

John Bull and the American Revolution: The Transatlantic Afterlives of Arbuthnot's Character

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Abstract How did the character John Bull come to be so widely recognized as a stand-in for the British government or people? John Arbuthnot created the character in 1712 in a series of five pamphlets criticizing the British role in the War of the Spanish Succession, and for fifty years the character was mentioned only in references to Arbuthnot. In the late eighteenth century, John Bull began to appear in newspaper articles relating to other political contexts, eventually appearing in satires on all manner of British policies and characteristics, from taxes and the economy to xenophobia and imperialism. This essay argues that the American colonists adapted the character to their own purposes. This analysis contributes to the understanding of the content, political engagement, and spread of the press in eighteenth-century Britain and America. It also reveals one way that writers about British national identity and its symbolism accounted for an increasingly diverse global empire that could not be represented adequately by a single figurehead.

The character John Bull is widely recognized as a stand-in for the British government or people in political cartoons and satire. Originally created in 1712 by John Arbuthnot in a series of five pamphlets criticizing the British role in the War of the Spanish Succession, for fifty years the character was mentioned only in references to its original context. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, John Bull began to appear in British newspaper articles relating to other political situations, eventually including satires on all manner of British policies and characteristics, from taxes and the economy to xenophobia and imperialism. How did John Bull come to be so widely used outside of his original context? Scholars have analyzed John Bull both in Arbuthnot's pamphlets and in the nineteenth century, but no one has explained how the character became so widely dispersed for different satirical aims. Tamara L. Hunt, surveying late eighteenth-century political cartoons, rightly comments that by the end of the century "John Bull, Britannia, and the British lion were common symbols of British nationalism, and often represented Britain or the British people."¹ Such was not always the case, however, and the means by which John Bull came to be so familiar reveal how satirists on both sides of the Atlantic responded to the crises of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

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¹ Tamara L. Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Burlington, 2003), 12.

This essay traces the history of the usage of John Bull from Arbuthnot's original pamphlets to later reappropriations of the character. I find that a key turning point in the history of John Bull occurred in American periodicals in the 1760s, which first used the character widely for a new political context beyond Arbuthnot's lifetime. British satires employing Bull in the 1760s and 1770s were a response to attacks on Britain in American periodicals and pamphlets. Bad feeling about the war for American independence inspired negative versions of John Bull on both sides, and led to the more nuanced and versatile character that would later become ubiquitous. Miles Taylor has argued, "Later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century versions of John Bull remained remarkably faithful to this 'vulgar' radical predecessor of the 1760s," but I shall argue that this oversimplifies a complex reshaping of a national character during a period of intense turmoil.² Taylor and Hunt both focus on the figure of John Bull from the 1790s onward. This essay explores the intervening period from the 1760s to the 1790s to chart how exactly Bull came to be extrapolated from his original context and put to such a wide range of satirical ends. By focusing on the reworkings of Arbuthnot's verbal John Bull, this essay complements studies of visual satire and caricature.³ We cannot know whether or not John Bull would have survived his original context if the American periodicalists had not made such extensive use of him, but the surviving evidence shows that their appropriation of the character was key to the disassociating of Bull from Arbuthnot and the original pamphlets.

Beyond the specific history of John Bull as a symbol of national character, this analysis reveals the sometimes fraught network of exchange between the British and American press in the eighteenth century as papers on both sides of the Atlantic borrowed from each other. Recent work by Jeffrey L. Pasley and William B. Warner shows that the anglophone press greatly expanded between 1760 and 1780, and that many colonial newspapers were highly partisan, borrowing materials from each other and from British newspapers.⁴ Despite their importance in shaping national opinion, newspapers were often irregular in their reporting and given to speculation and editorializing, particularly because news took months to travel across the Atlantic.⁵ Thus, in tracing the ways that both sides of the conflict employed John Bull as a site for discussing the war, this essay reveals both the

² Miles Taylor, "John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England, c. 1712–1929," *Past and Present* 134, no. 1 (February 1992): 93–128, at 104.

³ This is the focus of Hunt, *Defining John Bull* and is also covered at length in Taylor, "John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England, c. 1712–1929," as well as Alexandra Franklin, "John Bull in a Dream: Fear and Fantasy in the Visual Satires of 1803," in *Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion, 1797–1815*, ed. Mark Philp (Aldershot, 2006), 125–40. On the visual Bull in the 1760s, see Winifred Morgan, *An American Icon: Brother Jonathan and American Identity* (Newark, DE, 1988), 68; Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, GA, 1990), 301–7.

⁴ Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, 2001), 33–40; William B. Warner, "Communicating Liberty: The Newspapers of the British Empire as a Matrix for the American Revolution," *ELH* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 339–61. On the growth of papers and their partisanship in the early republic, see Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (Oxford, 2009), esp. 9–13.

⁵ See Nicholas Rogers, "From Vernon to Wolfe: Empire and Identity in the British Atlantic World of the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in *The Culture of the Seven Years' War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, ed. Frans de Bruyn and Shaun Regan (Toronto, 2014), 25–52, at 27–29.

interplay between American and British papers and the ways that they filled their pages with news-like items that commented on current events rather than reporting them directly. Richard D. Brown argues that for many colonists, newspapers were less significant in distributing news than letters and personal conversations were, so such editorializing content as the various John Bull satires could be seen as indicative of the newspaper's role as entertainment.⁶ The figure of John Bull can thus serve as a barometer for changing views of the British nation. Bull's character changed over time to adapt to new political and historical events, but also because writers adopted a range of attitudes towards the British government, from sympathy to ridicule to condemnation.

