



WILLIAM LAYTON SAMMONS
(“SAM SLY”).
THE FATHER OF SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM.
BORN 1800. DIED 1882.

Figure 1: William Layton Sammons, editor of *Sam Sly's African Journal*, drawing by W.H. Schröder, in *Lantern*, 9 September 1882.

Laughing with Sam Sly: The Cultural Politics of Satire and Colonial British Identity in the Cape Colony, c. 1840–1850

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This article examines Sam Sly's African Journal (1843–51), a literary and satirical newspaper published by William Layton Sammons in Cape Town. It contends that the newspaper utilised satire to forge British cultural affinity in the colony, as well as to encourage and preserve the conservative social boundaries of propriety and family values espoused by white middle-class colonists. This differed from the more widely studied position of satire as a subversive challenge to the established order, with Sammons avoiding sexually explicit, scandalous humour or overt attacks on personal character. In a period of growing white consensus, the African Journal's use of satire in the 1840s formed part of the cultural politics of establishing bourgeois values through the medium of appreciation of British literature and popular culture. Satire in Sam Sly's African Journal thus functioned ideologically to extend British cultural dominance and affinities, and to preserve and instil white bourgeois moral codes. Although much satire was shorn of the racial reality of the Cape Colony, seeking to replicate an impression of metropolitan whiteness, those satires that focused on race derided the Khoikhoi and Xhosa as incapable of achieving equality with whites, drawing on growing anti-humanitarian sentiment in the Cape. The African Journal's popularity, however, diminished in the face of the anti-convict agitation of 1848–50, when colonists opposed the landing of ticket-of-leave convicts from Ireland as an impediment to the goal of representative government, through petitions and boycotting supplying to the government. Satisfying these measures as a radical betrayal of British loyalty, Sammons's support dwindled owing to his criticism of popular feeling.

Historians of colonial South Africa have argued cogently about the role of the printed word in furthering the project of white hegemony, whether through the anecdotal power of travelogues in informing global imaginations, missionary publications to 'enlighten' indigenous inhabitants, or the forging of communities of opinion through settler newspapers.¹ The print media have too readily been rendered as containing the sombre rhetoric of disaffected colonists, with politics shorn of the cultural complexity of its polemical forms. Colonial newspapers and periodicals were important components of a bourgeois colonial project of extending British cultural norms and advancement. As Saul Dubow has demonstrated recently in *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, the cultivation of cultural life in the

¹ See A. Delmas and N. Penn, eds, *Written Culture in a Colonial Context, Africa and the Americas, 1500-1900* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2010).

first half of the nineteenth century through such forms as the theatre, libraries, and philosophical, literary and scientific institutions sought not only to anglicise the cultural landscape of the Cape Colony, but also to foster bourgeois (male) sociability and the utilitarian advancement of education and a colonial-born civic culture to raise the esteem of the colony in the eyes of Europe.²

Viewing newspapers through a culturalist lens adds complexity to existing materialist and social historical analyses of colonial power. The poetry and literature present within their pages, for example, are not simply frivolous asides to be tossed off into the historical scrapheap, or left for literary scholars to explore, but are necessary sources for understanding the complex discursive operations of colonial cultural politics.³ As a deep historical discourse of the nineteenth century, satire and its counterparts, humour and laughter, have received surprisingly little attention in colonial settings from social historians.⁴

This article examines the importance of satire as a polemical instrument in the arsenal of newspaper rhetoric, through interrogating its uses within the pages of *Sam Sly's African Journal* (1843–51),⁵ a literary and satirical miscellany and newspaper published by William Layton Sammons (1801–1882).⁶ Sammons made the wry claim in his prospectus that he strove to ‘instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town, and castigate the age’,⁷ itself a jab at the solemn moralising of the journalist and social reformer John Fairbairn and his *South African Commercial Advertiser*.⁸

Sammons’s editorial approach was, however, one that was morally conservative, avoiding the gratuitous sexual or bodily descriptions, scandal-mongering and radical challenge to authority often associated with early satirical publications. Sammons had been a member of the minor gentry in Bath, England, but had immigrated to the Cape in 1842, followed by his wife and children a year later, when he failed to inherit from a relative. He drew upon his experience of British print culture by naming his *Journal* a ‘register of facts, fiction, news, literature, com-

2 S. Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa, 1820-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3 Little has been made of the literary aspect of the newspaper and periodical press in colonial South Africa. The last full length study in this regard, itself lacking analytical treatment in favour of descriptive detail, is A.M. Lewin Robinson, *None Daring to Make Us Afraid: A Study of the English Periodical Literature of the Cape, 1824 to 1835* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1962).

4 An exception is a recent article by Sandra Swart who has noted the importance of laughter for Afrikaner identity from the Anglo-Boer War until the 1930s. Humour, she argues, facilitated group cohesion and shaped folk identity and national character. The social relations spoken through the physical act of laughter itself, calls for the history of emotions to be taken more seriously by South African historians. S. Swart, “‘The Terrible Laughter of the Afrikaner’: Towards a Social History of Humor”, *Journal of Social History*, Summer 2009, 889-917. For theories of humour see, amongst others, P. Lewis, *Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humour in Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); M. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London, 2005).

5 This was published from July 1849 as *The African Journal*. Sammons previously edited the short-lived *South African Advocate* and *Cape Town Spectator* for the first few weeks of 1843, although no extant copies of this publication remain. For a fuller analysis of *Sam Sly's African Journal*, see C. Holdridge, ‘*Sam Sly's African Journal* and the Role of Satire in Colonial British Identity at the Cape of Good Hope, c.1840-1850’ (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 2010).

6 For a biography of Sammons, see A. Hattersley, ‘Friend of George Cruikshank: William Layton Sammons (“Sam Sly”)’ in Hattersley, *Oliver the Spy and the Others: A Little Gallery of South African Portraits* (Cape Town, 1959); A. Hattersley, ‘Sammons, William Layton’, *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1 (Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg, 1968), 684-5.

7 *Sam Sly's African Journal* (hereafter *SSAJ*), Prospectus, 1 June 1843. This aphorism is attributed to Washington Irving, most famous perhaps for his stories ‘Rip van Winkle’ and ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ - who founded *Salmagundi* in 1807, a literary magazine with a satirical bent that parodied New York society and politicians.

8 K. McKenzie, “‘Franklins of the Cape’: The *South African Commercial Advertiser* and the Creation of a Colonial Public Sphere, 1824–1854”, *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25, 1998/9, 94.

merce and amusement'. As a theatrical critic for *Keenes' Bath Journal*, and as an amateur poet and satirist, his circle of friends had included the famous caricaturist George Cruikshank. His shock of long white hair and eccentric Dickensian wit were balanced by an acute awareness of the popular tastes of his largely British colonial readership, as he addressed their sense of cultural distance and anxieties as colonial Britons poised on the empire's periphery.

Newspapers, as circulated commodities read in homes and reading rooms, provided a dialogical space for encouraging reading and literary appreciation, with *Sam Sly's African Journal* stressing the importance of the press as a transnational publicist of colonial cultural attainment.⁹ The circulation of ideas through print shaped senses of community,¹⁰ helping to encourage and invent British national feeling. In the Cape Colony, newspapers and periodicals were increasingly used from the mid-nineteenth century to encourage a white consensus with the stress on the mutual benefit of a Cape identity within the British Empire, a unique node with its own growing public culture and intelligentsia.¹¹

Appeals to English or British identity, with the terms used interchangeably, were central to establishing common cause amongst white colonists in the nineteenth century, an enterprise later fulfilled by the invention of 'South African' nationalism. 'Britishness', as scholars have come to term it, was not simply a kith-and-kin identity that excluded those with different backgrounds, as its flexible message of egalitarian rights and British cultural affinity and allegiance to the Crown still allowed Dutch colonists, for example, to embrace their own linguistic and religious independence whilst proudly displaying the patriotic paraphernalia of belonging to the wider empire. The promise of diverse versions of Britishness within the commonality of a British world community provided wide appeal.¹² Civic institutions and patriotic public parades were one measure of furthering the script of British fellow-feeling; yet, the cultural politics that bolstered the standing of white hegemony (with black colonists, despite their avowed belief in British citizenship, increasingly excluded from full acceptance by white colonists), also extending to the cultural realm of leisure activities and even humour.

Analyses of humour in cultural history have relied on Bakhtin's influential work on the subversive use of popular culture by the marginalised lower orders of society.¹³ Yet satire was used not only to challenge the status quo, but also to preserve the hierarchical order in a more subdued comic form.¹⁴ Analysing the

9 C. Holdridge, 'Circulating the *African Journal*: The Colonial Press and Trans-Imperial Britishness in the Mid Nineteenth-Century Cape', *South African Historical Journal*, 62(3), 2010, 487-513.

10 The classic text on the relation between print culture and nationalism is B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

11 Dubow, "'Of Special Colonial Interest': The *Cape Monthly Magazine* and the Circulation of Ideas' in Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 71-120.

12 V. Bickford-Smith, 'Writing about Englishness' in G. MacPhee and P. Poddar, eds, *Empire and After: Englishness in Post-colonial Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

13 M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (London: Bloomington, 1984).

14 F. Palmeri, 'Cruikshank, Thackeray and the Victorian Eclipse of Satire', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 44(4), 2004, 753-777. For a lively and stimulating take on the gradual shift from the ribaldry and explicitness of eighteenth-century visual satires in England to its more restrained forms, see V. Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006); The Bakhtinian approach to laughter, too, can be re-evaluated in a colonial context. This is the theme of a recent revisionist article by Alecia Simmonds, who examines a case of convict women's laughter in Australia to demonstrate how laughter is not only a method of subversive resistance, but was also deployed as a form of coercive control by the laughing elite. A. Simmonds, 'Rebellious Bodies and Subversive Sniggers? Embodying Women's Humour and Laughter in Colonial Australia', *History Australia*, 6(2), 2009, 39.1-39.16.

role of satire within British identity at the Cape adds to the analyses of how this was forged through leisure, as noted by Vivian Bickford-Smith, or by Cape civic, literary and scientific institutions, as explored by Saul Dubow.¹⁵ *Sam Sly's African Journal* was explicit in its use of satire to entrench bourgeois sensibilities and encourage British allegiance and cultural expression.

