



Looking in this contemporary engraving like a cross between the Man-in-the-Moon and Fatty Arbuckle, Tyler, as well as an accomplished man of letters, sat as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court of the state of Vermont.

ROYALL TYLER & THE BIRTH OF AMERICAN STAGE COMEDY (1787)

*“And last Miss Fortune, whimpering came,
Cured me of love’s tormenting flame,
And all my beau pretences.
In widow’s weeds, the prude appears;
See now -- she drowns me with her tears,
With bony fist, now slaps my ears,
And brings me to my senses.”*
~ from Tyler’s poem “My Mistress”

In an effort to further enhance moral unanimity, civic mindedness, and individual sobriety, the Continental Congress on Oct 24th 1774 passed a resolution that pronounced a blunt disapproval of idle pastimes such as gaming, horse racing, and theater. It buttressed its continued commitment to this measure later in Oct. 1778 by issuing two additional resolutions, the second of which (of Oct. 16th) read:

“Whereas: Frequenting playhouses and theatrical entertainments has a fatal tendency to divert the minds of the people from a due attention to the means necessary for the defence of their country and the preservation of their liberties, -- Resolved: That every person holding an office under the United States, who shall act, promote, encourage, or attend such plays, shall be deemed unworthy to hold such office, and shall be accordingly dismissed.”

While time of war was a reasonable justification for such a policy, it was of course by no means without precedent in the colonies. Boston, as early as 1750 had forbade plays and other theatrical entertainments in the city; which statute remained on the books till 1793. Even Philadelphia, in April 1775, placed a ban on theater that was only rescinded in 1789. Other major cities, like Newport, Baltimore, Charleston, largely observed the wishes of Congress; although by as early as June 1781 small shows put on by small groups, some of which included former Continental officers and soldiers, and which exhibited songs, recitations, and individual dramatic scenes began appearing in

Baltimore and Annapolis. In occupied New York, however, the theater thrived, and plays were acted and directed there by British officers till the war's close.¹

Enter Boston Harvard educated lawyer Royall Tyler. While serving (at the rank of Major) as aide to Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln in the suppression of Shays' Rebellion in 1787, he was dispatched to New York City to enlist the support of New York in the prosecution of Shays; particularly in view of the leader of the insurgents having left Massachusetts and retreated into New York state for refuge. With his mission to secure New York aid fulfilled, Tyler, while sojourning in Gotham's metropolis, managed to make the acquaintance of "The American Company" -- a troupe of English players, domiciling themselves at the John Street Theater; who sought to revive theater life in the city; in spite of the Puritanical and Quaker attitudes, not to mention the aforesaid Congressional edicts, disapproving of such efforts and still prevalent at large. Although Tyler had never actually seen a professionally done stage play in his life, he took it upon himself to write one. And, as it happened, the company, knowing a good thing when they saw it, kindly received his work, "The Contrast," and agreed to stage it. Opening on April 16, 1787, the modest sized (in terms of number of players, props, and simple backdrops) production scored a notable success, and subsequently went on to be performed in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston with equally favorable reactions. As well as being the first ever professional produced play written by an American author, "The Contrast" played a significant part in helping to lift public prejudice and distrust of serious theater (as opposed to more commonly accepted forms of entertainment; such as pantomimes, harlequinades, and circus type acts.)

While "The Contrast" is conspicuously short on plot development, it was, for its day, strikingly innovative in its cast of characters, particularly in the case of Col. Henry Manly, a former Continental army officer, and his "waiter" Jonathan. It was also shrewdly written inasmuch as it used such personages to appeal to patriotic and moral values; while implicitly arguing that theater was and could in fact be of benefit to society if approached responsibly and intelligently.

Manly embodies the selfless and disinterested virtues and ideals of Washington and the Society of Cincinnati. At the same time, he is an altruistic sort who looks to giving to and aiding those in need. Not perhaps least remarkable of his adeptness in handling the character, Tyler presents him in a convincingly believable manner. Meanwhile, the character of Jonathan struck even more of a note of affinity with audiences, and was the first of a long line of like comic stage and film characters, and which include Colonel Nimrod Wildfire (from Paulding's play "Lion of the West" [1831]) up unto the Beverly Hillbillies; which is to say a self-confident country person or yokel whose humor lies in his (or hers) misconstruing the ways of culture and urban society. Contrary to the claims of some scholars, Jonathan was not a pure invention of Tyler's, and we see some of this same kind of personality in the joking, down to earth Ethan Allen, as revealed in the latter's 1779 *Narrative*. In fact, "The Contrast" makes an allusion to him (Act I, sc. 1) in the way of mentioning a General from Vermont.