THE ENGLISH BACKGROUND: ARBUTHNOT'S JOHN BULL AND ITS AFTERLIFE, 1712–1764

John Bull first appeared in five pamphlets from 1712, all by Arbuthnot: *Law is a Bottomless-Pit*, *John Bull in His Senses*, *John Bull Still in His Senses*, *An Appendix to John Bull Still in His Senses*, and *Lewis Baboon Turned Honest, and John Bull Politician*.⁷ The first pamphlet was an immediate success when it was published: Britain was in the midst of controversial peace negotiations in Utrecht with France, Spain, Portugal, and the Dutch Republic, attempting to end nearly a decade of war in Europe. The five original *John Bull* pamphlets describe a lawsuit between John Bull and Lewis Baboon as an allegory for the war between Britain and France. There were plenty of other satires on the war and politics in the period 1710 to 1713, but John Bull had greater lasting appeal than most.⁸ From 1712 to 1764, John Bull never appeared without the characterization, plot, and allegorical aims of Arbuthnot's pamphlets.

The pamphlets use a standard allegorical technique where characters and actions correspond directly to real people and current events.⁹ In the first pamphlet, John Bull and Nicholas Frog sue Lewis Baboon over who had the right to supply the deceased Lord Strutt's estate with trade. John Bull finds out that his wife was unfaithful, but when she dies he marries again. Part two takes up where the first left off: John finds out more details about his first wife's affairs, Nicholas warns Lewis not to treat with John, and the guardians of John's three daughters from his first marriage ask him to desist in the lawsuit. The third part describes several events outside the

⁶ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (Oxford, 1989), 115 and 127–28.

⁷ All five pamphlets were originally printed in London, 1712.

⁸ For example, see *The History Of Prince Mirabel's Infancy, Rise and Disgrace* (London, 1712); *The History Of The Proceedings Of The Mandarins and Proatins Of The Britomartian Empire*, 2nd ed. (London, 1713); *A New Voyage To The Island of Fools, Representing the Policy, Government, And Present State Of The Stultitians* (London, 1713); *The Impartial Secret History of Arlus, Fortunatus, and Odolphus, Ministers of State To The Empress of Grand-Insula* (London, 1710); *The Testimonies Of several Citizens of Fickleborough, In the Kingdom of Fairy-Land* (London, 1713); and *The Present State Of Fairy-Land* (London, 1713).

⁹ Although originally published anonymously, they were attributed to Arbuthnot in his lifetime by both Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope in personal correspondence. See John Arbuthnot, *The History of John Bull*, ed. Alan W. Bower and Robert A. Erickson (Oxford, 1976), xxii–xxiii. All citations to the Arbuthnot pamphlets come from this edition.

lawsuit, including friction between John's mother and his sister Peg, his reconciliation with Peg, and hostility with Nicholas. The "appendix" to part 3 (the fourth pamphlet published) fills in a digression about a man who was accused of poisoning and tricked into hanging himself. In the final pamphlet, John and Nicholas settle accounts, Lewis apologizes and agrees to return Ecclesdown Castle to John and his family, and John ends up happy. While some events are out of order, the whole is held together by the progression of the lawsuit from the initial conflict, to stalemate, and finally to resolution.¹⁰ The characters correlate to real-life people or groups: John Bull represents the English people, Lewis Baboon stands in for Louis XIV of France, Nicholas Frog signifies the Dutch people, Bull's wives are the Godolphin and Harley ministries, his mother is the Church of England, and his sister the Scottish people.

This use of character is the most striking and memorable part of the John Bull pamphlets. Arbuthnot's modern editors comment that although his "sense of national character took shape out of a matrix of seventeenth-century xenophobia ... John Bull is, above all, a party figure created in response to the political warfare between Whigs and Tories."¹¹ The original Bull has a grounding in the specific politics of 1712 and primarily reflects on the most important issue at that time: relations with Europe, especially France. The concept of national character relies on the assumption that there are certain characteristics that define the people of a country (and exclude people from other countries), though the personification of John Bull and the other characters in Arbuthnot's pamphlets are much more specific individuals than generic national symbols.¹² Peter Mandler points out that "To take the social elite as the whole of the people had been common in the eighteenth century," and that this is the assumption that "lay behind the character of John Bull, originally a squire."¹³ Bull is neither typical nor common, nor is he ideal, but he is symbolic of the nation and recognizable.

The portrayal of John Bull in Arbuthnot's pamphlet is not particularly flattering, as it presents him as a well-meaning squire with several bad tendencies. The "true Character" of Bull from *Law is a Bottomless-Pit* is worth quoting at length because of its influence on later iterations:

Bull, in the main, was an honest plain-dealing Fellow, Cholerick, Bold, and of a very unconstant Temper, he dreaded not Old *Lewis* either at Back-Sword, single Faulcion, or Cudgel-play; but then he was very apt to quarrel with his best Friends, especially if they pretended to govern him: If you flatter'd him, you might lead him like a Child. *John's* Temper depended very much upon the Air; his Spirits rose and fell with the Weather-glass. *John* was quick, and understood his business very well, but no Man alive was more careless, in looking into his Accounts, or more cheated by Partners,

¹⁰ Part three refers to English-Scottish relations more generally in the first decade of the eighteenth century. See Sharon Alker, "John Arbuthnot's Family Ties: Anglo-Scottish Relations in the John Bull Pamphlets," *Scottish Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 2008): 1–20.