No Laughing Matter? Historicising Satire in the Cape Colony

The collective tittering of colonists in satirical sketches and doggerel, and pronouncements of patriotism in letters to the editor, reveal the cleavages and contradictions within the Cape's middle-class culture. The 'tragedy of manners',¹⁶ to borrow Robert Ross's phrase, entailed not only public displays of status and respectable social standing, but also a complex double bind of subscribing to the scripts of rational propriety spearheaded by evangelicals, whilst also holding on to the ribald elements of amusement and leisure that underpinned senses of belonging and cultural attachment.

Satire can be defined as the humorous exposure of vice, hypocrisy or abuses to bring about a remedial effect on society. It is in its strictest sense a literary term, but is also embodied in various print media, and visual and theatrical forms. It is often expressed in broadsides or orally, a language of the street that expresses societal concern to expunge unwanted traits from the body politic.¹⁷ At the heart of the culture wars that bridged the reformist period between the eighteenth century and the Victorian era, satire allowed for a laughter of unease that elicited enjoyment whilst 'exposing repressed illogicalities and prejudices',¹⁸ the contradictions in a society that preached liberty, yet entrenched class and racial stratification. Satire (as a disparaging genre of humour) is 'a social lubricant and tool or force in the exercise of power in social groups', evoking laughter at values or behaviour viewed as deviant.¹⁹ It is thus a source for communal merriment both in forging group identity and in encouraging disdainful laughter at transgressive conduct.

In order to understand the satirical approach of *Sam Sly's African Journal*, it is important to first outline in brief the uses of satire in the colonial Cape. Some satires, such as a passage of Charles D'Oyly's *Tom Raw the Griffin* (1832),²⁰ involved British caricatures of the Dutch as slovenly, corpulent and comically inept as a means to deligitimise the Dutch right to rule, most often reflected in travel accounts.²¹ However, the most notable satires in the 1820s were clandestine street placards and orally transmitted doggerel aimed at Governor Lord Charles Somerset and his administration, owing to restrictions on publishing critical opinion

15 V. Bickford-Smith, 'Leisure and Social Identity in Cape Town, British Cape Colony, 1838-1910', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25, 1998/9, 103-128; Dubow, *Commonwealth of Knowledge*.

16 R. Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750-1870: A Tragedy of Manners* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

17 M. Hodgart and B. Connery, *Satire: Origins and Principles* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

18 J. A. Wagner-Lawlor, 'Introduction: New Perspectives on the Victorian Comic Spirit' in Wagner-Lawlor, ed. *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), xvi.

19 P. Lewis, *Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 36.

20 See K. McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), frontispiece.

21 For disparaging views of the Dutch, see Michael Streak, *The Afrikaner as Viewed by the English, 1795-1854* (Cape Town: Struik, 1974).

because of the lack of a free press.²² These emanated from British colonists critical of Somerset's autocratic regime as an arch-Tory aristocrat, as they called for the 'rights of freeborn Englishmen' to express their middle-class values of free debate and social position garnered through active enterprise and not patronage. Somerset avoided reforms of the press and administrative institutions. With Dutch colonists largely supportive of Somerset, criticism emanated from British colonists labelled as 'radicals' by his administration wary in the aftermath of the Napoleonic era.²³ Placards lampooned the perceived corruption of Somerset's regime, with his private life portrayed as morally dubious, a domestic reflection of the decay of his public office. One placard depicted Somerset sodomising his private surgeon, Dr James Barry (himself a sexually ambiguous figure later discovered to be either intersex or a female transvestite), with several other placards ridiculing high officials such as the Fiscal, accused of hiding abuses in the assignment of Prize Slaves. One placard was described as 'The Wonderful Cape Punch', with a drawing of 'an ugly thick man with a long nose', another as ridiculing Somerset's love of horse riding. Some of these placards were printed from the offices of George Greig, where Fairbairn's *Advertiser* was printed, whilst an escaped Australian convict, William Edwards, masquerading as a notary public and later tried by Somerset for libel, was accused of writing them. Their authorship, however, was never definitely solved.²⁴

Most satires did not encourage Anglo-Dutch enmity, but rather reflected support for increased labour control through vagrancy legislation and opposition to missionary endeavours and abolitionism in the fraught period of slave emancipation in the 1830s. The humanitarian liberalism of John Fairbairn, editor of the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, the missionary and abolitionist John Philip, and the administrator Andries Stockenström were caricatured in satirical plays and cartoons owing to scepticism toward their belief in the 'civilising project' of educating and Christianising black colonists. Frederick l'Ons, for example, was responsible for several satirical drawings of liberals, one entitled 'Romance and Reality, or Hottentots as they are said to be and as they really are', which depicted John Philip and Sir Thomas Buxton watching in admiration as the Khoikhoi learn Greek and Latin, whilst in reality they are involved in drunken brawls and sexual escapades near a canteen.²⁵ The lampooning of humanitarian idealism is also seen in Charles Etienne Boniface's play *De Temperantisten* (1832), where the missionary John Philip is labelled 'Dominee Humbug Philipumpkin',²⁶ the term discredit-

22 An exception to this is the satirical periodical published in 1825 by Frederick Brookes, *South African Grins; or the Quizzical Depot of General Humbug*. The author signed himself anonymously as 'that most notorious humbug, Q in the Corner, Esq., Disciple of Momus, &c. &c &c.' disarmingly equating satire, cant and buffoonery to popular effect. Seventy-two pages in length, it ridiculed Cape Town's dirty streets and made light of colonial manners, differing little then in sentiment from disparaging travel accounts of the Cape. It likely avoided censorship by not voicing political criticism of Somerset, although it received little colonial support, lasting for four issues. See Lewin Robinson, *None Daring to Make Us Afraid*, 93-98.

23 McKenzie, "'Franklins of the Cape'", 88-102; J.B. Peires, 'The British and the Cape, 1814-1834' in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, eds, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989); K. McKenzie, "'To Enlighten South Africa': The Creation of a Free Press at the Cape in the Early Nineteenth Century' in C. Kaul, ed, *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

24 See K. McKenzie, 'The Daemon behind the Curtain: William Edwards and the Theatre of Liberty', *South African Historical Journal*, 61(3), 2009, 482-504; C. Holdridge, 'The Escape of William Edwards: Respectability, Intrigue and Invented Identity at the Early British Cape and Australia', (BA Hons thesis, University of Cape Town, 2008), 34-48.

25 A. Bank, 'Liberals and their Enemies: Racial Ideology at the Cape of Good Hope, 1820 to 1850' (PhD thesis, Cambridge University 1995), 298.

26 Quoted in Bank, 'Liberals and their Enemies', 177.

ing Philip as a bumbling delusional in his civilising mission toward the irreclaimable drunkenness of the 'Hottentots'. Boniface's satires were not a clarion call for Dutch ethnic identification, his French background revealing the metropolitan flexibility of the urban Dutch in the Cape.

Despite a precedent for ridiculing individuals, Sammons and his readers avoided the defamatory approach of attacking prominent officials or figures to expose their folly. This was likely a prudent strategy for publishing in a colony increasingly self-conscious of the image of respectability and advancement it projected to the metropole. It also mirrored the shift in approaches to satire in Britain, where satirising of royalty and officials in an overtly scurrilous fashion diminished in the face of evangelical scorn and the threat of libel suits.²⁷ Aware of this shift, Sammons claimed that 'when any ludicrous excrescences, funguses, or diseases, appear on the face of society, it is the business of an honest and charitable humourist, to clip them off, with as little suffering as possible to the afflicted, and without leaving a scar behind'.²⁸ Unlike scandal, which was seen as a disreputable discourse that might police the conduct of colonists and thus perform a similar purifying purpose, but might also be utilised to spread falsehoods and destabilise the bourgeois order,²⁹ satire could be fashioned as a respectable and even patriotic form that served to protect the middle class establishment. Satire, as the nineteenth century progressed, became less dangerous precisely because it avoided overt sexual or violent content.

Colonial Journalism: A Disreputable Profession?

Satirical publications, whether they were published in Britain or the colonies, needed to avoid what might be perceived as overly licentious content. For this to be achieved, newspapers needed to be 'written *with* people if not *by* them' and not 'merely *for* them'.³⁰ This sense of community investment added legitimacy to a newspaper's content. Every publication 'stands up to its own merits', Sammons declared in defending *Sam Sly's African Journal*, 'if it be a monster, the Public are sufficient to frown it down ... If it speaks the truth and is pure, and have a streak of originality and talent, it will find readers who will cherish it.'³¹ He was aware that satirical publications, often associated with radical politics and libellous accusations, were particularly open to colonial scorn. If concerns for middle-class respectability were prominent in Britain, where the very suggestion of infidelity, corruption or incest could threaten the financial and moral standing of an entire household, this was perhaps even more so in colonial communities owing to their relatively small size and sensitivity to metropolitan judgement. Newspapers were highly effective in spreading gossip within communities, colonies and globally, poisoning the name of the individuals in question and potentially damaging the im-

27 Gatrell, *City of Laughter*; B. Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

28 *SSAJ*, 23 November 1843.

29 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*.

30 R. Williams, 'Radical and/or Respectable' in R. Boston, ed, *The Press We Deserve* (London: Routledge, 1970), 14-15.

31 *SSAJ*, 1 June 1843.

age of the colony.³² With such power to create far-reaching scandals Denis Cryle, a historian of the Australian colonial press, has described colonial journalism as a 'disreputable profession',³³ conjuring up the vulnerability to public disdain or the promise of public veneration newspaper editors faced.