Yet, rather strangely, the play, even by later standards, in its sexual references and innuendos, borders on racy. Moreover, it would seem Tyler in real life bore a greater resemblance to Billy Dimple, the play's dissipated rake and foil to Manly. Indeed, Tyler later lost out -- much to his genuine grief and sorrow -- on the hand in marriage to Nabby Adams, daughter of John and Abigail; exactly because her parents, with, at that time, some good reason did not think him a reliable and propitious match for her. Much distraught, Tyler sought ever afterward to rehabilitate his character and reputation whenever he could. And though remaining a virile and outspoken humorist, he became a

¹ See *With An Air Debonair: Musical Theatre In America 1785-1815* by Susan L. Porter; a positively delightful and superb book on its subject.

living illustration of the reformed Prodigal Son, including writing not a few works of a religious nature while decrying and warning against profligate sensuality.

For those without the leisure at present moment to sit and read the entire thing, and or who would otherwise much prefer to see it performed, we submit for your perusal this abridgment of Tyler's amateur comic triumph.

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from Act I, scene 1

*Scene, an Apartment at CHARLOTTE'S*

*CHARLOTTE and LETITIA discovered...*

LETITIA

...I hear that Mr. Dimple and Maria are soon to be married.

CHARLOTTE<sup>2</sup>

You hear true. I was consulted in the choice of the wedding clothes. She is to be married in a delicate white sattin, and has a monstrous pretty brocaded lutestring for the second day. It would have done you good to have seen with what an affected indifference the dear sentimentalist turned over a thousand pretty things, just as if her heart did not palpitate with her approaching happiness, and at last made her choice and arranged her dress with such apathy as if she did not know that plain white sattin and a simple blond lace would shew her clear skin and dark hair to the greatest advantage.

LETITIA

But they say her indifference to dress, and even to the gentleman himself, is not entirely affected.

CHARLOTTE

How?

LETITIA

It is whispered that if Maria gives her hand to Mr. Dimple, it will be without her heart.

CHARLOTTE

Though the giving the heart is one of the last of all laughable considerations in the marriage of a girl of spirit, yet I should like to hear what antiquated notions the dear little piece of old-fashioned prudery has got in her head.

LETITIA

Why, you know that old Mr. John-Richard-Robert-Jacob-Isaac-Abraham-Cornelius Van Dumpling, Billy Dimple's father (for he has thought fit to soften his name, as well as manners, during his English tour), was the most intimate friend of Maria's father. The old folks, about a year before Mr. Van Dumpling's death, proposed this match: the young folks were accordingly introduced, and told they must love one another. Billy was then a good-natured, decent-dressing young fellow, with a little dash of the coxcomb, such as our young fellows of fortune usually have. At this time, I really believe she thought she loved him; and had they been married, I doubt not they might have jogged on, to the end of the chapter, a good kind of a sing-song lack-a-daysaical life, as other honest married folks do.

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<sup>2</sup> Sister of Col. Henry Manly.

CHARLOTTE

Why did they not then marry?

LETITIA

Upon the death of his father, Billy went to England to see the world and rub off a little of the patroun rust. During his absence, Maria, like a good girl, to keep herself constant to her [k]nown true-love, avoided company, and betook herself, for her amusement, to her books, and her dear Billy's letters. But, alas! how many ways has the mischievous demon of inconstancy of stealing into a woman's heart! Her love was destroyed by the very means she took to support it.

CHARLOTTE

How? -- Oh! I have it--some likely young beau found the way to her study.

LETITIA

Be patient, Charlotte; your head so runs upon beaux. Why, she read Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa Harlow, Shenstone, and the Sentimental Journey; and between whiles, as I said, Billy's letters. But, as her taste improved, her love declined. The contrast was so striking betwixt the good sense of her books and the flimsiness of her love-letters, that she discovered she had unthinkingly engaged her hand without her heart; and then the whole transaction, managed by the old folks, now appeared so unsentimental, and looked so like bargaining for a bale of goods, that she found she ought to have rejected, according to every rule of romance, even the man of her choice, if imposed upon her in that manner. Clary Harlow would have scorned such a match.

CHARLOTTE

Well, how was it on Mr. Dimple's return? Did he meet a more favourable reception than his letters?

LETITIA

Much the same. She spoke of him with respect abroad, and with contempt in her closet. She watched his conduct and conversation, and found that he had by travelling, acquired the wickedness of Lovelace without his wit, and the politeness of Sir Charles Grandison without his generosity. The ruddy youth, who washed his face at the cistern every morning, and swore and looked eternal love and constancy, was now metamorphosed into a flippant, palid, polite beau, who devotes the morning to his toilet, reads a few pages of Chesterfield's letters, and then minces out, to put the infamous principles in practice upon every woman he meets.