¹¹ Bower and Erikson, introduction to *The History of John Bull*, lxix.

¹² On the psychology of national character, see Robert J. Smith, "In Defense of National Character," *Theory and Psychology* 18, no. 4 (August 2008): 465–82; Maurice L. Farber, "English and Americans: A Study in National Character," *Journal of Psychology* 32, no. 2 (July 1951): 241–49.

¹³ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), 138.

Apprentices, and Servants: This was occasioned by his being a Boon-Companion, loving his Bottle and his Diversion; for to say Truth, no Man kept a better House than *John*, nor spent his Money more generously.¹⁴

This characterization is supported by Bull's behavior in the pamphlets. Repeatedly, his allies and members of his family ask him for money or cheat him out of it. When he hears that his sister Peg's servants and family are eating all his food, he reacts with violence: "Instead of regulating this Matter as it ought to be, *Peg's* young Men were thrust away from the Table; then there was the Devil and all to do, Spoons, Plates and Dishes, flew about the Room like mad."¹⁵ Arbuthnot's John Bull is not dull-witted or blundering, but rather a plainspoken and well-meaning businessman whose greatest faults are his over-trust of other people and his tendency to become angry quickly and overreact, often with brutality.

Modern scholars have focused on Arbuthnot's successful pamphlets for their criticism of the political circumstances surrounding the War of the Spanish Succession and relations between England and Scotland.¹⁶ They have disagreed as to whether the satire is complex or overly simplistic, and whether the fable-like tone of the allegory is deceptive.¹⁷ Bull is neither a hero nor a figure of ridicule, and the other characters could be either targets or agents of satire. This lack of specific direction is perhaps one reason Arbuthnot is frequently left out of scholarly studies of satire that include his contemporaries Swift, Pope, and Gay.¹⁸ However they might be viewed now, Arbuthnot's pamphlets were widely read and outlasted the events to which they originally referred. *Law is a Bottomless-Pit* was printed nine times in 1712, and the sequel was equally successful. In addition to Arbuthnot's sequels, John Bull featured in a number of other political pamphlets imitating the allegorical style of the first, such as *John Bull's Last Will and Testament* (in which he declares allegiance to "Jacobitism and Infatuation" and leaves all his property to Lewis Baboon).¹⁹ The pamphlets were strung together into a continuous narrative and reprinted in the

¹⁴ Arbuthnot, *The History of John Bull*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶ For classic takes, see George Atherton Aitken, *The Life and Works of John Arbuthnot, M. D.* (Oxford, 1892), 45; Bonamy Dobrée, *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1700–1740* (Oxford, 1959), 97.

¹⁷ For arguments of complexity, see P. J. Köster, "Arbuthnot's Use of Quotation and Parody in His Account of the Sacheverell Affair," *Philological Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (April 1969): 201–11, at 211, and Angus Ross, s.v., "Arbuthnot, John (bap. 1667, d. 1735)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101000610/John-Arbuthnot>, accessed July 2016. For a reading of its simplicity, see Charles A. Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge, 2004), 62–63.

¹⁸ Arbuthnot does not appear in John Sitter, *Arguments of Augustan Wit* (Cambridge, 1991); Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca, 2001); or Melinda Alliker Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy in English Literature from 1650 to 1750* (New York, 2007), and he is mentioned only in footnotes and a single quotation in the text of Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment, 1660–1830* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁹ *John Bull's Last Will and Testament, As it was Drawn by a Welch Attorney* (London, 1713), 16. A later example of a spurious addition is *The History of John Bull, Part III* (London, 1744), which carries the satire forward to comment on events in the period 1714–27.

first volume of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* in 1728 and other collections, keeping them in circulation many years after the Treaty of Utrecht was completed.²⁰

When John Bull reappeared in other satires and political works, they always referred to Arbuthnot's characterization of Bull. The earliest reference to Bull, in an anti-Jacobite pamphlet of 1712, is also fairly typical:

But this, and more than this, we dare
 Hope for from thy successful Care,
 That hast *John Bull's* Affairs restor'd,
 Made easy now, at Bed and Board,
 And trick'd *Nic Frog*, and Lawyer *Hocus*,
 When they in one Term more had broke us.²¹

The role of Bull as a plaintiff in a lawsuit is taken directly from Arbuthnot and he represents the British government, just as in *Law is a Bottomless-Pit*. Other references to Arbuthnot are more direct, not trying to use the character in any new way. Such is the case with *The Humourist*, where “The *Roman Grumbletonians* vented their Spleen in the same mysterious Manner; and in our Country, *Hudibras*, *Atalantis*, and *John Bull*, are Instances that are not inferior to the Ancients in this Respect.”²² The comparison of *John Bull* with *Hudibras* and *Atalantis* marks the pamphlet series as a highly topical satire, not easily applied to other contexts.

None of the new uses of John Bull prior to 1765 is very ambitious.²³ One letter by Aaron Hill to the poet David Mallet comments of the Duke of Marlborough that “He had that necessary knowledge of John Bull's true temper, that he never thought of cool encampments, and long yawning times, for heads, so naturally made for pushing.”²⁴ John Bull stands for the English character more broadly, especially the common sort of people who formed the bulk of the army. By describing them as “made for pushing,” Hill used Arbuthnot's characterization of the English as impatient, but applied it more widely and to a new group (the army). Another example of John Bull continued Arbuthnot's work, describing “How, about a Year

²⁰ Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Dublin, 1728); *Miscellanies, Containing The History of John Bull* (Dublin, 1746); and *The History of John Bull and Poems on several Occasions* (London, [c. 1750]).