Sammons's *Journal*, as will be shown, was successful in avoiding attacking the moral standing of colonists personally. This was unlike another newspaper published in the same year as the *Journal* commenced, 1843, Thomas Johnson's *Satirist*, which printed the scandalous indiscretions of Sydney's inhabitants. The latest scandal in Sydney was announced in a gossip column titled 'Sat Wishes to Know' with content such as 'Whether S____A C____K of Bridge-street has recovered her VIRGINITY, since she parted with her *maiden-head* to the young BRASS-founder next door? The old TIGRESS says she's as clean and *tight* as ever she was.'³⁴ Although popular with many colonists, the newspaper still struck a collective nerve. Johnson was convicted of obscene libel in a prominent trial, where the prosecution urged the jury to consider the insulting overtures made against the colonial family, accused of promiscuity and drunkenness, and to defend it against the watchful eyes of the world. It was noted that the circulation of published gossip scandalised a colony, by deterring emigration and damaging the colony's reputation, with Australia particularly susceptible owing to its convict origins.³⁵ The antithesis of the colonial newspaper as propaganda sprucing up the image of the colony, printed scandal in the guise of moralising satire broke ranks with the code of acceptable publishing practice. Freedom of the press, in short, was limited in large part by what was allowed by the colonial public.

As with Johnson, who had claimed his Sydney *Satirist* would 'cleanse the Augean Stable of our metropolis and its environs, from the vice with which it abounds',³⁶ Sammons laid claim to the moral worth of ridiculing vice out of society. The editor 'intends for this purpose', Sammons wrote in his prospectus,

to present a striking picture of the Cape; and, as every body is anxious to see his own phiz on canvas, however stupid or ugly it may be, he has no doubt but the whole town will flock to see his exhibition. His picture will necessarily include a vast variety of figures, and should any lady or gentleman be displeased with the inveterate truth of their likenesses, they may ease their spleen by laughing at those of their neighbours.³⁷

This was largely initial bombast to titillate the public into buying the paper, rather than an outright attack on the moral standing of Sammons's fellow towns-

32 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*.

33 D. Cryle, ed, *Disreputable Profession: Journalists and Journalism in Colonial Australia* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 1997).

34 *The Satirist and Sporting Chronicle*, 1 April 1843, quoted in McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 161.

35 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 162-163. Pandering to the continued interest in scandalous newspapers in the wake of the *Satirist*'s suspended publication, a rival publication the *Omnibus; or Satirist and Sydney Spectator* emerged. Both newspapers were discussed during the trial.

36 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 160.

37 *SSAJ*, Prospectus, 1 June 1843.

men. By likening his journal to an ‘exhibition’, Sammons spoke of an important part of British metropolitan culture: the spectacle of London shows of the absurd, grotesque, exotic or scientific as well as the display of satirical prints and advertisements on shop windows and street walls. According to Richard Altick, ‘no English trait was more widespread throughout the entire social structure than the relish for exhibitions ... they were an indispensable way of momentary escape from the dullness ... [and] suppression of the imagination which were too often the price of life in the enveloping city’.³⁸ Central to negotiating the satirical press’s place within the new reformist order was the need to preserve the satirist’s role of exhibitionist and entertainer whilst avoiding the perceived taint of the carnivalesque. The satirical press, like London street exhibitions and the ritual symbolism of the old carnival and rural festival, came to represent the lowly, dirty, subversive elements of the human body and social spaces that were taboo for the rising bourgeoisie. Freak shows displaying bodily deformities through to the exaggerated celebration of dirt, genitalia and sex in carnival costumes and rituals had their printed word equivalent in satirical poems, novels and newspapers. The evangelical tide of popular opinion was turning against the display or publishing of subjects deemed offensive to bourgeois politeness,³⁹ with colonists taking their cue on moral sensibilities from Europe.

Sammons jokingly remarked that when his *Journal* first appeared

on the Cape stage ... naughty boys laughed, and the Puritans groaned, and the Merchants tittered, and the ladies veiled their faces ... but they soon found that the creature was harmless, and *Sly* only its name, and as innocent as themselves, and has now become their especial favourite, being cherished by them with a motherly affection.⁴⁰

The fear of *Sam Sly’s African Journal* making public scandal out of private gossip was alleviated by its calculated attempt at achieving family acceptance. Satirical publications could easily be a threat to middle-class morality and personal and community respectability, yet in striving to allay such fears and through the editor’s respectable background, Sammon’s *Journal* was welcomed rather than shunned. Sammons hoped that ‘every man and woman having children, will place it [the *Journal*] in their hands and induce them to contribute to its pages’.⁴¹ By promising to be a family publication, Sammons appealed to the greatest mark of respectability. If a newspaper could be read by the entire household of husband, wife and children, it had to be deemed apolitical and instructive, free from material that was morally dubious or that might encroach on the masculine domain of serious political discourse. By stressing literature and mental recreation, Sammons appealed to the most common traits of the Victorian family newspaper or periodical.

38 R. D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1-3. As an important means of social literacy and entertainment (they were accessible to both the literate and illiterate), the exhibition became the focal point for contestations over appropriate public instruction launched by middle class evangelicals and reformers as the ribald fair and travelling freak show gave way to the ordered, reformist vision of the museum.

39 P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986).

40 *SSAJ*, 28 December 1843.

41 *SSAJ*, 31 August 1843.

cal, the most famous of which would be Dickens's *Household Words* published in Britain in the 1850s.⁴²

In the words of Davidoff and Hall, the nineteenth-century home had become 'the nursery of virtue', a place of stability, love and instruction.⁴³ Illustrations of the time often showed a family seated at home, reading books or periodicals amongst themselves.⁴⁴ To enter this inner sanctum of domestic life, print culture needed to be virtuous and instructive. If children could read, but also contribute material to the *Journal*, it would follow that its contents were not only harmless but also nurturing for young minds. As the Dean of Cape Town, W.A. Newman, claimed in a lecture before the annual meeting of the South African Library in 1849, the reading of 'enlarging and elevating subjects' aided 'in correcting, ... improving and hallowing the domestic circle'.⁴⁵ The *African Journal* was 'constantly perused by most of the leading families in the Cape',⁴⁶ Sammons boasted, and was 'one of the standing dishes – and shall we say *jokes* – in the Government House ... remarkable for taste, and for judgement'.⁴⁷ With official and family support, he had achieved not only community acceptance, but also, importantly, acceptance for family consumption.

Sammons was helped in part by the rise of *Punch* magazine in Britain in the 1840s, whose issues were soon available to Cape colonists in the library and reading rooms. Satirical journals had long been held in suspicion of having a radical ideological bent, hardly the desired folio to countenance the table of a middle-class family. *Punch* aligned satire with popular taste by avoiding moral grossness, and was thus welcomed into the Victorian home.⁴⁸ The respectable *Bentley's Miscellany* wrote in May 1842 that in *Punch* 'there is nothing low or vulgar ... it may safely be introduced into the family circle, where it will provoke many a hearty laugh'.⁴⁹ By avoiding sexual, scatological and scandalous content, Sammons had also won family trust.

The satirical targets of *Sam Sly's African Journal* were predominantly fictitious stereotypes that ridiculed those on the outskirts of white male authority. Misogynistic satire was a popular theme, with the common trope of wayward women seeking to enter into the male-only domain of public politics. For example, drawing on Douglas Jerrold's successful 'Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures' published in *Punch* in 1845–6, a shrew derided for her bedside harangues toward her cuckolded husband,⁵⁰ a reader contributed his own Cape version with Mrs Caudle chairing a meeting of the 'Ladies of Simon's Town'. The ladies complain about the disturbance of the evening gun on the domestic felicity of their households, the sleep of their children and the obedience of their recently emancipated nursemaids. With their concerns depicted as focused frivolously on family and not the extension

42 H. Fraser, S. Green, and J. Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

43 L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, Revised Edition 2002), 149-192.

44 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 180.

45 *SSAJ*, 28 April 1849.

46 *SSAJ*, 24 August, 1843.

47 *SSAJ*, 23 November 1843.

48 R. D. Altick, *Punch: The Lively Youth of a British Institution* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997).

49 Altick, *Punch*, 10.

50 F. Palmeri, 'Victorian Eclipse of Satire', 771.

of political rights, such satires highlighted the assumed emotional irrationality of women.⁵¹ This reflected a desire to mirror the gender roles of Britain in the Cape, with women excluded from the male public sphere of political meetings and salaried work. The doctrine of separate spheres differed somewhat from the Cape Dutch model, where it was acceptable for women to operate retail businesses from their homes and to gain considerable economic independence if widowed.⁵²

Satire could preserve bourgeois values and promoted acculturation to British models of domesticity. Aware of disapproval of satire from some evangelical quarters, owing to its often radical associations, Sammons claimed, upon the arrival of the Bishop Robert Gray in Cape Town, that there was a mutual place for both priest and satirist,⁵³ with the latter serving to 'laugh a man out of mischief, when he can neither be prayed or preached out'.⁵⁴

An editor's standing in the public realm bolstered the acceptance of his publication. Sammons frequently attended church and invitation-only functions, such as Government Balls, on which he commented in his paper. As a member of the minor gentry during his time in Bath, Sammons had established a name for himself as the satirist 'Sam Sly' in the Bath press.⁵⁵ The editor of the *Cape Town Mail*, William Buchanan, noted that 'Sam Sly' was 'much respected in Bath' for his contribution to Somerset weeklies.⁵⁶ His father Robert had been a prosperous cooper, whilst William Sammons was a property owner and entitled to the Parliamentary franchise from 1832. Residing in Springfield Place, he mixed well with Bath high society, which had become dominated by the rising middle class.⁵⁷ His efforts to publish in Cape Town required the support of two sureties to 'keep the peace, and to refrain from pulling down the Church or upsetting the Government',⁵⁸ as Sammons put it, with the Attorney General of the Cape, William Porter, and a highly respected retired military man from India, Colonel Sutherland, performing this role.⁵⁹ These measures were the after-effects of Ordinance 60 of 1829, which liberalised the free press following Governor Somerset's stringent controls, allowing for political criticism but still maintaining strict regulatory measures to curb libelous or radical journalism.⁶⁰

The respectable standing of *Sam Sly's African Journal* is complicated, however, by the existence of a British scandal sheet called *Sam Sly*, discussed with much disapproval by the House of Commons in 1850 for having 'lived by libel-

51 *SSAJ*, 24 December 1846.