CHARLOTTE

But, if she is so apt at conjuring up these sentimental bugbears, why does she not discard him at once?

LETITIA

Why, she thinks her word too sacred to be trifled with. Besides, her father, who has a great respect for the memory of his deceased friend, is ever telling her how he shall renew his years in their union, and repeating the dying injunctions of old Van Dumpling...

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from Act II, scene 2

*A Room in VAN ROUGH'S House*

*MARIA sitting disconsolate at a Table, with Books, &c.*

SONG.

I.

The sun sets in night, and the stars shun the day;  
But glory remains when their lights fade away!  
Begin, ye tormentors! your threats are in vain,  
For the son of Alknomook shall never complain.

II.

Remember the arrows he shot from his bow;  
Remember your chiefs by his hatchet laid low:  
Why so slow? -- do you wait till I shrink from the pain?  
No -- the son of Alknomook will never complain.

III.

Remember the wood where in ambush we lay,  
And the scalps which we bore from your nation away:  
Now the flame rises fast, you exult in my pain;  
But the son of Alknomook can never complain.

IV.

I go to the land where my father is gone;  
His ghost shall rejoice in the fame of his son:  
Death comes like a friend, he relieves me from pain;  
And thy son, Oh Alknomook! has scorn'd to complain.

There is something in this song which ever calls forth my affections. The manly virtue of courage, that fortitude which steels the heart against the keenest misfortunes, which interweaves the laurel of glory amidst the instruments of torture and death, displays something so noble, so exalted, that in despite of the prejudices of education I cannot but admire it, even in a savage. The prepossession which our sex is supposed to entertain for the character of a soldier is, I know, a standing piece of raillery among the wits. A cockade, a lapell'd coat, and a feather, they will tell you, are irresistible by a female heart. Let it be so. Who is it that considers the helpless situation of our sex, that does not see that we each moment stand in need of a protector, and that a brave one too? Formed of the more delicate materials of nature, endowed only with the softer passions, incapable, from our ignorance of the world, to guard against the wiles of mankind, our security for happiness often depends upon their generosity and courage. Alas! how little of the former do we find! How inconsistent! that man should be leagued to destroy that honour upon which solely rests his respect and esteem. Ten thousand temptations allure us, ten thousand passions betray us; yet the smallest deviation from the path of rectitude is followed by the contempt and insult of man, and the more remorseless pity of woman; years of penitence and tears cannot wash away the stain, nor a life of virtue obliterate its remembrance. Reputation is the life of woman; yet courage to protect it is masculine and disgusting; and the only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can find is in the arms of a man of honour. How naturally, then, should we love the brave and the generous; how gratefully should we bless the arm raised for our protection, when nerv'd by virtue and directed by honour! Heaven grant that the man with whom I may be connected -- may be connected! Whither has my imagination transported me -- whither does it now lead me? Am I not indissolubly engaged, "by every obligation of honour which my own consent and my father's approbation can give," to a man who can never share my affections, and whom a few days hence it will be criminal for me to disapprove -- to disapprove! would to heaven that were all -- to despise. For, can the most frivolous manners, actuated by the

most depraved heart, meet, or merit, anything but contempt from every woman of delicacy and sentiment?

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from Act II, scene 1

CHARLOTTE

As I hope to be married, my brother Henry is in the city.

LETITIA

What, your brother, Colonel Manly?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, my dear; the only brother I have in the world.

LETITIA

Was he never in this city?

CHARLOTTE

Never nearer than Harlem Heights, where he lay with his regiment.

LETITIA

What sort of a being is this brother of yours? If he is as chatty, as pretty, as sprightly as you, half the belles in the city will be pulling caps for him.

CHARLOTTE

My brother is the very counterpart and reverse of me: I am gay, he is grave; I am airy, he is solid; I am ever selecting the most pleasing objects for my laughter, he has a tear for every pitiful one. And thus, whilst he is plucking the briars and thorns from the path of the unfortunate, I am strewing my own path with roses.

LETITIA

My sweet friend, not quite so poetical, and a little more particular.

CHARLOTTE

Hands off, Letitia. I feel the rage of simile upon me; I can't talk to you in any other way. My brother has a heart replete with the noblest sentiments, but then, it is like -- it is like -- Oh! you provoking girl, you have deranged all my ideas -- it is like -- Oh! I have it -- his heart is like an old maiden lady's bandbox; it contains many costly things, arranged with the most scrupulous nicety, yet the misfortune is that they are too delicate, costly, and antiquated for common use.

LETITIA

By what I can pick out of your flowery description, your brother is no beau.

