviii. (For editorial reasons, the Twayne edition is based on Irving’s final 1848 revision; while profiting from this edition’s textual apparatus and annotations, the interested reader will probably prefer the 1809 text available from the Library of America.)

<sup>2</sup> For overviews of Irving’s sources for the *History*, see the introduction to *Diedrich Knickerbocker’s A History of New York*, ed. Stanley T. Williams and Tremaine

Enlightenment philosophy, historiography, political science, and the legalistic basis for the new republican ideology in America;<sup>3</sup> it is a virtuosic compendium of comic motifs borrowed from Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Butler, Swift, Fielding, Sterne, and others;<sup>4</sup> it is a sardonic satire containing caricatures of leading political and historical figures on both the national and local level, in particular the original genius of American democracy, Thomas Jefferson.<sup>5</sup> *The History* has

McDowell (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), pp. xxxviii-li; and Robert S. Osborne, "A Study of Washington Irving's Development as a Man of Letters to 1825," diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1947, pp. 179-203. On its melding of Dutch history and folklore, see Helen Morris Johnson Loschky, "Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*: Folk History as a Literary Form," diss., Brown Univ., 1970; and Elisabeth Pating Funk, "Washington Irving and His Dutch-American Heritage as Seen in *A History of New York, The Sketch Book, Bracebridge Hall, and Tales of a Traveler*," diss., Fordham Univ., 1986.

<sup>3</sup> For Irving's critique of Enlightenment philosophy and historiography, see three studies by William L. Hedges: "Knickerbocker, Bolingbroke, and the Fiction of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959), 317-28; *Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), chap. 3; and "*The Knickerbocker History* as Knickerbocker's 'History,'" in *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving*, ed. Stanley Brodwin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 153-66. More recently, William T. Gilmore argues that Irving's *History* constitutes an attack on the cultural preeminence of history in the early republic (see "The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume I, 1590-1820*, gen. ed. Sacvan Bercovitch [New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994], pp. 664-68). For a discussion of the political significance of wind symbolism or "aeolism" in the *History*, see David Durant, "Aeolism in *Knickerbocker's A History of New York*," *American Literature*, 41 (1970), 493-506. On the *History* as a satire on American legalism and republican ideology, see Robert A. Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 154-70.

<sup>4</sup> On the eighteenth-century derivation of Irving's narrator, see James E. Evans, "The English Lineage of Diedrich Knickerbocker," *Early American Literature*, 10 (1975), 3-13. On Irving's adaptation of English and other European comic traditions, see Martin Roth, *Comedy and America: The Last World of Washington Irving* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1976), chap. 8.

<sup>5</sup> On political satire in the *History*, see Edwin Greenlaw, "Washington Irving's Comedy of Politics," *The Texas Review*, 1 (1915), 290-306; George Tremaine McDowell, "General James Wilkinson in the *Knickerbocker History of New York*," *Modern Language Notes*, 41 (1926), 353-59; Williams and McDowell, eds., introduction, *History*, pp. ix-ixxiii; Michael L. Black, "Political Satire in *Knickerbocker's History*," in *The Knickerbocker Tradition: Washington Irving's New York*, ed. Andrew B. Myers (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1974), pp. 67-87; Mary Weatherspoon Bowden, "Knickerbocker's *History* and the 'Enlightened' Men of New York City," *American Literature*, 47 (1975), 159-72; and her *Washington Irving* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), pp. 29-53; and Black and Black, introduction, *History*, pp. xxvi-xxix.

accordingly been examined from all these perspectives, but one significant aspect has not received critical attention: the whimsically childlike quality of Knickerbocker's re-creation of the past, with its unabashedly exuberant "low" humor.

Readers can hardly fail to observe that the image of Dutch New York depicted in the *History* evokes a mythical past that is both implicitly and explicitly associated with childhood. Knickerbocker's preface ("To The Public"), for example, reiterates the notion that the early history of New York is analogous to infancy. Describing the process of composition Knickerbocker writes, "I industriously sat myself to work, to gather together all the fragments of our infant history which still existed, and like my revered prototype Herodotus, where no written records could be found, I have endeavoured to continue the chain of history by well authenticated traditions."<sup>6</sup> A few paragraphs later he speaks of "one of the grand objects contemplated in my work, which was to trace the rise of sundry customs and institutions in this best of cities, and to compare them when in the germ of *infancy*, with what they are in the present old age of knowledge and improvement" (p. 379; emphasis added). And shortly afterward he exonerates himself by claiming that "had I been anxious to commend my writings to the pampered palates of literary voluptuaries, I might have availed myself of the obscurity that hangs about the *infant* years of our city, to introduce a thousand pleasing fictions" (p. 379; emphasis added).

Also contributing to the aura of infancy in the *History* is the figure of Saint Nicholas, the legendary original of Santa Claus and the patron saint of children, sailors, marriage, fertility, and (according to Knickerbocker) New Amsterdam/New York. Significantly, the image of this child-dedicated, philoprogenitive saint is featured on the bow of the *Goede Vrouw*, the ship that delivers the first Dutch settlers to the New World; and Nicholas's name is subse-

<sup>6</sup> Washington Irving, *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* . . . by Diedrich Knickerbocker, in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 377; emphasis added. Further references to this edition are cited in the text.

quently given to the settlement's first chapel, whereupon he "immediately took the infant town of New Amsterdam under his peculiar patronage, and has ever since been, and I devoutly hope will ever be, the tutelary saint of this excellent city" (p. 454).<sup>7</sup> Finally, we may recall that the *History* was designedly published on 6 December 1809, the holiday of Saint Nicholas.

In his preface Knickerbocker asserts that "in the conduct of this inestimable work I have adopted no individual model" (p. 378); but it is the purpose of this essay to demonstrate that the *History* is in fact predicated on a schema of *human* development and that the early growth of the biological individual is the ultimate historical model: Irving in effect draws on the ancient analogy of human body and body politic for his chronicle. Thus the movement of the *History* from the beginning to the end of Dutch hegemony figures as a physiological and psychological allegory starting with conception and birth and moving on through infancy and early childhood. More particularly, the trio of Dutch governors at the center of the *History*, Wouter Van Twiller ("Walter the Doubter"), Wilhelmus Kieft ("William the Testy"), and Piet Stuyvesant ("Peter the Headstrong"), embody the oral, anal, and genital or phallic phases of childhood development according to a standard psychoanalytic model, established by Freud. By examining these associations as exemplified by clusters of comic imagery and episode, the underlying formal unity of the *History* is revealed.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Irving's ascription of patronage here is a topical joke, for as Charles W. Jones has shown, the local New York cult of Saint Nicholas was actually created in the late eighteenth century by John Pintard and others as an anti-British, patriotic gesture; the New-York Historical Society, which Pintard helped found in 1804 and to which Irving dedicated the *Knickerbocker History* (after joining in October 1809), also promoted Saint Nicholas as a retroactive, mythical fixture of colonial Dutch culture. Irving, in turn, along with James Kirke Paulding, Clement Moore, and Cutler Verplanck, was largely responsible for establishing the modern popularity of the saint in the guise of "Santa Claus" (see Jones, "Knickerbocker Santa Claus," *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, 38 [1954], 357–83; see also his *Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bari, and Mahalata: Biography of a Legend* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978], pp. 326–49).