²¹ *The History Of The Jacobite Clubs* (London, 1712), 12. For other examples of similar references, see *Britons strike home. The Absolute Necessity Of Impeaching Somebody* (London, 1715), 5, and *The Windsor Medley* (London, 1731), 36.

²² *The Humourist: Being Essays Upon Several Subjects*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1735), 2:99. For other examples of similar references to *John Bull* as an “allegory” or “invective,” see *Observations On The Report Of The Committee of Secrecy* (London, 1715), 14; *A Key To The Lock* (London, 1715), 7; *A Compleat Collection Of all the Verses, Essays, Letters and Advertisements, Which Have been occasioned by the Publication of Three Volumes of Miscellanies, by Pope and Company* (London, 1728), 4; and *An Essay On Ridicule* (London, 1753), 35.

²³ To arrive at this conclusion, I performed key-word searches of Eighteenth Century Collections Online, the Burney Papers from the British Library, the Evans Early American Imprints Series 1, and the Early American Newspapers databases, then examined each instance of “John Bull.” Most examples prior to 1760 are actually real people who happen to have that name.

²⁴ Aaron Hill, *The Works Of The Late Aaron Hill, Esq.*, 4 vols. (London, 1753), 2:338. The letter is dated 28 July 1748.

after the Commencement of the Law-Suit between *John Bull* and young *Lewis Baboon*, *John* being put to such a Pinch to raise Money to carry on the Suit, had turn'd off his Steward *Jack Headlong*, to please his Tenants, and took in his Room *Hall Stiff*, who, being unable of himself to answer all *John Bull's* Expectations, took the family of the *Broad-bottoms* to his Assistance."²⁵ "Broad-bottom" indicated Henry Pelham and his ministers who gained power in 1743, so John Bull represents the British government, which was attempting to raise money to keep up its war with France. "Jack Headlong" represents Robert Walpole, who had resigned as Prime Minister in 1742, and "Hall Stiff" is probably Walpole's successor, the elderly Spencer Compton.²⁶ John Bull thus features in a new context, namely the political upheaval during the War of the Austrian Succession, but the character and type of allegory remain the same as in Arbuthnot's creation. Bull is still a successful tradesman and estate owner at the center of a lawsuit and beset on all sides by incompetent attendants and demanding dependents. One other new work extended the story about Bull's sister Peg from *John Bull Still in His Senses*, the third pamphlet, to detail English-Scottish relations in the 1750s.²⁷ Similar to his character in the Arbuthnot pamphlets, John Bull is "really at bottom a good-natured fellow."²⁸ The conflict between him and Peg is caused by her inability to take care of her own house and Lewis Baboon's meddling and aggravation, not any fault in Bull's character—much like the original lawsuit. While the events allegorized in *Sister Peg* occurred in the 1750s, the characters and the type of conflict are drawn straight from *John Bull Still in His Senses*.

From 1712 to 1764, then, John Bull stayed much the same. Easily angered and plainspoken, he was presented as Arbuthnot originally created him, and used in much the same way to criticize the same targets. All but two of the references to Bull explicitly mention the incidents in the five original pamphlets. Although the John Bull pamphlets enjoyed unusual success for ephemeral satire, they were never treated as anything other than topical political allegory. For the first fifty years after John Bull's creation, he remained no more than a clever portrayal of attitudes held by the English people at the end of the reign of Queen Anne.

JOHN BULL AND THE STAMP ACT, 1765–1773

From 1765, colonial American newspapers started to employ Bull to discuss their own increasingly fraught relationship with the British government, frequently portraying him as the head of a family with several children. By the end of the decade, British newspapers also featured Bull in reference to other issues, including worry about the growing lower class. Taylor has explained the sudden reappearance of John Bull by

²⁵ *An Address of Thanks To The Broad-Bottoms, For The Good Things they have done, And The Evil Things they have not done, Since their Elevation* (London, 1745), 12.

²⁶ On the broad-bottom ministry, see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 194–97.

²⁷ *The History of the Proceedings in the Case Of Margaret, Commonly called Peg, only Lawful Sister to John Bull* (London, 1761). Although generally ascribed to Adam Ferguson, David R. Raynor argues convincingly for David Hume's authorship. *Sister Peg: A Pamphlet Hitherto Unknown by David Hume*, ed. David Raynor (Cambridge, 1982), 3–10.

²⁸ *History of the Proceedings in the Case Of Margaret*, 5.

focusing on the political climate in Britain at the end of the Seven Years' War: although the British had won the war in North America as early as 1760, continued fighting elsewhere postponed the coming of peace and left the American colonists in limbo.²⁹ Certainly, the treaty negotiations and political tensions in the period 1761–63 have much in common with 1710–13, and the re-use of a popular satirical figure in a parallel circumstance makes sense. Bull's significance is not that he was resurrected during a time of political tension, but that satirists in the 1760s used him for entirely new targets and satirical aims, changing the character to suit their own purposes.