CHARLOTTE

No, indeed; he makes no pretension to the character. He'd ride, or rather fly, an hundred miles to relieve a distressed object, or to do a gallant act in the service of his country; but should you drop your fan or bouquet in his presence, it is ten to one that some beau at the farther end of the room would have the honour of presenting it to you before he had observed that it fell. I'll tell you one of his antiquated, anti-gallant notions. He said once in my presence, in a room full of company, -- would you believe it? -- in a large circle of ladies, that the best evidence a gentleman could give a young lady of his respect and affection was to endeavour in a friendly manner to rectify her foibles. I protest I was crimson to the eyes, upon reflecting that I was known as his sister.

LETITIA

Insupportable creature! tell a lady of her faults! if he is so grave, I fear I have no chance of captivating him.

CHARLOTTE

His conversation is like a rich, old-fashioned brocade,--it will stand alone; every sentence is a sentiment. Now you may judge what a time I had with him, in my twelve months' visit to my father. He read me such lectures, out of pure brotherly affection, against the extremes of fashion, dress, flirting, and coquetry, and all the other dear things which he knows I doat upon, that I protest his conversation made me as melancholy as if I had been at church; and heaven knows, though I never prayed to go there but on one occasion, yet I would have exchanged his conversation for a psalm and a sermon. Church is rather melancholy, to be sure; but then I can ogle the beaux, and be regaled with "here endeth the first lesson," but his brotherly here, you would think had no end. You captivate him! Why, my dear, he would as soon fall in love with a box of Italian flowers. There is Maria, now, if she were not engaged, she might do something. Oh! how I should like to see that pair of penserosos together, looking as grave as two sailors' wives of a stormy night, with a flow of sentiment meandering through their conversation like purling streams in modern poetry...

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from Act III, scene 1

ACT III. SCENE I.

*DIMPLE'S Room.*

*DIMPLE discovered at a Toilet, Reading.*

...Now, did not my lord expressly say that it was unbecoming a well-bred man to be in a passion, I confess I should be ruffled. [Reads.] "There is no accident so unfortunate, which a wise man may not turn to his advantage; nor any accident so fortunate, which a fool will not turn to his disadvantage." True, my lord; but how advantage can be derived from this I can't see. Chesterfield himself, who made, however, the worst practice of the most excellent precepts, was never in so embarrassing a situation. I love the person of Charlotte, and it is necessary I should command the fortune of Letitia. As to Maria! -- I doubt not by my sang-froid behaviour I shall compel her to decline the match; but the blame must not fall upon me. A prudent man, as my lord says, should take all the credit of a good action to himself, and throw the discredit of a bad one upon others. I must break with Maria, marry Letitia, and as for Charlotte -- why, Charlotte must be a companion to my wife. -- Here, Jessamy!<sup>3</sup>...

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from Act III, scene 1

JESSAMY

Stay here one moment, and I will call him. -- Jonathan! -- Mr. Jonathan! -- [Calls.]

JONATHAN [within]

Holla! there.--[Enters.] You promise to stand by me -- six bows you say. [Bows.]

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<sup>3</sup> Dimple's manservant and Jonathan's moral counterpart.

JESSAMY

Mrs. Jenny, I have the honour of presenting Mr. Jonathan, Colonel Manly's waiter, to you. I am extremely happy that I have it in my power to make two worthy people acquainted with each other's merits.

JENNY

So, Mr. Jonathan, I hear you were at the play last night.

JONATHAN

At the play! why, did you think I went to the devil's drawing-room?

JENNY

The devil's drawing-room!

JONATHAN

Yes; why an't cards and dice the devil's device, and the play-house the shop where the devil hangs out the vanities of the world upon the tenter-hooks of temptation? I believe you have not heard how they were acting the old boy one night, and the wicked one came among them sure enough, and went right off in a storm, and carried one quarter of the play-house with him. Oh! no, no, no! you won't catch me at a play-house, I warrant you.

JENNY

Well, Mr. Jonathan, though I don't scruple your veracity, I have some reasons for believing you were there: pray, where were you about six o'clock?

JONATHAN

Why, I went to see one Mr. Morrison, the hocus pocus man; they said as how he could eat a case knife.

JENNY

Well, and how did you find the place?

JONATHAN

As I was going about here and there, to and again, to find it, I saw a great crowd of folks going into a long entry that had lanterns over the door; so I asked a man whether that was not the place where they played hocus pocus? He was a very civil, kind man, though he did speak like the Hessians; he lifted up his eyes and said, "They play hocus pocus tricks enough there, Got knows, mine friend."