<sup>8</sup> Critics have disagreed on whether Irving's *History* possesses formal or thematic unity. Calling the *History* a "thundering, amorphous Jeremiaad," Stanley T. Williams goes on to note: "It is dangerous to speak of the book as a burlesque on a single



Like the traditional number of ages of both the individual and the world, the *History* is divided into seven narrative units or books. The first two books farcically encapsulate a time scheme from the creation of the world to the settlement of New Amsterdam, the third narrates the reign of Walter Van Twiller, the fourth that of William Kieft, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh that of Peter Stuyvesant and the end of Dutch rule in New Amsterdam. A close reading of Irving's text demonstrates that a sustained correspondence unites each phase of the *History* with a distinct phase of early human development, beginning with the act of conception. Thus the first book is largely given over to mocking the different theories that have been proposed to explain the creation of the world and the peopling of America—an exercise of pseudo-erudition that has an implied subtext in the paradoxical mystery and simplicity of human sexual reproduction. Two of the four chapter titles here reveal the potential for double entendre contained within the narrator's burlesque on the folly of the learned: chapter 2 is entitled "*Cosmogony or Creation of the World. With a multitude of excellent Theories, by which the Creation of a World is shewn to be no such difficult Matter as common*

theme; its satire is social, literary, and political and it assails the foibles of humanity. It is not a rapier, like that used by one of Irving's teachers, Swift, but a true Dutch blunderbuss, shooting in all directions at those idiosyncrasies in men and women which so amused the Salmagundians" (*The Life of Washington Irving*, 2 vols. [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935], I, 116). Henry A. Pochmann calls the *History* "an aggregation of tales told in chapters and books rather than a continuous story or history" ("Washington Irving: Amateur or Professional?" in *Critical Essays on Washington Irving*, ed. Ralph M. Adelman [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990], p. 164). For Mary Bowden "the book is really a series of separate sketches having no common theme or tone, with only Irving's wit and style in common" (*Washington Irving*, p. 36). On the other hand, for Robert Ferguson "Irving's emotional rejection of law—fictionally portrayed through the collapse of New Amsterdam—supplies a dramatic unity and thematic coherence that set *A History of New York* apart from his other imaginative works" (p. 155). In a manner analogous to my own developmental model Ferguson goes on to note that "the golden age of Wouter Van Twiller allows a nostalgic rendition of infancy and early boyhood. . . . Chronologically, the reigns of William the Testy and Peter the Headstrong move on to depict adolescence and early manhood with explicit references to Irving's vocational daydreams, first in the law and then in the military" (p. 169).

Folks would imagine"; and chapter 4 reads "Shewing the great toil and contention which Philosophers have had in peopling America.— And how the Aborigines came to be begotten by accident—to the great satisfaction and relief of the author." The implied association between the creation of the earth, the peopling of the New World, and human coition is occasionally made explicit. In chapter 2, for example, amidst his review of philosophical and scientific theories of creation, Knickerbocker mocks Plato as "that temperate sage, who threw the cold water of philosophy on the form of sexual intercourse, and inculcated the doctrine of Platonic affection, or the art of making love without making children.—An exquisitely refined intercourse, but much better adapted to the ideal inhabitants of his imaginary island of Atlantis, than to the sturdy race, composed of rebellious flesh and blood, who populate the little matter of fact island which we inhabit" (pp. 392–93). He goes on to mention the theory of Hesiod, "who generated the whole Universe in the regular mode of procreation," as well as other mythographers who believed "that the earth was hatched from the great egg of night, which floated in chaos, and was cracked by the horns of the celestial bull" (p. 393)—a prescientific, metaphorical approximation to the actual process of human fertilization.

In chapter 3 Knickerbocker makes fun of the Bible-based theories that held Noah's three sons as the progenitors of the races of mankind and Noah himself as the discoverer of America, while in chapter 4 he burlesques the historians and ethnographers who puzzled over the origins of the indigenous peoples of America. Adducing a host of conflicting theories set forth by various writers, Knickerbocker refers to those who speculate that the aborigines came to North America from either Asia or Europe as having "fastened the two continents together by a strong chain of deductions" (p. 409)—a process that comically conflates logical, geological, and sexual realms of discourse. He goes on to mention one individual who literally acts out the same comic incongruity: the Scottish savant John Pinkerton (1758–1826), the author of a *Modern Geography* (1802) and *Reflections on Paris* (1806), whom Knickerbocker facetiously characterizes as

that industrious old gentleman, who compiles books and manufactures Geographies, and who erst flung away his wig and cane, frolicked like a naughty boy, and committed a thousand courtesies, among the *petites filles* of Paris—he I say, has constructed a natural bridge of ice, from continent to continent, at the distance of four or five miles from Behring's straits—for which he is entitled to the grateful thanks of all the wandering aborigines who ever did, or ever will pass over it. (p. 409)

(Ironically, the erotically susceptible savant—the characterization is of course a comic fabrication—is the most credible theorist among the authorities cited by Knickerbocker.) Knickerbocker's last ethnological theorist is the French Jesuit Charlevoix (Irving's source for much of the historical speculation being mocked here), who concludes that the New World was peopled "by accident." Playing on the sexual and anti-philosophical implications of such a conclusion, Knickerbocker ends chapter 4 with a bawdy joke on the notion "that the people of this country had a *variety of fathers*, which as it may not be thought much to their credit by the common run of readers, the less we say on the subject the better" (p. 411). In other words, North America was peopled according to the same "accidental" manner by which the rest of the world is peopled—sexual intercourse.

If in Book I of the *History* there is an undercurrent of sexual double entendre in the conflation of natural creation, ethnographic speculation, and human procreation, Book II hints at an analogy between the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam and the process of human gestation. After the "discovery" of the New York region by Hendrick Hudson, sailing on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, the original Dutch settlers emigrate to America on a maternally named ship, the *Goede Vrouw* (the "Good Woman" or "Good Wife"). Likened to Noah's ark and physically modeled by its Dutch builders on "the fair forms of their country women," the *Goede Vrouw* is in fact a floating fertility symbol: "Like the beautiful model, who was declared the greatest belle in Amsterdam, it was full in the bows, with a pair of enormous cat-heads, a copper bottom, and withal, a most prodigious poop!" (p. 435). The ship,

in Knickerbocker's playfully polysemous language, features a pair of large, breastlike "cat-heads" (projecting beams on which the anchor is hoisted and secured) and a "prodigious poop" that combines both visual (sexual) and verbal (scatological) punning: "poop" as the aftermost deck or stern of a ship (the vessel's rear end, as it were), and "poop" as a child's term for defecation and/or breaking wind (the *OED* dates the latter meaning from at least the mid eighteenth century). To elucidate the scatological pun further we may cite Freud's observation that "from the very first, children are at one in thinking that babies must be born through the bowel."<sup>9</sup> Since the *Goede Vrouw* does indeed give birth to a prodigious new settlement, such an idea may well underlie Knickerbocker's alliterative and allusive punning here. It should be noted that the *Goede Vrouw* is also a comically hermaphroditical vessel, bearing a figurehead in the "goodly image of St. Nicholas" who is provided with "a pipe that reached to the end of the bow-sprit" (p. 435). Endowed with outsized physical characteristics of both sexes, the *Goede Vrouw* is an exuberant emblem of human generative powers, the image of the philoprogenitive saint leading the way.

The Dutch colonists on the *Goede Vrouw* found the settlement of Communipaw on the west side of the Hudson, which Knickerbocker characterizes as "the egg from whence was hatched the mighty city of New York!" (p. 437). But the colonists soon relocate across the river to Manhattan; whereupon Knickerbocker notes the favorable physical geography of lower Manhattan, remarking that it seemed "as though nature had kindly designated the cradle, in which the embryo of this renowned city was to be nestled" (p. 449). Lower Manhattan thus represents a combination of cradle and womb, and it is appropriate in this regard that the only "history" that Knickerbocker mentions for this early settlement involves a dispute between characters named Ten Broek ("Ten Breeces") and Hardenbroek

<sup>9</sup> "The Sexual Life of Human Beings," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XVI, 319. Further references to this edition of Freud's works are cited in the text.