Historians generally view the Stamp Act of 1765 as the crucial piece of legislation that first incited outright rebellion amongst at least a small group of American colonists.³⁰ Needing money after the expensive Seven Years' War, Parliament passed 5 George III, c. 12 to levy taxes on the paper produced for a variety of purposes, including playing cards, almanacs, deeds, and, most controversially, newspapers. It was extremely unpopular, especially among the printers who controlled the press, although it was still less stringent than the tax being paid in Britain.³¹ The bill was repealed in February 1766, but not before Parliament issued the Declaratory Act asserting its right to levy taxes on the colonies.³² Jon Butler makes the convincing case that colonists in America began creating an identity and society distinct from their British counterparts as early as the mid-seventeenth century, and that the Stamp Act was simply the crisis point of a long history of gradual separation.³³

By 1765, newspapers had proliferated across the colonies, concentrating especially in the Northeast urban centers where there was most dissent and the most critical views were articulated of the British government's actions towards the American colonies.³⁴ G. Thomas Tanselle analyzes surviving works with American imprints (not just newspapers) to demonstrate that in the period 1764–1783 some 83 percent are from the colonies of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and 55 percent from just three cities: Philadelphia, Boston, and New York.³⁵ This meant that criticism begun in northern cities was spread

²⁹ Taylor, "John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England," 102. For a detailed account, see Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000), 400–502.

³⁰ See Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 234–35, and Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 664–87. For standard accounts of the Stamp Act's influence, see Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1953); Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Coming of the Revolution, 1763–1775* (New York, 1954).

³¹ The stamp tax in effect in Britain, 30 George II, c. 19, charged three halfpence for a newspaper of one sheet (4 pages), while the tax presented to the colonists charged just one penny for a newspaper. See Jeffery A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism* (Oxford, 1988), 136–38 and Fredrick Seaton Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476–1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Controls* (Urbana, 1952), 320–21.

³² 6 George III, c. 12. Subtitled "An Act for the better securing the dependency of his Majesty's dominions in America upon the crown and parliament of Great Britain."

³³ Butler, *Becoming America*, 1–7 and 230–35.

³⁴ The first newspaper was *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*. On the earliest American newspapers and the British papers that they imitated, see Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665–1740* (New York, 1994). See also Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, A History: 1690–1960*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1962).

³⁵ G. Thomas Tanselle, "Some Statistics on American Printing, 1764–1783," in *The Press and the American Revolution*, ed. by Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Boston, 1981), 315–63, at 332 and 337.

through the colonies by newspapers favoring the Patriot cause. Pasley shows that in the period 1760–1776 “the newspaper press was expanding nearly twice as fast as the population” and that “the number of newspapers shot up during each individual crisis.”³⁶ Many papers stayed out of the Stamp Act controversy or offered passive resistance, either paying for stamped paper, temporarily stopping production, or altering the format to a pamphlet.³⁷ The newspapers carried more than just news, including opinion pieces, satire, and literary works, though during times of conflict political and war news took precedence.³⁸ News originating in the northeastern cities was reprinted rapidly throughout the colonies, often with additional editorializing and satirical content designed to agitate readers.

The earliest examples of John Bull in America appeared in Patriot newspapers and show him as absent or careless, not necessarily bad. The *Newport Mercury* printed a short piece that imagines Bull as having a horse named Public: “Public won several very great matches against Lewis Baboon, Esqr’s. best cattle, and never was beat, when fairly and honestly rode. Public won the great Sweepstakes over Culloden moor, April 16, 1746 ... but this was won, in a great measure, by the resolution and skill of Will Royal, who rode him, as Public was almost run off his legs, and had been beat a little before in two matches, wholly owing to the want of judgment in his riders.”³⁹ Here Bull is not in control of Public, but that is the fault of the people he put in charge of the horse. “Will Royal” is still forceful, but perhaps not taking enough responsibility. Notably, the specific reference to a historical event, the Battle of Culloden, was a victory of British crown forces over Jacobite rebels that took place nearly twenty years before this comment was published. This brief allegory may be showing Bull as out of control, but it is careful not to refer to current events. A second, similar portrayal of Bull as dangerously naive about his own affairs appeared around the same time in the radical William Bradford’s *Pennsylvania Journal* and more explicitly criticizes the Stamp Act. This presents a fake obituary of “Lady N–th A—an Liberty” who “The 7th of February 1765, died of a cruel Stamp on her Vitals.”⁴⁰ Her father, John Bull, the obituary continues, “gave her in Dower, a certain Tract of uncultivated Land, which she called after her name N–th A—ca.” In both cases, the implied criticism of Bull is not in the actions he has taken, but in his absence from concerns that should involve him more directly and his reliance on others to govern his own affairs (his horse or his daughter).

One of the most interesting instances of Bull from the 1760s is a short piece in William Goddard’s radical *Pennsylvania Chronicle* attributed to Benjamin Franklin, which goes so far as to threaten Bull about the consequences of stirring dissent among the colonists. Franklin begins by complaining of Bull’s greed and gluttony: “John Bull shews in nothing more his great veneration for good eating, and how much he is always thinking of his belly, than in his making it the constant topic of

³⁶ Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, 33. See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776* (New York, 1958), esp. chapters 4 and 5.

³⁷ Mott, *American Journalism*, 74; Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 188.

³⁸ See David A. Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* (Newark, DE, 1997).

³⁹ *Newport Mercury*, 29 July 1765, 3.

⁴⁰ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 12 September 1765, 1.

his contempt for other nations, that *they do not eat so well as himself*.”⁴¹ This echoes Arbuthnot’s Bull as a “Boon-Companion” who spent money freely on his household expenses. Franklin, however, makes his criticism more relevant to current events by asking, “when your enemies are uniting in a *Family Compact* against you, can it be discreet in you to kick up in your own house a *Family Quarrel*?” The “house” in this case represents Britain and its holdings beyond England, including Scotland, Ireland, and America. Franklin blames Britain for the disgruntlement among the colonies, using the phrase “kick up” to indicate that there would be peace if Britain would refrain from provocative legislation. He answers his own question: “It is my opinion, Master Bull, that the Scotch and Irish, as well as the colonists, are capable of speaking much *plainer English* than they have ever yet spoke, but which I hope they will never be provoked to speak.” This veiled threat implies that if provoked, the Scotch, Irish, and Americans will rise up against Bull (England) and revolt in “*plainer English*”—that is, by force. Franklin’s John Bull is dangerously selfish and out of touch with the needs and abilities of his “family.”