JENNY

Well --

JONATHAN

So I went right in, and they shewed me away, clean up to the garret, just like meeting-house gallery. And so I saw a bower of topping folks, all sitting round in little cabbins, "just like father's corn-cribs"; and then there was such a squeaking with the fiddles, and such a tarnal blaze with the lights, my head was near turned. At last the people that sat near me set up such a hissing -- hiss -- like so many mad cats; and then they went thump, thump, thump, just like our Peleg threshing wheat, and stamp away, just like the nation; and called out for one Mr. Langolee,--I suppose he helps act the tricks.

JENNY

Well, and what did you do all this time?

JONATHAN

Gor, I--I liked the fun, and so I thumpt away, and hiss'd as lustily as the best of 'em. One sailor-looking man that sat by me, seeing me stamp, and knowing I was a cute fellow, because I could make a roaring noise, clapt me on the shoulder and said, "You are a d---d hearty cock, smite my timbers!" I told him so I was, but I thought he need not swear so, and make use of such naughty words.

JESSAMY

The savage!--Well, and did you see the man with his tricks?

JONATHAN

Why, I vow, as I was looking out for him, they lifted up a great green cloth and let us look right into the next neighbor's house. Have you a good many houses in New-York made so in that 'ere way?

JENNY

Not many; but did you see the family?

JONATHAN

Yes, swamp it; I see'd the family.

JENNY

Well, and how did you like them?

JONATHAN

Why, I vow they were pretty much like other families; -- there was a poor, good-natured, curse of a husband, and a sad rantipole of a wife.

JENNY

But did you see no other folks?

JONATHAN

Yes. There was one youngster; they called him Mr. Joseph; he talked as sober and as pious as a minister; but, like some ministers that I know, he was a sly tike in his heart for all that. He was going to ask a young woman to spark it with him, and -- the Lord have mercy on my soul! -- she was another man's wife.

JESSAMY

The Wabash!

JENNY

And did you see any more folks?

JONATHAN

Why, they came on as thick as mustard. For my part, I thought the house was haunted. There was a soldier fellow, who talked about his row de dow, dow, and courted a young woman; but, of all the cute folk I saw, I liked one little fellow --

JENNY

Aye! who was he?

JONATHAN

Why, he had red hair, and a little round plump face like mine, only not altogether so handsome. His name was -- Darby; -- that was his baptizing name; his other name I forgot. Oh! it was Wig--Wag--Wag-all, Darby Wag-all, -- pray, do you know him? -- I

should like to take a sling with him, or a drap of cyder with a pepper-pod in it, to make it warm and comfortable.

JENNY

I can't say I have that pleasure.

JONATHAN

I wish you did; he is a cute fellow. But there was one thing I didn't like in that Mr. Darby; and that was, he was afraid of some of them 'ere shooting irons, such as your troopers wear on training days. Now, I'm a true born Yankee American son of liberty, and I never was afraid of a gun yet in all my life.

JENNY

Well, Mr. Jonathan, you were certainly at the play-house.

JONATHAN

I at the play-house! -- Why didn't I see the play then?

JENNY

Why, the people you saw were players.

JONATHAN

Mercy on my soul! did I see the wicked players? -- Mayhap that 'ere Darby that I liked so was the old serpent himself, and had his cloven foot in his pocket. Why, I vow, now I come to think on't, the candles seemed to burn blue, and I am sure where I sat it smelt tarnally of brimstone.

JESSAMY

Well, Mr. Jonathan, from your account, which I confess is very accurate, you must have been at the play-house.

JONATHAN

Why, I vow, I began to smell a rat. When I came away, I went to the man for my money again; you want your money? says he; yes, says I; for what? says he; why, says I, no man shall jockey me out of my money; I paid my money to see sights, and the dogs a bit of a sight have I seen, unless you call listening to people's private business a sight. Why, says he, it is the School for Scandalization. -- The School for Scandalization! -- Oh! ho! no wonder you New-York folks are so cute at it, when you go to school to learn it; and so I jogged off...

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from Act III, scene 2

*The Mall.*

*Enter MANLY.*

It must be so, Montague! and it is not all the tribe of Mandevilles that shall convince me that a nation, to become great, must first become dissipated. Luxury is surely the bane of a nation: Luxury! which enervates both soul and body, by opening a thousand new sources of enjoyment, opens, also, a thousand new sources of contention and want: Luxury! which renders a people weak at home, and accessible to bribery, corruption, and force from abroad. When the Grecian states knew no other tools than the axe and the saw, the Grecians were a great, a free, and a happy people. The kings of Greece devoted their lives to the service of their country, and her senators knew no other superiority over