52 K. McKenzie, 'Gender and Honour in Middle Class Cape Town: The Making of Colonial Identities, 1828-1850' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1997), 79-86.

53 *SSAJ*, 2 March, 1848.

54 *SSAJ*, 11 April, 1844.

55 Hattersley, *Oliver the Spy and Others*, 86-95.

56 *Cape Town Mail*, no date, quoted in Hattersley, *Oliver the Spy and the Others*, 96.

57 Hattersley, *Oliver the Spy and Others*, 86-95.

58 *SSAJ*, 1 June 1843.

59 *SSAJ*, 1 September 1848.

60 Ordinance 60 of 1829, *The Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, 8 May 1829. This was amended with less stringent measures by Ordinance 9 of 1839, *The Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, 29 November 1839. A further stumbling block for colonial newspapers was a compulsory stamp levy, increasing their sale price. This tax was abolished in 1848 by a Stamp Ordinance. *Sam Sly's African Journal* benefited from the Stamp Ordinance by being the first Cape newspaper without a stamp in its issue of 29 June 1848. In Britain, the Newspaper Stamp Act was repealed only six years later in 1854. R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 340-354.

ling individuals'.⁶¹ However, there is no evidence of a connection between the *African Journal* and its British namesake. In fact, Sammons was never prosecuted for libel, unlike his counterpart the *Commercial Advertiser's* John Fairbairn.⁶² The pseudonym 'Sam Sly' very likely derived from both personal and literary sources. It was possibly a childhood nickname, a play on his surname *Sammons* and an early inclination towards *sly* wit.⁶³ One advertisement for the journal quotes the jester character Christopher Sly from Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, renaming him as 'Sam Sly',⁶⁴ whilst many readers referred affectionately to Sammons as 'Samivel' in reference to the cockney misfit Sam Weller from Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.⁶⁵ Such references evince a deep cultural endorsement of his literary and satirical objectives.⁶⁶

Satire and Colonial Popular Culture

Leisure activities were an important demonstration of British cultural attachment, with patriotic parades and Royal celebrations, the unfurling of the Union Jack, literature and songs, through to clubs and institutions embodying strong belief in the values and vision of being British.⁶⁷ On the Queen's Birthday in 1843, for example, Sam Sly commented on 'rejoicings at the Cape', with artillery fire and a rendition of 'God Save the Queen' with 'loud shouts and huzzas from the assembled crowd, both black and white'.⁶⁸ As Vivian Bickford-Smith has argued, leisure activities in Cape Town ranging from the theatre and sports through to literature and public parades were fertile ground for the expression of social identities and thus contested sites of public debate around what constituted rational and acceptable amusements. The cross-racial appeal of leisurely celebrations lay in their alignment of Britishness with 'controlled frivolity', an emphasis on an inclusive patriotism embodied in both self-improvement and enjoyment.⁶⁹

Although many public parades allowed for racial inclusivity, as with black minstrelsy for example, the message within *Sam Sly's African Journal* made an implicit assumption that the only true Britons were white. The delight in leisure and humour spoke to patriotic allegiance, with Sammons hoping that 'should there be any real *John Bulls* at heart in Africa ... they may have not forgotten "auld lang syne," but still cherish the desire for the old broad humour and hearty laugh, and in

61 House of Commons Debates, vol. 110, 16 April 1850, 373-374 (accessed 28 Aug 2009) http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1850/apr/16/paper-duty#S3V0110P0_18500416_HOC_1.

62 H.C. Botha, *John Fairbairn in South Africa* (Cape Town: Historical Publication Society, 1984), 131-135.

63 This was an age when nonsense names were delighted in, even into adulthood, and could be carried over from childhood usage. Writing in *Keenes' Bath Journal* five years before his emigration from Britain to the Cape, Sammons reminisced about his days at the Hog Lane School in Bedford, where his playmates had nicknames such as 'Stingy Bull', 'Rough Dick', 'Big Ben' and 'Cockey Pierce'. *Keenes' Bath Journal and General Advertiser*, 24 July 1837.

64 *Graham's Town Journal*, 21 December 1843.

65 *SSAJ*, 3 July 1845.

66 *SSAJ*, 30 May 1844.

67 Bickford-Smith, 'Writing about Englishness', 64-67.

68 *SSAJ*, 11 June 1843.

69 Bickford-Smith, 'Leisure and Social Identity in Cape Town', 103-128. A general overview of existing research in the history of leisure in Africa is E. Akyeampong and C. Ambler, 'Leisure in African History: An Introduction', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Special Issue: Leisure in African History, 35(1), 2002, 1-16. For an Australian perspective, see R. Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788* (Melbourne: Longman, 1995). Waterhouse argues, as was similar in the Cape, that the regulation of and participation in leisure activities were a vital expression of social standing for the aspirant bourgeois values of Australian colonists.

consequence will not suffer “*Sam Sly*” to emigrate.’⁷⁰ Within the social exclusivity of leisure activities held at invitation-only events or societies requiring membership, white bourgeois status was particularly stressed. The illusion of egalitarian leisure displayed in public events was less true for bourgeois sociability, excluding those lower down in the social stratum, such as white and black artisans. The South African Library, for example, required a subscription fee for membership that maintained its elite status, a policy that still came under challenge from those advocating the wider accessibility of reading for poorer colonists to improve social mobility. The establishing of Mechanics’ Institutes and circulating libraries was increasingly called for in the letter columns of the press.⁷¹

Reading promised to fulfil the social function of enlightening colonial society, its advocates lauding the bourgeois values it might inculcate. Evangelicals saw literature as an aid in teaching godly values; utilitarians praised its educative function for social upliftment; Romanticists viewed literature as embodying artistic truths and aesthetic beauty; whilst many colonists trumpeted print culture as evidence of British national identity and ascendancy.⁷² Such views were both competing and complementary (evangelicals disputed, for example, the moral value of Lord Byron’s poems), yet they also gave allowance for the social value of satire and comedy. Evangelical propriety could still allow the mild ribaldry of laughter, with humour evincing patriotic fervour. In one letter to the *African Journal*, a reader declared

Dear Sir, – Hearing that a feather – to wit the ‘African Journal’, has been thrown up by one Samuel Sly, to see which way the wind may blow it – I anxiously watched its progress, and never passed the Curiosity Shop without glancing at your letter box to count, if possible! how many lovers of literature – how many jolly dogs, and funny fellows, might be crowding around, waiting their turn with some mental contribution ... If it were universally proclaimed that, in so large a community as our own, (libraries abounding) talent, and originality sufficient to *fill* one small sheet once a week, could not be found, – would no indignant blushes suffuse our cheeks? ... Is Momus afraid to laugh? Have the muses forsaken our Byron Secundus, and in the most unladylike manner broken the lyre about his head? ... In the name of all that’s laughter-moving and glad, – in the name of cheerfulness and smiling faces, – in the name of Dickens, – in the name of Sly, – yea! in the name of Punch itself – I conjure you (as Dan would say), let us drown such apathy and prove our willingness – our ability to cope with other Colonies in maintaining at least one agreeable es-cape! for drowsiness and ennui ... In the absence of real events we must set the imaginative powers hard at work – scandal mongers often do so – ours

70 *SSAJ*, 30 May 1844.

71 Dubow, *Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 47-52.

72 D. Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 13-39; D. Johnson, ‘Literary and Cultural Criticism in South Africa’ in D. Attridge and D. Attwell, eds, *Cambridge History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), forthcoming.

is a loftier aim, manufacture something to lighten dull care, something that our sons and daughters may revert to, in after times, and read with pleasure and with – MIRTH!⁷³

Satire, as a genre potentially disrespectful if scurrilous or sexually explicit, reflects the tensions inherent in the cultural politics of producing British cultural norms in the colony. The letter above demonstrates the importance of popular culture, libraries and a literate culture in establishing British attachment within the colony, a facet that Saul Dubow has recently argued was an important aspect in building white political ascendancy and pride in colonial achievements.⁷⁴ Satire was a sign of cultural attainment if scandal-mongering was avoided, an important requisite for evangelical domesticity to be appeased, as its British associations (such as *Punch* magazine or Dickens) promised to unify English literary appreciation by both British and Dutch colonists. The Dutch placed their own stress on Dutch-language recreation, within literary journals or theatrical productions by the group Tot Nut en Vermaak, yet this rarely embodied a nationalist message akin to British cultural affinities, stressing more the utilitarian value of leisurely endeavour.⁷⁵ Recognising the value of British culture was a strategic response to forge a white consensus, one which in turn would incorporate a uniquely Cape (and later South African) identity alongside British attachment.

Just as ideas around society, propriety and cultural attachment in Britain inevitably found their way to the Cape via the emigrants' own expectations around social space and etiquette, print culture helped impress a sense of nostalgia for the lost urban environment in Britain upon visions of Cape Town. Print culture influenced ideas around the rational bourgeois sphere, to the extent that reformist visions went beyond moral reformation to the creation of appropriate, sanitised urban spaces in Cape Town. Stray dogs and vagrants needed to be eradicated from the streets, and a rhetorical and physical space for discussion forged. The Commercial Exchange building and the reading rooms and literary and philosophical societies of the town played this role.⁷⁶

Sam Sly's African Journal championed the literary and satirical aspects of bourgeois culture, not simply to evoke laughter, but as a concerted effort to foster bourgeois values and British cultural tastes in a colony lacking a lively print culture. In the tradition of *Punch*, Sammons sought woodcut illustrations for his *Journal* for satiric comment, yet very few were published within its pages. He printed several woodcuts by J.C. Chase originally used in the *Cape Literary Gazette* in the 1830s.⁷⁷ In the illustration of 'A Poor Author' (see Fig. 2), Sammons commented that the man in rags was a poet or artist struggling for colonial appreciation of his craft, his pleas for aid from the Governor coldly

73 'Mirth!' to the editor, *SSAJ*, 21 March 1844.