("Tough Breeces") over the question of whether to establish a system of piers or canals in the new settlement, the latter in imitation of their practice in Holland. Knickerbocker plays here on the English word "breeces," meaning either short pants or the human posterior. But as Elisabeth Funk notes, he also covertly plays on the Dutch meanings of "broek," which denotes breeches, a bellying sail, a marsh, or bottomlands.<sup>10</sup> This semantic collocation of breeches, bellying sail, bottomlands, canals, water, and civic growth—we may also recall the "breech birth," in which the feet or "breech" of the infant appears first, and the homonymous noun "breach," meaning a break or opening—collectively hints at a displaced rendition of the birth process, as the city of New Amsterdam commences life at the bottom of Manhattan Island. Thus it is significant that at the end of this dispute, during which Ten Breeces is reported to have "battered and belaboured" Tough Breeces (p. 451), the city is no longer an "embryo" but an "infant settlement" (p. 452). At the conclusion to Book II Knickerbocker again employs related imagery when he remarks: "How long the growing colony might have looked to its parent Holland for supplies, like a chubby overgrown urchin, clinging to its mother's breast, even after it is breched, I will not pretend to say" (pp. 457-58). New Amsterdam has clearly emerged from its womblike origins and now leads an autonomous existence, and with the reign of its first governor we begin the *History's* psychological allegory of oral, anal, and phallic phases of childhood development.

According to the Freudian paradigm, in the conflict between "pleasure principle" and "reality principle" the child finds successive instinctual gratification in oral, anal, and genital (or phallic) erotogenic zones. In the oral stage, which begins with breast feeding and covers roughly the first year of life, the ingestion of nutriment provides the chief source of instinctual gratification. In the anal stage, lasting from about age one to three, the child's locus of pleasure is shifted to the release and retention of the bowels. Finally, in the

<sup>10</sup> See Funk, pp. 45-46; on Irving's full use of the "broek" motif, see pp. 44-62.

genital or phallic stage, from about age three to five or six, the (male) child's penis becomes the focus of instinctual attention—a stage ending with the resolution of the Oedipus Complex.<sup>11</sup> In Irving's *Knickerbocker History* the three Dutch governors—Walter the Doubter, William the Testy, and Peter the Headstrong—inhabit worlds of oral, anal, and phallic gratification.<sup>12</sup> This applies both to their own modalities of behavior and to that of their subjects, for the symbolic equation of gubernatorial body and body politic is a related feature of the psychological paradigm at work here. Irving in effect telescopes a total of seven actual Dutch governors between the establishment of the colony and its takeover by the English a half-century later into only three. The adjustment of the historical record is no doubt influenced by the brief tenure and obscurity of the first four governors as compared with the last three; but it also conveniently matches the tripartite division of childhood psychological development. An examination of each governor and the characteristic features of his reign will demonstrate these correspondences.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of this process, see Freud, "Infantile Sexuality," in *Standard Edition*, VII, 173–206; and "Sexual Life," and "The Development of the Libido and the Sexual Organizations," in *Standard Edition*, XVI, 313–38. For a recent evaluation of Freud's developmental model, see Anthony Storr, *Freud* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 20–29. As Storr notes, Freud's theory of oral, anal, and genital or phallic phases of human development has proved of durable utility amid the discrediting or revising of many other aspects of Freudian theory (following Storr and others, I henceforth use "phallic" for Freud's "genital" stage of development). For a more extensive overview of the credibility of oral and anal stages as well as oedipal dynamics, see Seymour Fisher and Roger P. Greenberg, *The Scientific Credibility of Freud's Theories and Therapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), chaps. 3 and 4. For a spirited debunking of the whole Freudian project, see the recent writings of Frederick Crews.

<sup>12</sup> It is pertinent to note that the nicknames of each governor may also be related to these three phases: the "oral" personality (Walter the Doubter) is passive, dependent, and subject to doubts; the "anal" personality (William the Testy) is parsimonious, orderly, and obsessive-compulsive; the phallic personality (Peter the Headstrong) is concerned with displays of potency. See Storr, pp. 22–23.

<sup>13</sup> The first four "Directors General" of the colony, whom Irving passes over, were Cornelis May (1624–1625), Willem Verhulst (1626), Peter Minuit (1626–1632), and Bastiaen Jansz Krol (1633). The reigns of Irving's three governors were Van Twiller (1633–1638), Kieft (1638–1647), and Stuyvesant (1647–1664). As Loschky notes, "Historians frequently chide Irving for neglecting the first four Directors General, or Governors, to rule the colony. But when we recall the scantiness of the early records from which Irving could have drawn his facts, and consider as well how few people

The "golden age" of Walter the Doubter embodies a full-scale "oral" culture dominated by a man whose infantile self-absorption is the comic source of his political wisdom. Walter is repeatedly described in terms suggesting infancy: he is "a man, shut up within himself like an oyster, and of such a profoundly reflective turn, that he scarcely ever spoke except in monosyllables yet did he never make up his mind, on any doubtful point" (p. 463). Not only is his conversation limited to monosyllables, but his shape suggests the physical proportions of babyhood: "His body was of an oblong form, particularly capacious at bottom; which was wisely ordered by providence, seeing that he was a man of sedentary habits, and very averse to the idle labour of walking. His legs, though exceedingly short, were sturdy in proportion to the weight they had to sustain." Like that of an infant, "his head was a perfect sphere" while "his face, that infallible index of the mind, presented a vast expanse perfectly unfurrowed or deformed by any of those lines and angles, which disfigure the human countenance with what is termed expression" (p. 464). Sleeping twelve hours a day, this overgrown infant inhabits the soporific world of the nursery: he presides in council "in a huge chair of solid oak" that suggests a highchair; while deliberating he makes "certain regular guttural sounds," which might be interpreted as either snoring or gurgling; and, finally, he occupies himself with a "long turkish pipe," like a child with a pacifier (p. 465). Walter's first judicial decision, which sets a precedent for his peaceful reign, also has relevant physiological implications. This involves a dispute between two burgers over a settlement of accounts. Parodying the wisdom of Solomon, as in the famous case of the two harlots claiming custody of a child (I Kings 3:16–27), Walter weighs the two account books as a means of finding out which side has the "weightier" argument. He finally decides "that one was just as thick and as heavy as the other" (p. 467).

there were for the first Directors to govern . . . how great a crime can we account it that Irving seemingly mistaid the first four Directors?" (pp. 22–23). See Loschky, chaps. 1 and 2, for a detailed analysis of Irving's *History* in comparison with the historical record of New Amsterdam.

a conclusion suggesting that Walter has learned his judicial wisdom at his mother's breast.

If Walter is an adept at ingestion, his political associates are modeled on him in appearance and behavior: his burgomasters "were generally chosen by weight—and not only the weight of the body, but likewise the weight of the head" (p. 469). The alimentary motto of Walter's reign is in fact written over the council chamber and reads, "The sow that's still / Sucks all the swill" (p. 472). Walter and his advisers are, in effect, both porcine and infantine in their unself-conscious adiposity and their single-minded concentration on sucking up their food. Knickerbocker facetiously claims that the unique tranquility of Walter's reign stems from the physiological principle that fat people are noncontentious; yet such tranquility is also analogous to the infant's sense of peace and security when satiated with nourishment, particularly after breast feeding.<sup>14</sup>

Not only is Walter fixated in a paradise of orality and ingestion, but the populace shares this tendency as well. The early New Amsterdammers, who remind the narrator of "those happy days of primeval simplicity, which float before our imaginations like golden visions" (p. 479), limit themselves to life's simple pleasures of eating, drinking, and sleeping.<sup>15</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that the folk of New Amsterdam mimic their governor in his infantile eating habits. Thus the people consume large meals of "sturdy, substantial fare" such as "slices of pork fat, fried brown, cut up into mouthfuls, and

<sup>14</sup> As Freud remarks in a famous sentence, "No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life" ("Infantile Sexuality," *Standard Edition*, VII, 182).