their fellow-citizens than a glorious pre-eminence in danger and virtue. They exhibited to the world a noble spectacle, -- a number of independent states united by a similarity of language, sentiment, manners, common interest, and common consent, in one grand mutual league of protection. And, thus united, long might they have continued the cherishers of arts and sciences, the protectors of the oppressed, the scourge of tyrants, and the safe asylum of liberty. But when foreign gold, and still more pernicious foreign luxury, had crept among them, they sapped the vitals of their virtue. The virtues of their ancestors were only found in their writings. Envy and suspicion, the vices of little minds, possessed them. The various states engendered jealousies of each other; and, more unfortunately, growing jealous of their great federal council, the Amphictyons, they forgot that their common safety had existed, and would exist, in giving them an honourable extensive prerogative. The common good was lost in the pursuit of private interest; and that people who, by uniting, might have stood against the world in arms, by dividing, crumbled into ruin; -- their name is now only known in the page of the historian, and what they once were is all we have left to admire. Oh! that America! Oh! that my country, would, in this her day, learn the things which belong to her peace!

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from Act IV, scene 2

*MANLY leading in MARIA.*

MANLY

I hope you will excuse my speaking upon so important a subject so abruptly; but, the moment I entered your room, you struck me as the lady whom I had long loved in imagination, and never hoped to see.

MARIA

Indeed, Sir, I have been led to hear more upon this subject than I ought.

MANLY

Do you, then, disapprove my suit, Madam, or the abruptness of my introducing it? If the latter, my peculiar situation, being obliged to leave the city in a few days, will, I hope, be my excuse; if the former, I will retire, for I am sure I would not give a moment's inquietude to her whom I could devote my life to please. I am not so indelicate as to seek your immediate approbation; permit me only to be near you, and by a thousand tender assiduities to endeavour to excite a grateful return.

MARIA

I have a father, whom I would die to make happy; he will disapprove --

MANLY

Do you think me so ungenerous as to seek a place in your esteem without his consent? You must--you ever ought to consider that man as unworthy of you who seeks an interest in your heart contrary to a father's approbation. A young lady should reflect that the loss of a lover may be supplied, but nothing can compensate for the loss of a parent's affection. Yet, why do you suppose your father would disapprove? In our country, the affections are not sacrificed to riches or family aggrandizement: should you approve, my family is decent, and my rank honourable.

MARIA

You distress me, Sir.

MANLY

Then I will sincerely beg your excuse for obtruding so disagreeable a subject, and retire.  
[Going.]

MARIA

Stay, Sir! your generosity and good opinion of me deserve a return; but why must I declare what, for these few hours, I have scarce suffered myself to think? -- I am --

MANLY

What?

MARIA

Engaged, Sir; and, in a few days, to be married to the gentleman you saw at your sister's.

MANLY

Engaged to be married! And have I been basely invading the rights of another? Why have you permitted this? Is this the return for the partiality I declared for you?

MARIA

You distress me, Sir. What would you have me say? You are too generous to wish the truth. Ought I to say that I dared not suffer myself to think of my engagement, and that I am going to give my hand without my heart? Would you have me confess a partiality for you? If so, your triumph is compleat, and can be only more so when days of misery with the man I cannot love will make me think of him whom I could prefer.

MANLY [after a pause].

We are both unhappy; but it is your duty to obey your parent -- mine to obey my honour. Let us, therefore, both follow the path of rectitude; and of this we may be assured, that if we are not happy, we shall, at least, deserve to be so. Adieu! I dare not trust myself longer with you. [Exeunt severally.]

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from Act V, scene 1

JESSAMY

"There was a certain man, who had a sad scolding wife,"--now you must laugh.

JONATHAN

Tarnation! That's no laughing matter though.

JESSAMY

"And she lay sick a-dying"; -- now you must titter.

JONATHAN

What, snigger when the good woman's a-dying! Gor, I --

JESSAMY

Yes, the notes say you must --"and she asked her husband leave to make a will,"-- now you must begin to look grave; --"and her husband said" --

JONATHAN

Ay, what did her husband say? Something dang'd cute, I reckon.

JESSAMY

“And her husband said, you have had your will all your life-time, and would you have it after you are dead, too?”

JONATHAN

Ho, ho, ho! There the old man was even with her; he was up to the notch -- ha, ha, ha!

JESSAMY

But, Mr. Jonathan, you must not laugh so. Why you ought to have tittered piano, and you have laughed fortissimo. Look here; you see these marks, A, B, C, and so on; these are the references to the other part of the book. Let us turn to it, and you will see the directions how to manage the muscles. This [turns over] was note D you blundered at. -- You must purse the mouth into a smile, then titter, discovering the lower part of the three front upper teeth...