74 Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, especially chapter 1.

75 This is discussed in Ross, *Status and Respectability*, chapter 3; for Dutch theatre, see J. Fletcher, *The Story of Theatre in South Africa: A Guide to its History from 1780-1930* (Cape Town: Vlaeberg, 1994).

76 K. McKenzie, 'The *South African Commercial Advertiser* and the Making of Middle Class Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Cape Town' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993); K. McKenzie, 'Dogs and the Public Sphere: The Ordering of Social Space in Early Nineteenth-Century Cape Town', *South African Historical Journal*, 48 (2003).

77 L.J. Picton, 'Nicprint 50, being some account of the history of the printing, packaging and newspaper industry of South Africa...' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1969), 17-18; Lewin Robinson, *None Daring to Make Us Afraid*, 215-222.

The Sly Corner.

African Fine Arts.

(STEP THE FOURTH.)

A POOR AUTHOR.

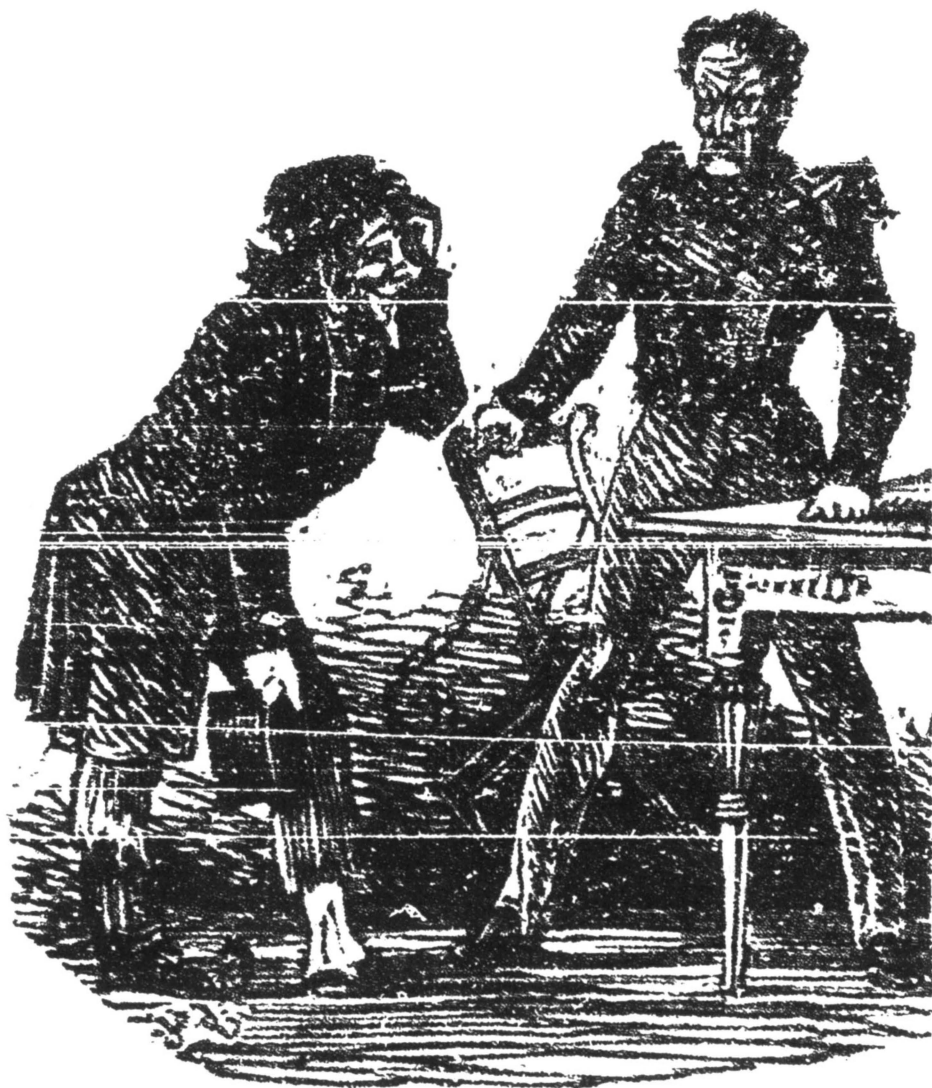


Figure 2: *Sam Sly's African Journal*, 6 November 1845.



Figure 3: Thomas Bowler, pencil illustration of Robertson's Booksellers in Worden et al., *Cape Town: The Making of a City* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 154.

turned down in favour of trade and administrative issues. The author's wish to have Milton's *Paradise Lost* translated into 'High Dutch' to popularise English literature, Sammons jested, was met with cold indifference from high office.⁷⁸ A love of literature, he argued, would uplift the Cape from an image of mercantilism linked to a slave past, to an 'ennobling, elevating character'.⁷⁹ Sammons's efforts at publishing comic illustrations, however, were confined to rudimentary woodcuts that were published only on the rare occasion. Illustrated comic weeklies in South Africa would only appear two decades later in the 1870s, the first of which were the *Zingari* (1870–4) and *The Squib* (1869–70).⁸⁰

Booksellers, like libraries, were literary nodes that promised an improving influence. The South African Library might have been described as 'the bright eye of the Cape' by the astronomer John Herschel in 1854,⁸¹ expressing its stature as a vital civic institution, yet it was William Sammons who had earlier described Robertson's Booksellers in Heerengracht Street as 'the Cape's Bright Eye' in 1844.⁸² The display in the shop window of books, art and cartoons, including work by George Cruikshank and local artists, would, according to Sammons, 'refine the judgment' of colonists with a 'higher and purer taste', whilst the displays 'render

78 The original, interestingly, utilised the woodcut to make a joke of the economic prospects for emigrants. A farmer approaches the magistrate to enquire whether he may keep minerals found on his newly-granted farm. When the magistrate asks whether any 'precious stones' have been found, the farmer denies this but states to 'have found a precious lot of stones'. Lewin Robinson, *None Daring to Make Us Afraid*, 215-216.

79 *SSAJ*, 23 November, 1843.

80 For a bibliographical list of these and other Cape satirical publications, see B. Cheadle, 'Southern Africa' in J. Vann and R. van Arsdell, eds, *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 243-298.

81 *Proceedings of the 25th Anniversary Meeting of the Subscribers to the Public Library, Cape Town, Saturday 6th May, 1854* (Cape Town, 1854), 20. Quoted in Dubow, *Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 45.

82 *SSAJ*, 2 November 1844.

the exhibition a second *Ackerman's* [*sic*].⁸³ Rudolph Ackermann owned a successful satirical print shop that had opened in London in the 1790s and catered for an affluent and respectable clientele, with its famous window displays setting the standard of refinement and fashion.⁸⁴ Despite the seedier connotations associated with much satirical print-work of the Regency era, Ackermann's reputation as an earlier exemplar of fine mercantile taste remained. There is something remarkable in the assortment of objects and artwork displayed in Robertson's Booksellers. From the work of Cruikshank through to that of Cape artists such as Thomas Bowler, the visual display emphasised the importance placed on encouraging a market for artistic and literary appreciation, with the latest books and periodicals shipped from England, alongside local newspapers and the odd tract published at the Cape.⁸⁵ Its importance is seen in a pencil illustration by Thomas Bowler (see Fig. 3). Although much of Thomas Bowler's work was concerned with the picturesque and landscape, increasing prominence was giving to depicting particular buildings and scenes that projected an image of a clean and industrious town.⁸⁶ The Malay hawkers add an exotic aesthetic and charm to the orderly bustle of white colonists, yet depictions of other black colonists were usually less complimentary.

Racial satire most commonly expressed settler unease with black labour control, with disparaging caricatures of the Khoikhoi as drunken and indolent vagrants. This was reflected in the art of Frederick I'Ons and Charles Bell, for example,⁸⁷ and in satirical plays such as *Kaatje Kekkelbek* (first performed in 1838 and published later in *Sam Sly's African Journal* in 1846).⁸⁸ These works were responses to humanitarian liberalism by settler sceptics who depicted the Khoikhoi as averse to following religion, the law or moral propriety. By ridiculing the potential for black equality with white colonists, satire made it difficult to take seriously humanitarian aims. With the Khoikhoi increasingly rendered as 'outsiders', and as the 'antithesis to respectability', the distancing of white cultural attainment from the supposed drunken backwardness of the black labouring population reveals the political

83 *SSAJ*, 2 November 1844.

84 Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 243-4.

85 Very few books were published in Cape Town before the 1850s, with pamphlets and religious tracts being more common alongside newspapers and periodicals. For a list of works published in Cape Town in the 1840s, see *The Cape Press: 1838-1850, A Bibliography*, compiled by Joyce C. Mandelbrote (University of Cape Town, 1945). Although Robertson published several works himself, he also seems to have specialised in selling work published by Saul Solomon. Mandelbrote, *The Cape Press*, iv.

86 M. Godby, 'The Colonial Experience of Space: Thomas Bowler's Representation of the Figure in the Landscape in Lithographs and Other Views of the Cape' (UCT: Centre for African Studies seminar paper, 1992), 6-10; M. Hall, 'Fish and the Fisherman, Archaeology and Art: Cape Town seen by Bowler, D'Oyly and De Meillon', *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History*, 2 (3&4), 1991, 78-88. The man in a dark coat to the right is 'Old Moses', a well-known Cape Town vagrant whose brazen conversations with passers-by reflect the position of the vagrant as a subversive commentator. 'Old Moses' was occasionally quoted and responded to in Sammons's editorials. *SSAJ*, 3 July 1845.