<sup>15</sup> Roth identifies New Amsterdam under Walter as a version of the mythological land of Cockaigne by way of Rabelais: "Rabelais' masterpiece [*Gargantua*] is certainly the highest expression of the Cockaigne myth in literature, and most of the features of Rabelais' comic universe flow into Irving's New York. The Rabelaisian universe is inhabited by tremendous eaters and drinkers, but behind those towering gluttons are equally tremendous stores of foodstuffs; and, on a higher level of the fiction, the world itself is alimentary, if not literally, then metaphorically so" (*Comey and America*, p. 130). For local folkloric traditions of Dutch roundity, see Robert C. Wess, "The Use of Hudson-Valley Folk Traditions in Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker History of New York*," *New York Folklore Quarterly*, 30 (1974), 212–25.

swimming in doup or gravy" or "balls of sweetened dough, fried in hog's fat, and called dough nuts or oly kooks" (p. 480). Also typical of this age of oral gratification is the tea party, the chief social amenity, during which a loaf of sugar was suspended "by a string from the ceiling, so that it could be swung from mouth to mouth—an ingenious expedient" (p. 481) that suggests a serviceable, all-purpose teat.<sup>16</sup> It is only appropriate that the inhabitants wear several layers of garments resembling both diapers and the protective apparel of infancy. Hence, the women wear multiple layers of petticoats; and "a fine lady, in those times, waddled under more clothes even on a fair summer's day, than would have clad the whole bevy of a modern ball room" (p. 484). Similarly, the fashionable gentlemen would go about clad in "half a score of breeches" (p. 486). With all its physical needs amply taken care of, the "city" of New Amsterdam under Walter Van Twiller exists in a blissful if precarious state of oral oblivion. So when news arrives of Yankee harassment at the Dutch fort of Goed Hoop at Hartford, the peace-loving Walter expires with a final gurgle. Walter does not so much die as evaporate with the last puff of his pipe, a cartoonlike expiration suited to the self-absorbed infantile world he inhabits.

With Walter's death New Amsterdam enters a new era under a new governor, Wilhelmus Kieft or "William the Testy." He is "a brisk, waspish, little old gentleman" obsessed by the profundities of the law and other abstruse philosophical and scientific studies. As a number of critics have pointed out, William is a telling satirical caricature of Thomas Jefferson, whose personality and presidency Irving satirizes extensively here.<sup>17</sup> Yet the characterization of William the Testy

<sup>16</sup> Writing of the infant's sucking instinct, Freud notes: "A portion of the lip itself, the tongue, or any other part of the skin within reach—even the big toe—may be taken as the object upon which this sucking is carried out. In this connection a grasping-instinct may appear and may manifest itself as a simultaneous rhythmic tugging at the lobes of the ears or a catching hold of some part of another person (as a rule the ear) for the same purpose" ("Infantile Sexuality," *Standard Edition*, VII, 180).

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 1 of Book IV is accordingly given over to ridicule of William's (or Jefferson's) pretensions to universal knowledge and his devotion to impractical theory over commonsensical fact. Moreover, by comically representing William as fighting his English neighbors to the East by means of ineffectual "proclamations"

also suggests a personality fixated at the anal stage of development, as Irving conflates political satire of his own era with a scatological "purge" of his subject. From a psychological perspective William's anal orientation is well suited to his political situation. In the anal stage children "encounter the external world as an inhibiting power, hostile to their desire for pleasure, and have a glimpse of later conflicts both external and internal" (Freud, "Sexual Life," *Standard Edition*, XVI, 315). This intrusive presence is represented in the *History* by the growing menace of Yankee settlements in Connecticut at the beginning of William's reign, particularly the unwelcome presence of Yankee "squatters" on Dutch territory. Upon hearing of Yankee demands for the surrender of the Dutch fort at Hartford, William's reaction is the desire to fight the Yankees exclusively by "proclamation." While this incident parodies Thomas Jefferson's controversial Non-Importation, Embargo, and Non-Intercourse Acts during his second presidency, there is more at work here than topical satire alone: William's official proclamation against the Yankees is also a symbolic act of defecation. Thus, after his council gives "a universal grunt of acquiescence" to its issuance, the proclamation is

immediately dispatched with due ceremony, having the great seal of the province, which was about the size of a buckwheat pancake, attached to it by a broad red ribband. Governor Kieft having thus vented his indignation, felt greatly relieved—adjourned the council *sine die*—put on his cocked hat and corduroy small clothes, and mounting a tall raw boned charger, trotted out to his country seat, which was situated in a sweet, sequestered swamp, now called Dutch street, but more commonly known by the name of Dog's Misery. (p. 517)

and declarations of "non-intercourse," Irving skewers Jefferson's pacifist and legalistic foreign policy in the years leading up to the War of 1812. On the anti-Jefferson satire in the *History*, see Greenlaw, pp. 299–305; Williams and McDowell, eds., introduction, *History*, pp. lxi–lxxiii; Williams, *Life*, I, 117–18; Black, "Political Satire," pp. 71–73; Bowden, "Knickerbocker's *History*," and *Washington Irving*, pp. 39–44 (Bowden argues that the portrait of Kieft parodies De Wit Clinton as well as Jefferson); and Ferguson, pp. 157–58.

The scatological hints are pervasive here, from the relief William feels over the successful emission of his "proclamation" to the toilet-like ambience of his "country seat" to which he subsequently "trotted out."<sup>18</sup>

To continue the analogy, William takes inordinate pleasure in his "proclamation" in the same way that a child delights in his own bowel movements, a feature of the anal stage of development when they represent the child's "gift" to the world: "They are clearly treated as a part of the infant's own body and represent his first 'gift': by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience" (Freud, "Infantile Sexuality," *Standard Edition*, VII, 186). William sees his first proclamation against Yankee encroachment as such a gift:

The proclamation was perfect in all its parts, well constructed, well written, well sealed and well published—all that was wanting to insure its effect, was that the Yankees should stand in awe of it; but, provoking to relate, they treated it with the most absolute contempt, applied it to an unseemly purpose, which shall be nameless, and thus did the first warlike proclamation come to a shameful end—a fate which I am credibly informed, has befallen but too many of its successors. (p. 519)

The proclamation is a "well constructed" masterpiece; yet the "unseemly purpose" to which it is subjected ironically underlines the connection between William's proclamation and its physiological equivalent. For the "shameful end" here is a pun on the practical but insulting use to which the proclama-

<sup>18</sup> As Williams and McDowell note, "Kieft's cocked hat and corduroy small clothes" and his "raw-boned charger" would easily suggest to a reader in 1809 Jefferson's notorious saddle-horse which he rode between Washington and Monticello, and his democratic taste in breeches, so annoying to American aristocrats" (introduction, *History*, p. lxi). Moreover, "Dog's Misery" is clearly an anti-Jeffersonian barb, this being the name given to one wing of Monticello where Jefferson experimented on animals (see Black and Black, eds., *History*, p. 332n). On the other hand, Kieft's estate in a "sweet sequestered swamp" would seem to be as much a spoofing of Monticello as further evidence of the scatological imagery surrounding Kieft here. Significantly, William at his "country seat" submits to the "petticoat government" of his dominating wife just as a child submits to the coercive toilet training of his mother or father.



tion is put in an era when wastepaper was devoted to human hygiene.