Even while anti-British American papers were using John Bull to discuss their own situation, British newspapers continued to employ Bull either in direct reference to Arbuthnot’s character or to refer to relations with Scotland. British papers did print news about America, though mostly only after the Stamp Act controversy, and the satire using John Bull tended to be more careful of political concerns.⁴² British allusions to Bull are mostly nonspecific. One reference that devotes some attention to the character of Bull is a supposed letter “from the Principal Steward of John Bull, Esq; to the Chief Agent of Sir Lewis Baboon,” which asks Lewis to pay a debt owed for housing Bull’s men.⁴³ The letter expresses particular indignation that “After ’Squire John had won from him by fair play, a large estate, and had it even in his possession, he gave back again the lest part of it to your Master Baboon, particularly the two sugar-houses, and kept to himself little more than a piece of waste ground, where he might divert himself with catching rabbits.” This allegorical comment clearly refers to the exchange of lands in Treaty of Paris (1763), in which Britain returned France’s Caribbean colonies (Guadeloupe and Martinique) and kept instead the part of France’s holdings in North America that stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi. The scornful mention of “a piece of waste ground” highlights the irritation at the government’s decision to keep New France instead of the Caribbean islands. Most other British examples of John Bull reflect Arbuthnot’s characterization of him as “plain-dealing” yet of an “unconstant Temper.” A 1767 letter to the printer signed “John Bull” expresses a xenophobia that becomes part of his generalized character in the later eighteenth century, commenting that while the British should tolerate “French and other Protestants to settle amongst us,” they should “not be encouraged more than our own

⁴¹ “Dr. Franklin’s Pieces in Behalf of North-America,” *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, 23–26 March 1767, 33. Also in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 13 (New Haven, 1954–present), online ed., 44.

⁴² On British papers printing news about America, see Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695–1855* (Harlow, 2000), 156–60; Fred Junkin Hinkhouse, *The Preliminaries of the American Revolution as Seen in the English Press 1763–1775* (New York, 1926), esp. chap. 3.

⁴³ *London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*, 2–5 February 1765, 7.

Natives.”⁴⁴ More critical articles emphasize how John Bull was so trusting as to be easily deluded: a 1771 piece on relations with Spain relates that “a certain foreigner, by means of his agents, has made a very great sum lately by Alley dealings; and should such be the real case, poor simple John Bull, if suffered to recover damages, may be paid with his own money.”⁴⁵ These allusions do little to alter the characterization of Bull from Arbuthnot’s original satire.

By far the most important portrayal of John Bull in the British press in the period 1765–1773 is a continuation of the original pamphlets containing an account of John Bull’s children, first published in 1766.⁴⁶ In this brief continuation, John Bull has nine bastard children: Jacky, Yorky, Jerry, Penelope, Mary, Virgy, Caroline, and later Georgy and Peg. On account of their being bastards, “John disowned them, and left them to get over the childrens disorders the best way they could, without paying a farthing for nurses, or apothecary’s bills,” though once they grew up “John claimed them for his own.” Young Lewis Baboon falls in love with Virgy, and when “he came behind with intent to ravish her ... John called for his stick and his barge, and crossed the pond to save his daughter’s virtue.” He appoints Fair George as a steward for them, but “Fair George took an antipathy to John’s children, because he said they put nothing into the box at Christmas.” He advises John to have them “stampt,” but John only ends up burning himself. At last, however John “became beloved of his children, and respected by his neighbours.” Further events are promised in a fuller printed version.

This satire is clearly an allegory of Britain’s relations with the American colonies through the Seven Years’ War and the Stamp Act controversy, and except for the happy ending, it is seriously hostile to the actions of the British government. John’s bastard children are the American colonies, and his absenteeism parallels the lack of support given to colonists in the seventeenth century. Young Lewis Baboon’s lust for Virgy parallels New France’s encroachments on the western part of Virginia, resulting in war. Few people could object to this portrayal of past events, but the satire’s depiction of John Bull’s actions after fighting ceased is highly critical: Bull’s attempt to force his children to give money to the Christmas box corresponds to British efforts to tax American colonists. The metaphor of the Christmas box implies voluntary rather than compulsory contributions, making clear that the writer of this satire does not see the colonies as obligated to pay taxes to the British crown. The “stamp” Bull tries to affix to the offending children is presented solely as a penal measure meant to enforce his power over them. Although this satire first appeared in a British newspaper (and was subsequently reprinted in the *Newport Mercury*), it takes a decidedly unfriendly view of the British government’s conduct towards the colonies, especially after the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763. This John Bull is significant also because of its depiction of him as a bad father whose actions stir up family quarrels: he is shown here to be cruel rather than “plain-dealing” and angry rather than “bold.” Jay Fliegelman points

⁴⁴ *Public Advertiser*, 20 February 1767, 2. See also an article from 1769 on how “John Bull very naturally wished to give his countryman the lead” in an overseas commission, in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 25 July 1769, 4.

⁴⁵ *General Evening Post*, 22–24 January 1771, 4.