87 As Andrew Bank and Russel Viljoen have noted, artistic depictions of the Khoikhoi depended on the demands of the market. Some mid-nineteenth-century artists, such as George Angas, aimed their artwork at a European market that favoured, in the climate of humanitarianism, an idealistic aesthetic in ethnographic sketches. In contrast, Charles Bell's well-known visual satires of the Khoikhoi as drunken vagrants were sold mainly to a colonial market, thus reflecting the anti-liberal views held by many colonists. This is complicated somewhat by Bank's observation that noble portraits of Xhosa chiefs were commissioned for military officials, following a picturesque aesthetic and fulfilling a desire to depict chiefs as honourable and appropriate opponents. See R. Viljoen, 'Sketching the Khoi: George French Angas and his Depiction of the Genadendal Khoikhoi Characters at the Cape of Good Hope, c.1847', *South African Journal of Art History*, 22(2), 2007, 277-290; R. Viljoen, 'Alcohol and Art: Charles Davidson Bell and his caricatured images of Colonial Khoikhoi in early nineteenth century South Africa', *South African Journal of Art History*, 23(1), 2008, 190-202; A. Bank, 'The Return of the Noble Savage: The Changing Image of Africans in Colonial Art, 1800-1850', *South African Historical Journal*, 39(1), 1998, 17-43.

88 Klipspringer [Andrew Geddes Bain], 'Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life Among the Hottentots', *SSAJ*, 20 August 1846. The most extensive treatment of its poetics and literary historical context is P.R. Anderson, "'The Host of Vagabonds': Origins and Destinations of the Vagrant in Cape History and Ideas' (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 2007), chapter 3.

strategy of racial exclusion in its ideological manifestations, despite the avowed legislative equality espoused through Ordinance 50 of 1828.⁸⁹ This would take a few more decades to manifest itself in legislated segregation of public space,⁹⁰ but ultimately a decline in liberal attitudes to race was often most virulently expressed in colonial print culture such as satires.⁹¹ It was implied that only white society was culturally refined and cultivated the manners of respectability, with the breakdown of moral order the key motif of racial satire.

The Xhosa, for example, were lampooned as threatening not only white lives and property, but also the stability of settler family life on the frontier.⁹² In the 1840s, even liberals like John Fairbairn, who had a decade earlier through his *Commercial Advertiser* supported conciliatory efforts and treaties with the Xhosa, supported combative approaches when faced with further frontier wars.⁹³ Within the *African Journal*, satire was often used in fictitious letters. Many of these, written in the voice of 'Kitty Veller', a settler woman, expressed how she was 'awfully fritened at the selveges the Kaffirs', who would attack farmers' 'dearest sweet Hinfants, their wives, and their property' adding that 'I'm shure I'd die if I was won o' them black beastes wives'. The threat to domesticity was worsened by the Xhosa being labelled 'Blakc Varmint' who will 'eat hus all up'.⁹⁴ Claims of cannibalism echoed the satirical print by George Cruikshank, *All among the Hottentots* (1820), where the 1820 Settlers are depicted as being devoured by the Xhosa, in concert with wild animals, their jagged teeth gnawing women, men and children as their homes burn in the background.⁹⁵

Kitty Veller's hysterical utterances complaining of black savagery were likely written by a male hand owing to contrived spelling mistakes and malapropisms, and served as both misogynistic and racial satires. They ridiculed petitions that strayed from the desired script of a white, male merchant spokesperson for settler interests. This was not to trivialise the perceived Xhosa threat, for virulent racism was heightened during times of increased conflict on the frontier, but it demonstrates how satire exposed contestations over who had the right to publicise settler views. The largest volume of racial satire appeared in the *African Journal* during the Seventh Frontier War (1846–7), serving to attract focus away from the unsavoury reality of colonial violence.⁹⁶ For the most part, however, *Sam Sly's African Journal* concentrated on aspects of white exclusivity, conveniently expunging the

89 Ross, *Status and Respectability*, 125-7.

90 V. Bickford Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

91 For the hardening of racial attitudes, see A. Bank, 'Losing Faith in the Civilising Mission: The Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism at the Cape, 1840-1850' in M. Daunton and R. Halpern, *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 364-383.

92 For an insight into settler women's experience of the eastern frontier, see N. Erlank, "'Thinking It Wrong to Remain Unemployed in the Pressing Times': The Experiences of Two English Settler Wives", *South African Historical Journal*, 33, 1995, 62-82.

93 Bank, 'Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism'.

94 *SSAJ*, 21 August 1845. Another noteworthy correspondent to *Sam Sly's African Journal* who wrote in vernacular spelling with frequent malapropisms (and who was also likely a fictitious character) was 'Sam Switch', a cockney soldier or settler on the frontier. *SSAJ*, 25 June 1846. For further analysis of 'Kitty Veller', see Holdridge, 'Sam Sly's African Journal and the Role of Satire', 121-122, 142-149.

95 For the Cruikshank illustration, see H. Giliomee and B. Mbenga, eds, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007), 87.

96 See Bank, 'Return of the Noble Savage', 24, drawing upon L. Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', *Art in America*, 71 (1983), 126.

presence of black colonists from discussions of leisure pursuits or satires that focused on the paradoxes of white social mobility.

This creation of a white bourgeois cultural space can be seen in the literary, philosophical and scientific institutions, perceived as an important facet in mirroring the cultural landscape of Britain in the Cape Colony. They were spheres not only for rational conversation, but also for mirthful recreation. As bodies aimed at 'the spirit of improvement, civic virtue, scientific enquiry, and reasoned debate',⁹⁷ their utilitarian desire for useful knowledge surprisingly recognised the social value of laughter and spectacle. Lectures and demonstrations on the latest pseudo-scientific discoveries of phrenology, mesmerism or laughing gas (nitrous oxide) were often advertised in the colonial press.⁹⁸ In a demonstration to a gathering of the Cape Town Institute in 1846, participants inhaled small measures of laughing gas following a reading of Humphry Davy's research on its scientific properties and potential use in anaesthesia. Volunteers breathed 'hard and quickly' from a bladder passed to them, following which they elicited fits of laughter from the audience as they either 'jumped and danced', made 'comical faces' or roared like a 'bear with a sore head'. One participant was also reported to have previously 'attempted to kiss the ladies' following a dosage.⁹⁹ Such conduct would receive disapproving stares outside the context of scientific entertainment, yet the laughter of the audience was a safe yet uneasy guffaw that 'exorcised aberrant behaviour from the collective whole'.¹⁰⁰ These provocative displays were a psychic release of moral inhibitions, and herein lay their social use. Such an example demonstrates how scientific endeavour was not solely the cold pursuit of knowledge, but was also embedded in the entertainment lives of colonists. The seeming irrationality of their laughter reveals how interactions between emotions and the intellect moulded the bourgeois order.

The relation between the rational bourgeois order of the streets and the cultured role of satire's moral probity can be seen in the following quote. Envisioning Cape Town as an extension of Britain's satirical sphere of influence, the *African Journal* joked:

We can laugh at *Punch* at a distance, and think it all very funny – when every face but our own is the subject of merriment: but suppose *Punch* slept in the *Heerengracht*, and the *Parades* only, afforded him objects and topics for his sketches and sallies, where then would be the titter? This then may teach us to have mercy in our smiles, and not suffer a joke to warp or affect our judgements. The greatest proof of the noble feeling, the unbounded good nature, the civilization and refinement, the right understanding, and the high appreciation of genuine wit and humour, is where these pointed and pungent satires are tolerated, nay,

97 Dubow, *Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 44.

98 See, for example, Sammons's editorials and comments on public lectures in phrenology in the colony, in *SSAJ*, 25 September, 2 October and 9 October 1845. For phrenology in the Cape, see A. Bank, 'Of "Native Skulls" and "Noble Caucasians": Phrenology in Colonial South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22(3), 1996, 387-403.

99 'A Friend of Laughter and Gas' to the editor, *SSAJ*, 16 April 1846.

100 E. H. Grayson, 'Social Order and Disorder: Laughing Gas Demonstrations, 1800-1850' in R. G. Thomson, ed, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 109.

rather courted with delight and avidity. Fall into a lower and more contracted sphere, and then see what a miserable reception they meet with. Litigations, personal insults, salt for old sores; and a thousand coarse and perverted feelings arise, the offspring of prejudice, weakness, ignorance, and cant.¹⁰¹

In this passage respectable satire, indicative of ‘civilization and refinement’, is only possible where satire is ‘tolerated’ and not censored. For Sammons, the pinnacle of bourgeois cultural sophistication required far more than attempts at moral and urban reform. Without an appreciation of satire, and the proper use of satire, colonial society would descend into libel suits, ‘personal insults’ and the opposite of desired truthful discourse: ‘cant’.