Failing to "purge the land from these rapacious intruders," William "resolutely resolved to double the dose" (pp. 519–20). But in spite of his rhetorical threats the Dutch troops at the Fort of Goed Hoop are ignominiously kicked out by the Yankees. Receiving this communication William goes into a tantrum, at which time his ire is vented in a revealing manner:

Language cannot express the prodigious fury, into which the testy Wilhelmus Kieft was thrown by this provoking intelligence. For three good hours the rage of the little man was too great for words, or rather the words were too great for him; and he was nearly choaked by some dozen huge, mis-shapen, nine cornered dutch oaths, that crowded all at once into his gullet. A few hearty thumps on the back, fortunately rescued him from suffocation—and shook out of him a bushel or two of enormous excretions, not one of which was smaller than "dunder and blixum!"—It was a matter of astonishment to all the bye standers, how so small a body, could have contained such an immense mass of words without bursting. Having blazed off the first broadside, he kept up a constant firing for three whole days—anathematizing the Yankees, man, woman, and child, body and soul, for a set of dieven, schobbejaken, deugenieten, twist-zoekeren, loozen-schalken, blaeskaeken, kakken-bedden, and a thousand other names of which, unfortunately for posterity, history does not make particular mention. (p. 525)

Here again words are symbolically associated with the alimentary canal in a comic reenactment of the symbolic equivalence of proclamation and defecation.<sup>19</sup> Freud notes that "children who are making use of the susceptibility to erotogenic stimulation of the anal zone betray themselves by holding back their

<sup>19</sup> The image of William choking on a string of "huge, misshapen, nine cornered dutch oaths" has a probable literary source in a scene from Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (Act V, scene iii) in which the poet Crispinus (a caricature of John Marston) is made to disgorge a series of ungainly words—a parody of Marston's inflated diction—in a therapeutic satirical "purge"; this scene was in turn based on a similar episode in Lucian's *Lexiphanes*. For a discussion of the literary context of Jonson's "purge" of Marston, which subsequently inspired Shakespeare's "purge" of Jonson in *Troilus and Cressida*, see James P. Bednarz, "Shakespeare's Purge of Jonson: The Literary Context of *Troilus and Cressida*," in *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 21, ed. Leeds Barroll (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 175–212.

stool till its accumulation brings about violent muscular contractions and, as it passes through the anus, is able to produce powerful stimulation of the mucous membrane. In so doing it must no doubt cause not only painful but also highly pleasurable sensations" ("Infantile Sexuality," *Standard Edition*, VII, 186). William seems to be engaged in a similar process. Choking on his "enormous excretions" that "posterity" will never know—scatological puns lurk in both nouns—William nevertheless articulates seven insulting Dutch epithets, the first five of which mean, respectively, "thieves," "scoundrels" or "beggars," "good-for-nothings," "quarrelers," and "rogues" (literally "sly jokers"). The last two, on the other hand, mean "blowhards" or "braggarts" (literally "blow jaws") and "bedshitters"—epithets that duplicate the mirroring here of oral and anal emissions and illustrate once again William's anal characterization.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most familiar feature of the "anal" personality is a tendency toward stinginess resulting in the classic "anal" type, the miser. Hence it comes as no surprise that this is a prominent feature of William the Testy's reign. At some point William "stumbled over a grand *political cabalistic* word" (p. 535)—economy—a word that is capable of "drawing the purse strings and buttoning the breeches pockets of all philosophical legislators" (p. 536) and that is ultimately responsible for William's miserly outlays on defense and other civic necessities. In fact this talismanic word "at once explains the whole system of proclamations, protests, empty threats, windmills, trumpeters, and paper war, carried on by Wilhelmus the Testy" (p. 537). William's one-word motto, like Walter's rhyming couplet before him, is the key to his ineffectual statecraft as well as to the implied source of his instinctual gratification.

As was apparent during the earlier reign of Walter, the citizens of New Amsterdam are again symbolically allied with their governor's personality type. One of William's legislative acts aptly demonstrates the interdependence of politi-

<sup>20</sup> For a linguistic analysis of these terms, see Funk, pp. 326–27. See also Clarence M. Webster, "Irving's Expurgation of the 1809 *History of New York*," *American Literature*, 4 (1932), 293–95.

cal and psychological tendencies in the populace: when William tries to prohibit smoking in New Amsterdam, "a mob of factious citizens had even the hardihood to assemble around the little governor's house, where setting themselves resolutely down, like a besieging army before a fortress, they one and all fell to smoking with a determined perseverance, that plainly evinced it was their intention, to fank him into terms with villainous Cow-pen mundungus!" (p. 543). This excremental aroma—"mundungus" is "any foul smelling tobacco" (*OED*)—has its effect, and William relents in his prohibition of tobacco. Not surprisingly, even after this episode the people of New Amsterdam persist in their tendency to mirror their leader's censorious "anal" tendencies. For with the excessive smoking of short-stem pipes (which William has enforced) their brains become hot and dry, and as a result the people again become as fractious as their "testy" governor. Irving's depiction of the political factionalism created by William's legalistic reign assumes a relevant anatomical configuration:

The wise people of New Amsterdam therefore, after for some time enduring the evils of confusion, at length, like honest dutchmen as they were, soberly settled down into two distinct parties, known by the name of *Square head* and *Platter breech*—the former implying that the bearer was deficient in that rotundity of pericranium, which was considered as a token of true genius—the latter that he was destitute of genuine courage, or *good bottom*, as it has since been technically termed—and I defy all the politicians of this great city to shew me where any two parties of the present day, have split upon more important and fundamental points.

(p. 548)

The pseudoscientific Swifitian terminology, recalling the High Heels and Low Heels of the island of Lilliput, resolves itself into a Swifitian scatological pun. Moreover, in his equating of the two political parties to nonspherical forms of the human head and hindquarters, Irving reduces New Amsterdam politics to a contest of lamebrains and lightweights and simultaneously transforms William the Testy's subjects into

the twin globes of the human fundament.<sup>21</sup> To amplify the joke Irving introduces several scientific authorities to gloss this party division, including an appropriately named figure whose pedagogy has established the practical link between buttocks and brain: "the breechology of professor Higenbottom, which teaches the surprizing and intimate connection between the seat of honour, and the seat of intellect" (p. 549). The body politic is taking a satirical beating here—both in this penultimate stage of William's reign and in the divisive era in which Irving was writing—as the dirty business of politics becomes an all-consuming activity for William's wayward subjects.

William's reign effectively ends with the rise of the New England confederation, although he still "kept constantly firing off his proclamations and protests, like a sturdy little sea captain, firing off so many carronades and swivels" (p. 556). Apparently fixated at the anal stage of development, "he at length became as completely burnt out, as a dutch family pipe" and expires by "animal combustion" (p. 559). Like Walter the Doubter, William seems to transmigrate rather than die, making way for a new Dutch governor, Piet Stuyvesant or "Peter the Headstrong," whose character suggests that we have entered a new stage in the conflation of psychological and historical development illustrated by the *History*.

The most notable feature of Peter's anatomy is his "wooden leg, which was the only prize he had gained, in bravely fighting the battles of his country; but of which he was so proud, that he was often heard to declare he valued it more than all his other limbs put together; indeed so highly did he esteem it, that he caused it to be gallantly enchased and relieved with silver devices" (p. 565). As this description implies, Peter's dominant character trait is martial ardor, the outward manifestation of what might be called his phalloscentric or phalloscentric identity, which begins with his given

<sup>21</sup> Such imagery has led Marvin E. Mengeling to fastidiously remark: "One could almost make a case for the 'anal vision' of Diedrich Knickerbocker, if one were so inclined (I am not so inclined), because so much of his bawdy humor involves the human posterior" ("The Crass Humor of Irving's Diedrich Knickerbocker," *Studies in American Humor*, 1 [1974], 67).

name.<sup>22</sup> The combined virile and autocratic nature of Peter's reign is conveyed by a characteristic trope justifying his intransigence: "The clock that stands still, and points resolutely in one direction, is certain of being right twice in the four and twenty hours—while others may keep going continually, and continually be going wrong" (pp. 566–67). Peter's gubernatorial rule is marked by a steadily increasing battle against enemies from without and within, hence his "phallic" personality is well suited to the temper of his times.