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from Act V, scene 2

*CHARLOTTE'S Apartment.*

*Enter DIMPLE leading LETITIA.*

LETITIA

And will you pretend to say now, Mr. Dimple, that you propose to break with Maria? Are not the banns published? Are not the clothes purchased? Are not the friends invited? In short, is it not a done affair?

DIMPLE

Believe me, my dear Letitia, I would not marry her.

LETITIA

Why have you not broke with her before this, as you all along deluded me by saying you would?

DIMPLE

Because I was in hopes she would, ere this, have broke with me.

LETITIA

You could not expect it.

DIMPLE

Nay, but be calm a moment; 'twas from my regard to you that I did not discard her.

LETITIA

Regard to me!

DIMPLE

Yes; I have done everything in my power to break with her, but the foolish girl is so fond of me that nothing can accomplish it. Besides, how can I offer her my hand when my heart is indissolubly engaged to you?

LETITIA

There may be reason in this; but why so attentive to Miss<sup>4</sup> [Charlotte] Manly?

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<sup>4</sup> i.e., Charlotte.

DIMPLE

Attentive to Miss Manly! For heaven's sake, if you have no better opinion of my constancy, pay not so ill a compliment to my taste.

LETITIA

Did I not see you whisper her to-day?

DIMPLE

Possibly I might--but something of so very trifling a nature that I have already forgot what it was.

LETITIA

I believe she has not forgot it.

DIMPLE

My dear creature, how can you for a moment suppose I should have any serious thoughts of that trifling, gay, flighty coquette, that disagreeable--

Enter CHARLOTTE.

DIMPLE

My dear Miss Manly, I rejoice to see you; there is a charm in your conversation that always marks your entrance into company as fortunate...

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...VAN ROUGH<sup>5</sup>

Pray, some of you explain this; what has been the occasion of all this racket?

MANLY

That gentleman<sup>6</sup> can explain it to you; it will be a very diverting story for an intended father-in-law to hear.

VAN ROUGH

How was this matter, Mr. Van Dumpling?

DIMPLE

Sir, -- upon my honour, -- all I know is, that I was talking to this young lady, and this gentleman broke in on us in a very extraordinary manner.

VAN ROUGH

Why, all this is nothing to the purpose; can you explain it, Miss? [To Charlotte.]

Enter LETITIA through the back scene.

LETITIA

I can explain it to that gentleman's confusion. Though long betrothed to your daughter [to Van Rough], yet, allured by my fortune, it seems (with shame do I speak it) he has privately paid his addresses to me. I was drawn in to listen to him by his assuring me that the match was made by his father without his consent, and that he proposed to break with Maria, whether he married me or not. But, whatever were his intentions respecting your

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<sup>5</sup> Marias' father.

<sup>6</sup> Dimple.

daughter, Sir, even to me he was false; for he has repeated the same story, with some cruel reflections upon my person, to Miss Manly.

JONATHAN

What a tarnal curse!

LETITIA

Nor is this all, Miss Manly. When he was with me this very morning, he made the same ungenerous reflections upon the weakness of your mind as he has so recently done upon the defects of my person.

JONATHAN

What a tarnal curse and damn, too!

DIMPLE

Ha! since I have lost Letitia, I believe I had as good make it up with Maria. Mr. Van Rough, at present I cannot enter into particulars; but, I believe, I can explain everything to your satisfaction in private.

VAN ROUGH

There is another matter, Mr. Van Dumpling, which I would have you explain. Pray, Sir, have Messrs. Van Cash & Co. presented you those bills for acceptance?

DIMPLE

The deuce! Has he heard of those bills! Nay, then, all's up with Maria, too; but an affair of this sort can never prejudice me among the ladies; they will rather long to know what the dear creature possesses to make him so agreeable. [Aside.] Sir, you'll hear from me. [To Manly.]

MANLY

And you from me, Sir--

DIMPLE

Sir, you wear a sword--

MANLY

Yes, Sir. This sword was presented to me by that brave Gallic hero, the Marquis De la Fayette. I have drawn it in the service of my country, and in private life, on the only occasion where a man is justified in drawing his sword, in defence of a lady's honour. I have fought too many battles in the service of my country to dread the imputation of cowardice. Death from a man of honour would be a glory you do not merit; you shall live to bear the insult of man and the contempt of that sex whose general smiles afforded you all your happiness.

DIMPLE

You won't meet me, Sir? Then I'll post you for a coward.