Satire could inject the town with a sense of moral purpose that need not have ties to a humanitarian or mercantilist prerogative such as in Fairbairn’s *South African Commercial Advertiser*. A reader from Graham’s Town wrote, ‘I wish, Mr. Sly, you was here, and could occasionally administer a sarcastic pill or two’, further hoping that this would remedy the ‘selfishness, spleen, or over business-like habits’ of the town’s inhabitants that threatened their ‘moral duty’ to others.¹⁰² The British character might be distinguished by a mercantile spirit, yet it was the job of the editor, entertainer or satirist to encourage a good-natured laugh to balance out the dullness and extend a cultured hand to enrich bourgeois mercantilist sensibilities. As Sammons was often fond of reminding his readers, there was much truth in the old English proverb that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’.¹⁰³ He was worried that ‘an over-anxiety for gain and accumulation’ was ‘shutting up the soul from finer sympathies’.¹⁰⁴

Such a view of the role of satire was not shared by all, since the boundary between licentious and acceptable satire was often a blurred one. Satire, like the popular novel, could easily offend evangelical middle-class feeling. Many colonists frowned upon the publishing of subjects that did not reflect the Bible’s teachings. For them, there was ‘a tendency in novel-reading to affect and deteriorate the mind’.¹⁰⁵ When Samuel Warren’s novel *Ten Thousand a Year* was printed in Cape Town in 1842 for a colonial reading public, the printer Saul Solomon refused to publish what he saw as an offensive passage in the book. This was omitted and abridged with the following: ‘Mrs. Tag-rag, a showily dressed woman of about fifty, her cap having a prodigious number of artificial flowers in it, sat reading.’ The passage should have continued thus: ‘... sat reading a profitable volume entitled *Groans from the Bottomless Pit to Awaken Sleeping Sinners*, by the Rev. Dismal Horror’. In the novel she was reading, the clergyman proceeds to preach at a funeral of a ‘Miss Snooks’ who kept a circulating library, encouraging his parishioners to terminate their subscriptions to it so that they might not end up ‘ruining their

101 *SSAJ*, 11 Dec. 1845.

102 ‘Peter Tomkins’ to editor, *SSAJ*, 16 October 1845.

103 *SSAJ*, 8 June 1843.

104 *SSAJ*, 8 June 1843.

105 ‘A Well Wisher to the Youth of this Colony’, ‘Open Letter’, *Cape of Good Hope Literary Gazette*, 2, 11 (November 1832), 391. Cited in Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa*, 18.

NOVEL LITERARY
ENTERTAINMENT.

T. P. HILL

RESPECTFULLY announces to the Ladies and
Gentlemen of Cape Town and its vicinity, his
intention of having

“An Evening with some choice Spirits,”
in the Commercial Exchange.

On Monday next,

THE 12TH OF OCTOBER.

Programme :

Part 1.

TOX HOOD,
THE DREAM OF EUGENE ARAM.

SAM LOVER,

A MIGHTY QUEER STORY CONCERNING
PADDY THE PIPER.

Part 2.

A GLANCE AT THE BRITISH SENATE.

SIR ROBERT PEEL AS AN ORATOR,
A ROW IN THE HOUSE.

Scene between the Prime Minister, and the LEADER OF
THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE, described from
personal observation.

LORD LYNDHURST'S celebrated attack upon the IRISH
CHARACTER,—“Aliens in Language! Aliens in Blood!
Aliens in Religion!”

SHEIL'S IMPASSIONED VINDICATION.

Part 3.

Something sprightly from SIR WALTER SCOTT,
THE MANIAC.

To conclude with CHARLES DICKENS' Mirth-exciting
description of a TEMPERANCE MEETING and
Mr. STIGGINS.

[A lapse of 4 minutes between each part.]

Admission, 2s.—Tickets to be had of Mr. ROBERTSON,
Bookseller, Heerenracht; Mr. KRELER, Chemist, do.;
Mr. COLLARD, Stationer, Long-market-street; Mr. FRO-
SHARD, House Agent, do.; and of Mr. ROSE, at the Com-
mercial Exchange.

Doors open at 7, commence at half-past 7 precisely.

MR. CORDER, Professor of Music, has received
per *Sir Edward Ryan*, PIANO FORTES from
W. BRONART & Son, which are for Sale at his residence,
Albion Cottage, Rondebosch.

Figure 4: *Sam Sly's African Journal*, 8
October 1846.

precious souls with light and amusing reading'.¹⁰⁶ The Cape printer of *Ten Thousand a Year* seems to have objected to the Church view that entertaining literature might have an injurious effect on prospects for spiritual redemption. Nevertheless, through the amenable help of a rival printer, the office of the *Zuid-Afrikaan* newspaper, an appendix of the offending passages was printed, demonstrating differing sensibilities around literary censorship in Cape Town.

Nevertheless, as long as satire could prove its moral worth and distance itself from its more daring and provocative forebears, for many it was deemed an important facet of the British character. Satire as a ridiculing of vice out of society was still often conflated in Victorian comic theory with light humour, with the jovial

106 D.H. Varley, *South African Reading in Early Days* (Johannesburg: SABC, 1958), 23-24; Samuel Warren, *Ten Thousand a Year!*: reprinted from *'Blackwood's Magazine'* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon, 1842).

bar-room song or comic poem. The rising Victorian taste in humour emphasised recreation over satire's conventional emphasis on overt social and political critique. Humour was trivialised, whilst the most common form 'did not intend and require judgment, but offered a holiday from judgment'.¹⁰⁷ This was, in short, a move towards favouring laughter for laughter's sake with frivolous songs and light burlesque. As Sammons pointed out about the general feelings of the audience towards the entertainment offered at the opening performance of the Drury Lane Theatre in Cape Town in 1848, 'the comic as usual ... [is] better understood than the tragic, and the song than the sentiment'.¹⁰⁸ There was a tension between 'high' culture with its emphasis on artistic merit and strong evangelical resonances, and the 'low' culture of farce and comedy in popular culture.¹⁰⁹

These tensions, however, were not irreconcilable. One of the most popular nineteenth-century poets and humorists, Thomas Hood, was well loved in Britain and at the Cape.¹¹⁰ Demonstrating their commiseration at the loss of Thomas Hood to illness, respectable members of Cape Town society attended a reading of Hood and others' work by T.P. Hill in the Exchange Rooms in Cape Town. The list of readings on the bill for the evening included Hood's 'The Dream of Eugene Aram', Charles Dickens's 'mirth-exciting description of a Temperance meeting' and Sir Walter Scott's 'The Maniac'.¹¹¹ In his introduction to the readings, Hill claimed that 'true humour necessarily implies a deep sense and faculty of the pathetic' and gave the work of Hood as a prime example.¹¹² Public and private readings of British literature allowed for the sociability of bourgeois colonists combined with a public demonstration of collective investment in British culture.

The following doggerel by 'Proteus' highlights some pertinent themes around satire and literature:

... Nor will I deprecate

Your Editorial censure, sir,
 Your satire's pungent lash; –
 My song, – you may pronounce it fair,
 Or you may swear it's trash.

I shall not crow, I shall not weep,
 Whatever you may think;
 I write because I cannot sleep,
 And have no grog to drink.¹¹³

107 D. Gray, 'The Uses of Victorian Laughter', *Victorian Studies*, 10(2), (1966), 147-8.

108 *SSAJ*, 22 June 1848. Sammons gave frequent commentary on the theatrical life of Cape Town, attending English and Dutch plays alike, offering encouragement through his column in *Sam Sly's African Journal* titled 'Touching Things Theatrical'. Fletcher, *The Story of Theatre in South Africa*, 68-75.

109 Johnson, 'Literary and Cultural Criticism in South Africa'.

110 S. Lodge, *Thomas Hood and Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Work, Play and Politics* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007).

111 *SSAJ*, 22 October 1846.

112 *SSAJ*, 22 October 1846.

113 *SSAJ*, 15 Aug. 1844.

Sammons was indeed critical of his contributors, chiding the quality of the poem by pointing out it was ‘written in too much haste’,¹¹⁴ yet it well illustrates a jocular approach to popular literature, that writing poetry is a cathartic aid against insomnia and akin to drinking alcohol. Attention to ‘good’ literature by notable poets and authors is important, yet it is often more interesting for the historian to examine literature not on its literary merit, but on its reflection of popular attitudes. Within the realm of print culture and the verbal and aural cacophony of leisure spaces, doggerel, ballads and satirical sketches were better indicators of national feeling. ‘Proteus’ wrote freely of ‘grog’ in his poem, because despite evangelical calls for temperance, many colonists felt an attachment between their national identity and the long tradition of drinking culture. If they were careful to distance themselves from public drunkenness and kept to white middle-class drinking establishments, rather than racially mixed canteens that were decried as the seedbeds of criminality, their behaviour could be deemed respectable.¹¹⁵

Satire and the Anti-Convict Agitation

At moments of political crisis, newspapers were utilised to rally support, and satire in turn became more daringly defamatory. In 1848 news reached the Cape that 300 ticket-of-leave convicts, most of them from Ireland, were to arrive in the colonies on the orders of the Secretary for the Colonies, Earl Grey. This was met with vociferous opposition from colonists who, through the formation of an Anti-Convict Association, organised mass meetings and signed petitions to lobby against the move. Fearing that the arrival of convicts would sully the image of the colony with the dreaded ‘convict stain’ that hampered colonial Australia, it was argued that the plan would instil criminality into the white population and, worse still, undermine the racial order by inculcating new forms of criminality in the black labouring classes and on the frontier. As McKenzie has noted, ‘white convicts were a “taxonomical anomaly” in a post-emancipation era in which respectability was increasingly aligned with whiteness’.¹¹⁶ The fear lay in damaging the colony’s image, hampering immigration and the possibilities for representative government.¹¹⁷ With the refusal of Governor Harry Smith to turn the *Neptune* away from Cape shores, the Anti-Convict Association, through the vocal propaganda of John Fairbairn and his *Commercial Advertiser*, decided upon a signed pledge by colonists to boycott supplying the government or military.¹¹⁸ William Sammons, usually reticent to enter into overt political pronouncements, turned to satire to denounce what

114 *SSAJ*, 15 Aug. 1844.

115 This is a complex issue for which there is little space to elaborate on here. Historical work on social attitudes to alcohol has understandably focused on white disapproval of black drunkenness, yet this has created an impression of white colonial sobriety that belies the scope for respectable drinking amongst the middle classes. For racial anxieties over drunkenness, see Ross, *Status and Respectability*, chapter 6; K.D. Elks, ‘Crime, Community and Police in Cape Town 1825-1850’ (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986), 130-169. For an attempt at addressing the complexities of attitudes to white middle-class drinking, see Holdridge, ‘*Sam Sly’s African Journal* and the Role of Satire’, 94-102.