If Peter's wooden leg is a symbol of his phallocentrism, his right-hand man, Antony Van Corlear, is a mock-heroic embodiment of the same trait. Van Corlear, Peter's trumpeter and military point man, makes a cameo appearance during the reign of William the Testy but emerges as a character only under Peter the Headstrong. The relationship between the two, suggesting both psychological displacement and allegorical doubling, is so close as even to imply an anatomical linkage. Thus when he is first summoned into Peter's presence to explain his function, Van Corlear plays his instrument so well that Peter "straightway conceived an astonishing kindness for him; and . . . ever after retained him about his person, as his chief favourite, confidential envoy and trusty squire" (p. 570). Van Corlear had earlier been characterized as being "famous for his long wind and his huge whiskers, and who as the story goes, could twang so potently upon his instrument, as to produce an effect upon all within hearing, as though ten thousand bagpipes were singing most lustily; the nose" (p. 526). Perpetually blowing at his trumpet, Antony becomes Peter's bewhiskered, ithyphallic mascot. Antony's first assignment, which plays on his comic priapism, is to send Peter's challenge to the Yankee Amphycytonic league in Connecticut. After sounding his challenge in their faces Antony returns to New York, "stopping occasionally to eat pumpkin pies, dance at country frolics, and bundle with the beauteous lasses of those parts—whom he rejoiced exceedingly with his soul stirring instrument" (p. 582). The punning

<sup>22</sup> According to Donald R. Noble, Jr., Irving conveys a sexual double entendre in Stuyvesant's first name (see "Washington Irving's 'Peter' Pun," *American Notes and Queries*, 8 [1970], 103–4).

language here could hardly be more bawdy in its celebration of a joyous and priapic virility.<sup>23</sup>

While the true phallic hero, Antony Van Corlear, embodies a psychological displacement of Peter Stuyvesant's phallocentric identity, he has a dramatic counterpart in a castrating, false phallic hero, Jacobus Von Poffenburgh, the Dutch high commander in charge of Fort Casimer. As a target for Irving's political satire Von Poffenburgh represents a mordant caricature of General James Wilkinson, the double-dealing commanding general of the Armies of the United States under Jefferson and Madison and the first governor of the new Louisiana Territory. Irving had observed Wilkinson during Aaron Burr's trial in Richmond in the spring and summer of 1807; hence the portrait of the bloated, self-important Von Poffenburgh is closely modeled on the pompous, posturing, and duplicitous Wilkinson.<sup>24</sup>

Yet over and above this political caricature Von Poffenburgh's fatuous behavior suggests other dimensions to his character. As an example of the ancient comic type of the *miles gloriosus*, Von Poffenburgh, like his literary ancestor Falstaff, is notable for his panoply of mock-heroic endowments, chief of which is his endowment of hot air. Appropriately enough, Von Poffenburgh's militaristic German surname actually means "mountain of wind." He is "a huge, full bodied man, whose size did not so much arise from his being fat, as windy; being so completely inflated with his own importance,

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson claims that Van Corlear is a "figure for the artist. Antony's creativity and boisterous good humor are rooted in the acceptance of his music by political authority, his imperviousness to legal wrangling, his easy conquests of every available heart, and his good fortune in 'having never been married'" (p. 156). On Van Corlear's mix of historical models, see Loschky, pp. 67–70.

<sup>24</sup> What made Wilkinson particularly odious to Irving was the fact that in October 1806 Wilkinson had accused Burr, his co-conspirator and Irving's fellow New York Federalist, of treason during Burr's ill-fated southwestern expedition—this despite rumors of Wilkinson himself being in the pay of the Spanish government, an allegation that later turned out to be true. In "General James Wilkinson" McDowell first pointed out the parallels between Von Poffenburgh and Wilkinson; Black ("Political Satire," pp. 73–78) adds further details and suggests a connection between Von Poffenburgh's loss of Fort Casimer and Wilkinson's inability to remove Spanish garrisons on the Sabine River. On Wilkinson, Burr, and Irving's attendance at the latter's trial, see Williams, *Life*, I, 96–98; and Philip McFarland, *Soyourners* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), pp. 61–69, 74–85.

that he resembled one of those puffed up bags of wind, which old Eolus, in an incredible fit of generosity, gave to that vagabond warrior Ulysses" (p. 599). Von Poffenburgh is thus a caricature of both comic and phallic tumescence; he is, moreover, a descendant of the grotesquely inflated giants of romance like Spenser's Orgoglio, who represents a personification of pride and phallic tumescence.<sup>25</sup> In dress Von Poffenburgh is "crowned with an overshadowing cocked-hat, and girded with a leathern belt ten inches broad, from which trailed a faultchion [a curved sword] of a length that I dare not mention" (p. 599). His weaponry is literally unspeakable because of its enormous size—or perhaps the reverse. Having invested Fort Casimer on the Delaware River, Von Poffenburgh spends his time marching "on the top of his little rampart—like a vain glorious cock pidgeon vapouring on the top of his coop" (p. 601) and exercises his military ardor by attacking cabbages, sunflowers, and pumpkins with "his trusty sabre, of full two flemish ells in length" (p. 602).

Given his symbolic identity as false phallic hero, it is appropriate that Von Poffenburgh, unlike the joyous and procreative Van Corlear, is associated with displaced acts of violation and castration. In fact, an act of castration is suggested when in a show of discipline Von Poffenburgh orders one of his soldiers, the old veteran Kildermester, to cut off his "immoderate queue" of hair (p. 602). ("Queue" is French slang for "penis," a meaning dating at least as far back as Rabelais.) Vowing resistance to this violation of his manhood, Kildermester falls ill of a fever and dies before his "queue" is cut off, having defiantly directed before he died "that he should be carried to his grave with his eel-skin

<sup>25</sup> The characterization of Orgoglio ("pride") reveals his kinship with Von Poffenburgh: "The greatest Earth his uncouth mother was, / And blustering Aeolus he boasted sire, / Who with his breath, which through the world doth pass, / Her hollow womb did secretly inspire, / And fill'd her hidden caves with stormie yre, / That she conceived; and trebling the dew time, / In which the wombes of women do expire, / Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slime / Putt up with empte wind, and fill'd with sinful crime" (*The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto VII, stanza 9, in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism: Third Edition*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott [New York: W. W. Norton, 1993], p. 89). On Orgoglio as an embodiment of phallic tumescence, see John W. Schroeder, "Spenser's Erotic Drama: The Orgoglio Episode," *ELH*, 29 (1962), 140–59.

queue sticking out of a knot hole in his coffin" (p. 603).<sup>26</sup> The sequel to the Kildermester affair, however, suggests that it is Von Poffenburgh himself who is fearful of castration, for the image of the old soldier whom he attempted to deprive of his "queue" continues to haunt the general: "This magnanimous affair obtained the general great credit as an excellent disciplinarian, but it is hinted that he was ever after subject to bad dreams, and fearful visitations in the night—when the grizzly spectrum of old Kildermester would stand centinel by his bed side, erect as a pump, his enormous queue strutting out like the handle" (p. 603). A grotesque phallic monster, Kildermester's nightmare image, with its threat of an older and more virile male, suggests a nemesis figure originating in a displaced image of the father as subconscious threat, according to the oedipal scenario.<sup>27</sup> In any case, Von Poffenburgh's repressed castration anxiety (the obverse of his overweening braggadocio) portends defeat for this military imposter.