MANLY

I'll venture that, Sir. The reputation of my life does not depend upon the breath of a Mr. Dimple. I would have you to know, however, Sir, that I have a cane to chastise the insolence of a scoundrel, and a sword and the good laws of my country to protect me from the attempts of an assassin --

DIMPLE

Mighty well! Very fine, indeed! Ladies and gentlemen, I take my leave; and you will please to observe in the case of my deparment the contrast between a gentleman who has

read Chesterfield and received the polish of Europe and an unpolished, untravelled American.  
[Exit.

Enter MARIA.

MARIA  
Is he indeed gone? --

LETITIA  
I hope, never to return.

VAN ROUGH  
I am glad I heard of those bills; though it's plaguy unlucky; I hoped to see Mary married before I died.

MANLY  
Will you permit a gentleman, Sir, to offer himself as a suitor to your daughter? Though a stranger to you, he is not altogether so to her, or unknown in this city. You may find a son-in-law of more fortune, but you can never meet with one who is richer in love for her, or respect for you.

VAN ROUGH  
Why, Mary, you have not let this gentleman make love to you without my leave?

MANLY  
I did not say, Sir--

MARIA  
Say, Sir! -- I -- the gentleman, to be sure, met me accidentally.

VAN ROUGH  
Ha, ha, ha! Mark me, Mary; young folks think old folks to be fools; but old folks know young folks to be fools. Why, I knew all about this affair. This was only a cunning way I had to bring it about. Hark ye! I was in the closet when you and he were at our hours. [Turns to the company.] I heard that little baggage say she loved her old father, and would die to make him happy! Oh! how I loved the little baggage! And you talked very prudently, young man. I have inquired into your character, and find you to be a man of punctuality and mind the main chance. And so, as you love Mary and Mary loves you, you shall have my consent immediately to be married. I'll settle my fortune on you, and go and live with you the remainder of my life.

MANLY  
Sir, I hope --

VAN ROUGH  
Come, come, no fine speeches; mind the main chance, young man, and you and I shall always agree.

LETITIA I sincerely wish you joy [advancing to Maria]; and hope your pardon for my conduct.

MARIA  
I thank you for your congratulations, and hope we shall at once forget the wretch who has given us so much disquiet, and the trouble that he has occasioned.

CHARLOTTE

And I, my dear Maria,--how shall I look up to you for forgiveness? I, who, in the practice of the meanest arts, have violated the most sacred rights of friendship? I can never forgive myself, or hope charity from the world; but, I confess, I have much to hope from such a brother; and I am happy that I may soon say, such a sister.

MARIA

My dear, you distress me; you have all my love.

MANLY

And mine.

CHARLOTTE

If repentance can entitle me to forgiveness, I have already much merit; for I despise the littleness of my past conduct. I now find that the heart of any worthy man cannot be gained by invidious attacks upon the rights and characters of others; -- by countenancing the addresses of a thousand; -- or that the finest assemblage of features, the greatest taste in dress, the genteelst address, or the most brilliant wit, cannot eventually secure a coquette from contempt and ridicule.

MANLY

And I have learned that probity, virtue, honour, though they should not have received the polish of Europe, will secure to an honest American the good graces of his fair countrywomen, and, I hope, the applause of THE PUBLIC.

THE END.

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For the complete text of "The Contrast," see: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/554>

Some other works by Tyler

Plays:

"May-day in Town, or New-York in an Uproar" (1787) -- a comic opera; now lost

"The Farm House, or The Female Duellists" (1796), lost

"The Georgia Spec, or Land in the Moon" (1797), lost

"The Doctor in Spite of Himself" (1797)

"The Island of Barrataria" (1797)

Sacred dramas (the dates for these I was unable to ascertain):

"The Origin of the Feast of Purim, or The Destinies of Haman"

"Mordecai"

"Joseph and His Brothers"

"The Judgement of Solomon"

Miscellaneous:

The Algerine captive, or, The life and adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill (1797) -- a novel

"Convivial song, sung at Windsor, on the evening of the Fourth of July" (1799)

"An oration, pronounced at Bennington, Vermont, on the 22d February, 1800. In commemoration of the death of General George Washington"(1800)

"A Christmas Hymn" (1807)

The Yankey in London (1809)⁷

Modern anthologies:

The Verse of Royall Tyler. Collected and edited by Marius B. Peladeau

The Prose of Royall Tyler. Collected and edited by Marius B. Peladeau

William Thomas Sherman

<http://www.gunjones.com> and http://www.scribd.com/wsherman_1

For a full list of titles in the Continental Army series, see:

<http://www.gunjones.com/Cont-Army-series.html>

And for Lee's Legion on Face Book:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=121637007849696>

⁷ This book would seem to have possibly influenced James Kirke Paulding's anglophobic *The Diverting History of John Bull and Brother Jonathan* (1812) and *A Sketch of Old England by a New England Man* (1822).