⁴⁶ *London Chronicle*, 3–6 April 1766, 4. It purports to be just a “specimen,” but no longer work survives.

to this particular satire as one of several examples of John Bull's "parental abuse" against his children.⁴⁷ Indeed, the metaphor of the British government as the struggling head of an increasingly unruly and unhappy family became a standard allegory for colonial relations in the 1770s as hostilities increased.

To the colonists agitating for change, Bull is negligent and careless, unable to look after his own family and equally clueless about their unhappiness and their potential strength. British portrayals of Bull show his character as a heightened version of Arbuthnot's creation, with similar personal qualities of fairness and bravado. Even as hostile a satire as "John Bull's Children" is careful to show him as having been provoked, and merely overreacting to the misbehavior of his offspring. The same elements of his character that made him a successful tradesman in the original pamphlets—his sense of justice, his stubbornness, his bonhomie—are shown to be the source of tension in relations with his children in the anti-British satires. The national values that seemed quintessentially British in Arbuthnot's 1712 pamphlets became troublingly out of touch in the hands of satirists in British America half a century later.

JOHN BULL DURING THE WAR IN AMERICA, 1774–1783

The dumping of tea in Boston harbor in December 1773 marked a turning point in British-American relations as well as a change in how radical American periodicals depicted John Bull. They employed a metaphor of Bull as the head of a family, either roused in anger and petulance (early in the war) or beleaguered and unable to understand how he ended up with rebellious children (when Britain started to lose in the early 1780s). British uses of Bull to comment on the war in America followed a similar pattern. Other invocations of John Bull in British papers were far less consistent: sometimes he was described as an irresponsible or easily angered father, at other times as a calculating merchant, or as an English everyman who voiced the wishes of the common people. On both sides of the ocean, however, John Bull was increasingly shown in a negative light, his good nature leading him to neglect his duty and his choler leading to angry overreactions.

Whereas the Stamp Act of 1765 first provoked outspoken objections, the "destruction of tea" signaled outright rebellion.⁴⁸ While the destruction of the tea was the action of only the most extreme rebels, the incident appeared to British readers as indicative of the feelings of all the American colonists since much of the American news reported in London papers came from the Patriot New England newspapers. Troy Bickham explains that in Britain, "few in the press expressed doubts that Boston, though perhaps more radical than its neighbors, roughly represented wider colonial opinion."⁴⁹ Throughout the war, newspapers in both Britain and America referred back to the tea incident as the beginning of real hostility. Allegories

⁴⁷ Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge, 1982), 117.

⁴⁸ Peter D. G. Thomas, *Tea Party to Independence: The Third Phase of the American Revolution, 1773–1776* (Oxford, 1991), esp. 26–61.

⁴⁹ Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (DeKalb, 2009), 60.

involving John Bull frequently presented righteous anger as a reason for violence, and both loyal and rebel writers focus on whether or not violence was necessary under the circumstances.

The first use of John Bull from American newspapers after the dumping of tea portrays Bull as angry after having been provoked. In July, 1774, the cautiously loyal *New-York Journal* printed a letter to the editor that warned that “Our Sons of Liberty, as you’ll see by the Papers, have at length procured for themselves a smart Dose of Correction, but they make Faces and take it with a bad Grace which will not make the Operation the gentler. Will your Colony and others of the same Stamp, take warning by our Discipline? If they do not, they will certainly come in for their Share, now John Bull is roused.”⁵⁰ This letter refers to the “Intolerable Acts” passed by Parliament in response to the action in Boston which closed the port of Boston and greatly limited the independence of the Massachusetts government. Bull is presented as being “roused” at the actions of the colonists, and the writer implies that his anger could grow to punish other colonies if they followed the lead of the Boston rebels. The “smart Dose of Correction” seems deserved, and Bull’s response a just punishment for the crime committed.

After military action commenced in 1775, American representations of Bull shifted to show him as beleaguered or hapless rather than angry or vindictive. Even the overtly Loyalist *Royal American Gazette* wasted little effort in sympathy with Bull, saying in 1778 that “It cannot be denied by Mr. Bull’s most partial friends, that some years ago he shewed a most tyrannical temper, and had on many occasions treated his wife extremely ill,” and that he had allowed his daughter to flirt with Lewis Baboon (the wife in this instance being Scotland and the daughter America).⁵¹ Such criticism is a double condemnation of the British government’s treatment of America as both tyrannical and neglectful. The editorial concludes with the hope that “if proper subordination should be restored to the family, they will be enabled to make as good a figure in the world as any tradesman whatever,” but this is hardly as optimistic as the wishes from the 1766 John Bull editorial that he would be “beloved” and “respected.” By 1778, the most the writer hopes for is that Bull can be equal to his peers.

Other representations of Bull from during the war show him unable to control his family and both helpless and unreasonable. A 1781 excerpt from “The Royal Scot’s Political Dictionary” describes how John asks his children George and Peg for money, who “nevertheless assume a right to enquiring minutely into John’s wants before they comply with his request.”⁵² His daughter “Yanky answers, that if she is allowed the credit of giving it herself, he shall have every penny she can rap or run ... but if that does not please him, a fig for both him and his lousy sister Peg [Scotland] ... This is rank rebellion.” Bull is shown unable to take care of his own finances and lacking any authority over his children. There is no suggestion that he will punish his children for their disrespect, but rather his financial need puts him at their mercy. Around the same time the Patriot *New-Jersey Gazette* ran a letter to the editor with a similar message blaming Bull’s personality for familial quarrels, commenting of John Bull

⁵⁰ The letter is signed “Murray,” supposedly of the “Office of Imports and Exports in Boston.” *New-York Journal*, 21 July 1774, 3.