As we soon discover, in the course of Peter the Headstrong's reign a contest of phallic heroes transpires, with one contender proving his impotence and the other his mettle. The contrast in potencies between Von Poffenburgh and Van Corlear is especially made manifest in Book VI, which, with its marshaling of armies and mock-heroic battle at Fort Christina, represents the dramatic climax of the *History*. The Book begins with Von Poffenburgh foolishly allowing Fort Casimer to be seized by the Swedish leader, Risingh, who takes advantage of the general's self-infatuation to get him drunk: "so lustily did the great Von Poffenburgh ply the bottle, that in less than four short hours he made himself, and his whole garrison, who all sedulously emulated the deeds of their chieftain, dead

<sup>26</sup> Michael L. Black has demonstrated that Kildermester is based on the case of Colonel Thomas Butler, an old veteran who, at the instigation of Wilkinson, was convicted by a court martial in 1805 for refusing to cut his hair according to Wilkinson's original order of 1801; he died of yellow fever before the sentence was carried out (see Black, "Political Satire," p. 75; and Black and Black, eds., *History*, pp. 343–44).

<sup>27</sup> We may note that, unlike almost all the other Dutch names in the *History*, there is apparently no Dutch source for the name "Kildermester" (see Funk, p. 358); thus it is probably a facetious coinage suggesting "kill the master."

drunk" (p. 614). Von Poffenburgh thus debases and unmans himself through alcoholic indulgence; and "when brought to himself by a sound drubbing, bore no little resemblance to a 'deposhed fish;' or bloated sea monster, caught upon dryland" (p. 615). Von Poffenburgh's disgrace in losing Fort Casimer is confirmed by Peter Stuyvesant's contemptuous dismissal of him from service.

The fall of Fort Casimer sends Peter Stuyvesant on a recruiting voyage up the Hudson with his trusty trumpeter in order to marshal the Dutch tribes to combat their Swedish colonial rivals. And on this voyage Van Corlear distinguishes himself by performing a magical feat with his oversized nose, an organ analogous to his "soul stirring" instrument in its phallic resonances: "It must be known then that the nose of Antony the trumpeter was of a very lusty size, strutting boldly from his countenance like a mountain of Golconda; being sumptuously bedecked with rubies and other precious stones—the true regalia of a king of good fellows, which jolly Bacchus grants to all who bouse it heartily at the flaggon" (p. 626). Ornamented with "precious stones" (the punning equivalent of "family jewels" in today's slang) and associated with mythical wealth, Van Corlear's olfactory organ proves to be an effortless provider when it effectuates the killing of "a mighty sturgeon" by reflecting the sun's "potent beams" at its underwater target. By so doing, Van Corlear's fabulous nose—apparently a combination of fishing pole and primitive ray gun—proves to be an embodiment of the primal generative energy of the universe (though with a comic-diabolic hint of brimstone in its composition, as the Dutch crewmembers remark upon consuming the giant fish).

The contrast between Van Corlear and Von Poffenburgh as antithetical allegorical doublets should by now be clear. Van Corlear is an ithyphallic hero and Von Poffenburgh a detumescent one. Van Corlear enhances his manhood through drink while Von Poffenburgh debases his own. Van Corlear is a musical horn of plenty; Von Poffenburgh is an empty bladder and a mountain of wind. Van Corlear catches mighty fish with his magical "pole"; Von Poffenburgh massacres humble vegetables with his unmentionable weaponry. Finally, whereas

Von Poffenburgh is responsible for the loss of Fort Casimer, Van Corlear is ultimately to be credited with the Dutch victory at Fort Christina. For another emblem of Antony's magical potency enables Peter Stuyvesant to defeat his Swedish counterpart, Risingh, during their solo encounter on the field of battle. The decisive victory comes about after Peter has temporarily stunned Risingh with a blow from his wooden leg and then proceeds to attack him with another non-lethal weapon:

The bewildered Swede staggered with the blow, and in the mean time the wary Peter, espying a pocket pistol lying hard by (which had dropped from the wallet of his faithful squire and trumpeter Van Corlear during his furious encounter with the drummer) discharged it full at the head of the reeling Risingh—Let not my reader mistake—it was not a murderous weapon loaded with powder and ball, but a little sturdy stone pottle, charged to the muzzle with a double dram of true dutch courage, which the knowing Van Corlear always carried about him by way of replenishing his valour. (p. 657)

Van Corlear's "pocket pistol" or more properly "stone pottle"—which probably derives from the "pistol" of sack that Falstaff offers Prince Hal at the Battle of Shrewsbury (*Henry IV*, V, iv)—is of special significance here, for a "pottle" is a two-quart container while "stone" is a covert pun on "testicle": in sum, Van Corlear's "double dram of true dutch courage" is the symbolic equivalent of testosterone. Van Corlear is thus triply blest with phallic powers, first with his "soul stirring instrument," second with his bejeweled nose, and now with his "pocket pistol" or "stone pottle." Moreover, if Von Poffenburgh's abuse of alcohol is originally responsible for the loss of Fort Casimer, the conquest of Fort Christina is gained by means of the more potent liquor contained in Van Corlear's "stone pottle."

In the last book of the *History*, chronicling the demise of Dutch sovereignty in New Amsterdam, the close relationship between Peter and Van Corlear enters its terminal phase. The book begins in the heroic mode, with the governor and his trumpeter making an expedition to deal directly with the unresolved issue of Yankee encroachment by negotiating with the Amphycyonic league of New England. For their expedition



Peter goes "bracing on his thigh that trusty brass hilted sword, which had wrought such fearful deeds on the banks of the Delaware," while Van Corlear has "his sturdy stone pottle which had laid low the mighty Risingh, slung under his arm, and his trumpet displayed vauntingly in his right hand" (p. 686). Yet despite this formidable phallic display at the outset Peter's negotiations with the land-hungry English colonists are ineffectual; indeed, they are soon interrupted by news of the impending arrival of an English fleet in New Amsterdam. Peter's fighting spirit is galvanized by this threat to Dutch sovereignty, but he is soon handicapped by the death of Antony, his vital musical mascot, who perishes on "a dark and stormy night" while attempting to swim across the narrows at upper Manhattan on another recruiting mission. As we might expect, Antony dies with his phallic power intact; for after again "bracing to his side his junk bottle, well charged with heart inspiring Hollands" (pp. 707-8), he sallied forth to the tip of Manhattan, where he "took a hearty embrace of his stone bottle" and jumped into the turbulent stream, in the middle of which "he was observed to struggle most violently as if battling with the spirit of the waters—institively he put his trumpet to his mouth and giving a vehement blast—sunk forever to the bottom!" (p. 708). After he "instinctively" attempts a final sonic ejaculation the forces of chaos overcome the lusty trumpeter, as eros is vanquished by thanatos in the cycle of nature.<sup>28</sup>

As in the cases of the two previous governors, the people of New Amsterdam demonstrate the same instinctual orientation as their leader; but after the mock-heroic victory at Fort Christina they more resemble the disgraced false phallic hero, Von Poffenburgh, than the true one, Van Corlear. Thus the news of the impending arrival of the English puts the New Amsterdammers in a martial posture well fortified

<sup>28</sup> That Van Corlear is almost an appendage of Peter's anatomy is again hinted in the description of Peter's reaction to his trumpeter's death. Here Peter is likened to "some lorn pilgrim" who "sees stretched cold and lifeless, his faithful dog—the sole companion of his lonely journeying, who had shared his solitary meal, who had so often licked his hand in humble gratitude, who had lain in his bosom, and been unto him as a child—So did the generous hearted hero of the Manhattoes contemplate the untimely end of his faithful Antony" (p. 709).