116 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 172.

117 Ross, *Status and Respectability*, 161-2.

118 For the anti-convict movement, see A. Hattersley, *The Convict Crisis and the Growth of Unity: Resistance to Transportation in South Africa and Australia, 1848-1853* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal University Press, 1965); McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 171-179; T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 225-231.

he saw as a betrayal of British values by Fairbairn and his supporters. Fairbairn was labelled as ‘Johnny Foulburn’, ‘Nero’ and ‘Robespierre’,¹¹⁹ with claims that he had curtailed freedom of speech, one of the ‘John Bull requisites’ that he had ironically championed two decades prior during Governor Somerset’s administration.¹²⁰ Sammons’s newspaper became the home for moderate responses that were marginalised by the wide public consensus echoed in the streets and on the pages of most of the Cape press.¹²¹ In one poem, titled ‘Neptune’s Song’, the god of the sea rebukes the editor of the *Advertiser*:

Bad luck Johnny Fleecebairn, you must be an ass,
 Sure soldiers and sailors can’t live upon grass,
 You want to cut off *their* supplies it appears,
 Take care they don’t cut off *your* long pair of ears!¹²²

This was a strongly worded satirical assault on Fairbairn’s character. His patriotism was called into question, and also his allegiance to the tenets of being ‘a freeborn Englishman’. By denouncing Fairbairn’s advocacy of economic boycotts and mass political action as ‘radical outbursts’,¹²³ Sammons made clear his alignment with more conservative politics. He supported a delay in the granting of a constitution and representative government to the Cape, decrying the ‘ultra doctrines’ that threatened a ‘*safe path to Self-Government*’.¹²⁴ This was in tune with the views of Governor Harry Smith, the Secretary to Government, John Montagu, Robert Godlonton in the eastern Cape, as well as the wealthier merchants, such as John Ebdon.¹²⁵ The merchants were smarting from the double effect of a global economic slump following the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the decrease in commerce brought about by the boycott measures of the pledge. The satire of Sammons’s *Journal* railed against Fairbairn as residing in ‘the Dictator’s Chair’ and as a ‘Jacobinical’ leader of an unruly ‘mob’, whose actions were ‘factious and unconstitutional’, ‘inconsistent with every principle of allegiance to the Crown of England’ and threatening to drive colonists to the ‘level of the lowest savages’.¹²⁶

Claims of radicalism by Sammons were hyperbolic, with comparisons with the working-class Chartist movement in Britain reflected perhaps in some protest

119 *The African Journal*, 22 November 1849, 17 January 1850.

120 *SSAJ*, 1 November 1849.

121 Several satirical responses can be found in Sammons’s *Journal*, including a long poem published separately as a pamphlet. (J.S. Nichol, *Lines Written on the Occasion of the Cape Town Anti-Convict Association, Attaining Its Climacteric, by Closing the Shops, Injuring the Community, and Attempting to Starve the Opponents of the Pledge* (Cape Town: William Sammons, 1849)).

122 [William Sammons], ‘Neptune’s Song’, in *SSAJ*, 24 January 1850. The threats of violence in the poem are particularly surprising, especially in the context of Fairbairn having recently been attacked at his home by a disgruntled and unemployed mob of black artisans. Hattersley, *Convict Crisis*, chapter 6. As Keegan notes, they were likely expressing their frustration at the exacerbating effects of the economic boycotts of the pledge on their job prospects. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 229.

123 *SSAJ*, 12 July 1849.

124 *African Journal*, 28 April 1850.

125 John Montagu, as Secretary to Government, spearheaded administrative reforms and road-building through local convict labour in the 1840s, vastly improving infrastructure for the Cape economy, yet his opposition to an immediate Representative Assembly for the Cape severely diminished his popularity. See N. Penn, ‘“Close and Merciful Watchfulness”: John Montagu’s Convict System in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony’, *Cultural and Social History*, 5(4), 2008, 465-480.

126 *African Journal*, 21 Feb 1850.

methods but not in the modest political reforms demanded. These extended to the enfranchisement of propertied men. Fairbairn's prerogatives were still informed by the utilitarian objectives of his mercantilism, seeking a political franchise that would best suit merchant interests.¹²⁷ Satire had remained tamely impersonal in the calm political climate of the 1840s, where personal scurrility would undermine the respectable content desired for a colony on the make, yet faced with a political crisis satire was called upon by both sides to contest and lay claim to the correct expressions of British allegiance.

As with the struggle for a free press and institutions in the 1820s, placards once again appeared in the streets of Cape Town. These were mostly targeted against merchants who had allegedly provided the government or army with supplies and thus broken the pledge, with libellous placards even ordered by the Secretary of the Anti-Convict Association John Saunders. One, in particular, showed the merchant Benjamin Norden suspended from a hangman's noose at the gallows, the words 'traitor's doom' scrawled beneath.¹²⁸ The protest at play here is obviously a more complex phenomenon to analyse, but it operated both to intimidate potential transgressors and to place satirical messages about British patriotism into mutterings of the public sphere of the streets.

In this fraught political climate, Sammons's paper suffered, with a decline in readership and contributors. Having fallen ill, he eventually ceased publication in September 1851.¹²⁹ It is testament to the popular efforts of John Fairbairn in deterring convicts, and in further achieving the Cape Constitution of 1853, that a liberal narrative has survived of orderly uniformity of opinion during the anti-convict agitation and of liberal benevolence at the racial inclusivity of the Cape franchise.¹³⁰ Although there was tremendous support for Fairbairn, the discursive terrain of political crisis led to satire uncharacteristically vitriolic for a colony that usually prized propriety and understatement. Sammons had thrived under a consensus of middle-class values in satire, yet his standing soured as he challenged the perceived radicalism of anti-convict measures.

Conclusion

Satire was an important rhetorical component in contesting and preserving the scope of white colonial interests, as well as advancing British national feeling and cultural norms within the Cape Colony. It was viewed by colonists as a component of the cultural politics of developing a thriving leisure scene and print culture to dismiss metropolitan disdain. Satire's social function has most commonly been seen by historians as a subversive response within histories 'from below'. Yet *Sam*

127 This utilitarian outlook had even informed his liberal advocacy of slave abolition in the 1830s with freedom of labour seen as more economically productive. More concern was expressed by Fairbairn towards slave compensation to farmers than to the ideals of slave freedom. See L. Meltzer, 'Emancipation, Commerce and the Role of John Fairbairn's *Advertiser*'.

128 Hattersley, *Convict Crisis*, 60-61.

129 Hattersley, 'Friend of George Cruikshank', 99-100.

130 The racial inclusivity of colonial enfranchisement is too complex an issue for extensive discussion here, but has most convincingly been seen as a response that still preserved the desired 'white consensus' of British and Dutch colonists who saw the mutual benefit of maintaining white hegemony over black labour. The low property requirement of £25 allowed poorer whites to vote, whilst the number of enfranchised black colonists was negligible. Bank, 'Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism', 375-377.

Sly's African Journal demonstrates its manoeuvrability within the bourgeois sensibilities of white colonists to uphold the established order.

In 1882, a full three decades after his retirement from journalism, Sammons's death was met by a full-page illustration in the *Lantern* by the caricaturist W.H. Schröder, with the words 'Father of South African Journalism' printed below.¹³¹ This was a noticeable snub of John Fairbairn, the doyen of the free press in the Cape for his efforts in the face of Governor Somerset's censorship of his *South African Commercial Advertiser* in the 1820s. Schröder's homage to Sammons speaks of the importance placed on the birth of a strong satirical voice in colonial South Africa, his cartoons in the *Lantern* and other newspapers being some of the earliest examples of visual political satires.¹³²

A fuller history of satire has yet to be written and contextualised within the polemical exchanges of colonial South Africa. As an early example, William Sammons's approach, despite its candid avowal of the remedial effect of satire, avoided politically personal satires except during the anti-convict agitation. He was aware of colonists' heightened concern against scurrilous publications and the resulting metropolitan condescension it might attract, as steps grew closer in the 1840s towards the granting of representative government. *Sam Sly's African Journal* is the earliest example of a satirical publication in the Cape Colony that successfully reconciled bourgeois moral sensibilities with the radical origins of satire's aim of corrective ridicule. Satire avoided sexual or scatological content in the shift from Georgian to Victorian values in Britain, and this was gradually reflected in Cape print culture. Sammons's journal could appeal to the cultural capital invested in the role of 'showman', yet imbue this with readers' equal concern to ensure restrained satire for a 'family paper'.¹³³

Sammons successfully used his role as satirist to tap into the cultural politics of bourgeois sensibilities in the Cape, championing the growth of reading and leisurely sophistication whilst also appealing for the place of satire as a patriotic expression of British identity. Satire provided more than entertainment. It facilitated a means for white colonists to express their hegemony through laughter that encouraged 'strong fellow feeling amongst participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders'.¹³⁴ Whether these 'outsiders' were racial others or white colonists seen to deviate from the respectable conduct of bourgeois status, satire remained a useful vehicle for consolidating the collective ethos of a colonial society on the make. However, when faced with the intensified rhetoric of the anti-convict agitation, Sammons's alignment of satire with conservative British loyalism to criticise popular protest lost him popular support and led to the demise of *Sam Sly's African Journal*.

131 *Lantern*, 9 September 1882.

132 For Schröder's career and examples of his political cartoons, see L. Weinthal, ed. *The Schröder Art Memento. A Volume of Pictorial Satire Depicting Our Politics and Men for the Last 30 Years* (Pretoria: The Press Printing and Publishing Works, 1894).

133 *SSAJ*, Publishing Notice, 1 June 1843.

134 C. Lorentz quoted in J. Lowe, 'Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing', *American Quarterly*, 38(3), 1986, 440.