with "resolutions" and absurd gestures of defiance. But with the English offering them a painless surrender the Dutch are in fact little inclined to fight. Typical of the pusillanimous New Amsterdammers at this juncture is one Dofue Roerback, whose preeminence among the people was based on the fact that "he was the first that imprinted new year cakes with the mysterious hieroglyphics of the Cock and Breeches, and such like magical devices" (pp. 704-5); this maestro of party-cake decor demands that Peter capitulate to the English. Faced with a populace more inclined to resent the intransigence of their governor than to resist their colonial enemy, Peter is forced to capitulate. But holed up in the attic of his Bowery residence he stubbornly resists actually signing the agreement of surrender until it is

hoisted to him on the end of a pole, and having scrawled his name at the bottom of it, he excommunicated them all for a set of cowardly, mutinous, degenerate platter-breeches—threw the capitulation at their heads, slammed down the window, and was heard stumping down the stairs with the most vehement indignation. The rabble incontinently took to their heels; even the Burgomasters were not slow in evacuating the premises, fearing lest the sturdy Peter might issue from his den, and greet them with some unwelcome testimonial of his displeasure. (p. 717)

The punning language of this passage makes it clear that Peter is condemning his citizenry for being devoid of manliness in all senses of the term. For whereas they are potentially incontinent of bladder and bowels through fear, Peter is still capable of a "testimonial" of true courage and preserves his honor intact despite defeat. Not surprisingly, at his eventual death from "cholera morbus" Peter is still tenaciously retaining his masculine endowment by "holding out, to the last gasp, with most inflexible obstinacy, against a whole army of old women, who were bent upon driving the enemy out of his bowels, after a true Dutch mode of defence, by inundating the seat of war, with catnip and penny royal" (p. 726). With this mock-heroic defense of his bowels against an army of officious women, the personal reign of Peter the Headstrong comes to an end. It is significant that the death of each of

Irving's three governors can be related to his instinctual orientation: the oral Walter expires with "his peaceful soul . . . having escaped in the last whiff that curled from his tobacco pipe" (p. 507); the anal William "undergo[es] a kind of animal combustion" (p. 559); and the phallic Peter "clinched his withered hand, as if he felt within his gripe that sword which waved in triumph before the walls of Fort Christina, and giving a grim smile of exultation, sunk back upon his pillow, and expired" (p. 726).



Martin Roth has explored the extensive literary ancestry of Irving's *History*, in particular its relation to what he at one point calls "the infantile world of burlesque" (*Comedy and America*, p. 130). In his study of Irving and the law Robert Ferguson has characterized the *History* as "an acting-out of childhood experience and arrested adolescent frustrations" (*Law and Letters*, p. 169). Based on the foregoing analysis, we have seen that the *Knickerbocker History* actually subsumes a comprehensive comic allegory in which the "peopling" of North America suggests the idea of human reproduction while the "infant history" of Dutch New York parallels the process of childhood psychological development according to a Freudian model; in effect the body politic of New Amsterdam develops according to the instinctual mandates of the childhood body. It is useful to note that the association in the *Knickerbocker History* between sexual and scatological humor and a developmental model also accords with Freud's general argument in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) that jokes, humor, and the "comic" all give access to instinctual pleasures associated with infancy and childhood. Like its comic predecessor, *Tristram Shandy* (1767)—Laurence Sterne's extended burlesque on the hero's procreation, gestation, birth, and infancy—Irving's *History* creates a whimsical, improvisatory world in which comic analogues to infantile omnipotence, polymorphous perversity, and instinctual gratification are expressed through a process of what might be called creative comic regression. Such a

procedure accords with William L. Hedges's observation that "Irving gives us fantasies of flagrant wish-fulfillment, direct appeals to the regressive instinct—the American dream as a return to the womb."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, as an ironic expression of nostalgia for a lost world of childhood and Dutch colonial history, the *Knickerbocker History* grows out of a unique blend of biographical and historical imagination. A pampered youngest son, the last of eleven children, Irving was well suited by temperament and upbringing to reimagine the instinctual modes of childhood experience.<sup>30</sup> So we find that Irving's narrative persona in

<sup>29</sup> "Washington Irving: Nonsense, the Fat of the Land, and the Dream of Innocence," in *The Chief Glory of Every People: Essays on Classic American Writers*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1973), p. 158. Hedges similarly remarks, "one must recognize the nonsense of Knickerbocker humor as psychologically regressive, part of an escape from responsibility and conflict which is characteristic of Irving generally and which is at once the great strength and weakness of his work" ("Nonsense," pp. 148–49). Significantly, Knickerbocker's other best-known literary creations, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," have elicited analogous, if only incidental, psychoanalytic commentary. Terence Martin has suggested that Ichabod Crane is stuck at the oral stage of development: "Irving couples the oral stage and imaginative indulgence; both signify childhood" ("Rip, Ichabod, and the American Imagination," *American Literature*, 31 [1959], 143). Philip Young has described Rip Van Winkle as "the ego arrested at the infantile level in an Oedipal situation; under pressure he reverts all the way back to the sleep of the womb" ("Fallen from Time: The Mythic Rip Van Winkle," *Kenyon Review*, 22 [1960], 568). (For a revealing examination of the sexual humor of "Rip Van Winkle," see also William P. Dawson, "'Rip Van Winkle' as Bawdy Satire: The Rascal and the Revolution," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 27 [1981], 198–206.) Jeffrey Rubin-Dorisky, in *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), has produced an informative "psychological" reading of Irving's European writings from *The Sketch Book* to *The Alhambra*, but his focus is primarily on the author's working-out of personal anxieties and insecurities in relation to larger questions of national identity: "Irving's most compelling subject as a writer—the displaced self adrift in a mutable world—which was, of course, autobiographical in substance, coincided with the uneasiness and uncertainty of the American people as they contemplated the fate of the nation in the early decades of the nineteenth century" (p. xv). Although Irving's later fictional and historical works only intermittently show the comic ingenuity that animates his early Knickerbocker writings, they sometimes dramatize a comparable opposition between the playful, imaginative world of childhood and the more practical, rational world of adulthood that supersedes it. On this phenomenon, see especially Martin.

<sup>30</sup> In an autobiographical manuscript fragment written in the early 1820s Irving wrote of his childhood: "When I was very young I had an impossible flow of spirits that often went beyond my strength. Every thing was fairy land to me" (quoted in





the *History*, the aged and eccentric Diedrich Knickerbocker, represents a conflation of both infancy and old age, first and second childhood—a psychological pun bridging the beginning and end of life. Knickerbocker's name, which Irving borrowed from a prominent Albany-area Federalist, Herman Knickerbocker (1779–1885) of Schaghticoke, New York, actually means—contrary to Knickerbocker's own whimsical etymologies (p. 631)—“baker of earthen marbles or balls,” or in other words a manufacturer of child's play.<sup>31</sup> Imaginatively empowered by his regressive comic persona, Irving facetiously yet nostalgically reworked the archetypal myth of America as a new world in which human nature might be restored to a prelapsarian state of innocence—the myth surviving despite (or because of) its repeated disconfirmation. Irving's fusing of an allegory of childhood development with this national mythic leitmotif conceivably reveals a psychological component in its makeup. Consequently, the *Knickerbocker History* is the first important “fictive” embodiment of the loss of innocence and dispossession from paradise that serves as a recurrent theme in American literature. We might say with little exaggeration that Diedrich Knickerbocker is the prepubescent father of us all.

*Boston University*

Williams, *Life*, II, 255). For a full account of Irving's childhood, see Williams, *Life*, chap. 1.

<sup>31</sup> It is a matter of dispute whether Irving had actually met Herman Knickerbocker (also spelled “Knickerbaker”) when he wrote the *History* (see Black and Black, eds., *History*, p. 302n). Funk notes of the derivation of Irving's famous pseudonym: “The first name, Diedrich, is the German version of the Dutch Diederick. . . . The origin of the [last] name is Knickerbaker, baker of earthen marble(s) or any small, hard ball, perhaps some kind of confection” (p. 359).