⁵¹ *Royal American Gazette*, 22 September 1778, 2.

⁵² *Freeman’s Journal: Or, The North-American Intelligencer*, 19 December 1781, 4.

that “when he is in a choleric humour, he will not spare his best friends and nearest neighbours, even when he has most need of their assistance.”⁵³ The same positive attributes that Bull had in Arbuthnot’s version of the character—his quickness to anger at perceived insults, his boldness and stubbornness, his self-interest—are here shown to be his downfall.

As Britain’s defeat in the American theater of war became more evident, John Bull appeared as an object of pity or scorn, especially as a deserted or cuckolded husband. A 1783 poem in the radically anti-British *Massachusetts Spy* gleefully summed up the situation in a few lines: “Such a rout as to set half the world in a rage, / Make France, Spain, and Holland with Britain engage, / While the Emperor, the Swede, the Russ, and the Dane / All pity John Bull—and run off with his gain.”⁵⁴ Far from the earlier hopes that Bull will “make as good a figure in the world as any tradesman,” Bull has now lost the respect of all the countries engaged in the fighting, to the point that they are trying to take advantage of his weakness rather than repair relations. A French newspaper ran a mock-advertisement, reprinted in the radical *Vermont Gazette*, explaining that since “Mrs. Ame-Independent, formerly contracted to John Bull, Esq; & living with him as a consort, hath eloped from the said John Bull, carrying with her a great part of his property,” and she is “living in intimacy with one Louis Baboon,” John Bull “will not pay any debt of her contracting.”⁵⁵ Bull is no longer the successful tradesman engaged in suing for more business, nor the proud and tyrannical father, nor even the beleaguered head of a rebellious family, but instead a deserted husband with no one left to tyrannize.

British newspapers also featured John Bull to comment on relations with America during the war. Similar to American papers, the British press initially portrayed Bull as justifiably angry but later showed him as helpless and pitiable. Early in the war, British depictions of Bull chiefly showed him as having been provoked—his fault is anger or incompetence, but he can still resolve the situation. An optimistic article from the *London Gazette* (the official government organ), reprinted in *Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet* in 1775, claimed that, “There are not a set of more useful subjects, nor more loyal, in any part of the British dominions, than in America; nay, I think I may add, than in New-England; but they have their tempers as well as John Bull; and if he says sternly *they shall eat no* hard dumplings, they may possibly reply, *but we will*; and about such a wise affair as this we are hazarding every thing.”⁵⁶ Bull is easily angered and stubborn, and the conflict is presented as being a contest of wills over a trivial matter. A sharper critique from the *Gazetteer* complained of “young ’Squire John Bull, who ... hath lost the affection of his tenants at home, and fallen out with the planters of a considerable estate belonging to him abroad, occasioned, it is whispered, by the domineering spirit of his favourite steward, and the haughty behaviour of his upper servants.”⁵⁷ This satirical description blames Bull for being an incompetent landlord who allowed his servants to overstep their bounds in their treatment of his tenants. By attributing negligence to Bull, it avoids blaming him directly for the problems with his estate.

⁵³ “John Moore, a Scotchman,” *New-Jersey Gazette*, 6 February 1782, 1.

⁵⁴ *Thomas’s The Massachusetts Spy, Or, Worcester Gazette*, 6 February 1783, 4.

⁵⁵ *Vermont Gazette, Or, Freeman’s Depository*, 28 August 1783, 3. Originally from the *Gazette des Bijoux*.

⁵⁶ Reprinted in *Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet*, 9 January 1775, 3. The source cited is the *London Gazette*.

⁵⁷ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 21 February 1775, 4.

Some months later the London *Morning Chronicle* printed a piece of dialogue between John Bull and “his saucy daughter Bett,” to whom he says “I’ll make you know who’s your master, Miss Minx. Pay me a tax for your tea, you undutiful slut you.” She throws tea at him and they fight until “when John’s discipline was over, she, poor, dear creature, could as soon discover the longitude, as raise herself out of the dirt. ... both of them wept with pure affection and kindness over each other, and Betsy promised all obedience to her dear papa. And John Bull put himself to more expence on her account than ever he had done before.”⁵⁸ This Bull is a father who is tyrannical and easily angered, but shows love and mercy when he has achieved dominance. Once Britain sufficiently chastised the rebellious colonists, this allegory implies, it would make amends by granting them greater favors than they had had before the conflict.

As the war went on, John Bull was shown more often as a victim of attack, deserving pity or sometimes scorn. In 1778 an editorial in the oppositional *London Evening Post* commented that “We hear that a *divorce* of a very extraordinary nature between *John Bull* and his wife *Americana*, is shortly to take place, which will astonish all Europe. The cause of quarrel originated one morning over their *tea*, which would have been instantly made up, but for the *roguery* of Mr. Bull’s *servants*, who had an *interest* in keeping them at variance.”⁵⁹ Notably, this editorial not only portrays John Bull as the victim of his advisors’ plots, but also shows America as Bull’s wife rather than his child. While still placing the colonies in a subordinate role, this changing relationship indicates recognition of the strength of America as a military enemy. By 1783, pessimism about the outcome of the war had grown to the point that one London newspaper wrote that “The foreign mails of Monday last advise, that neither the Dutch or the Americans seem inclined to ratify the preliminary articles of peace ... It now remains to be proved, whether in this the hour of humiliation, the spirit of John Bull is so far humbled as to submit to these extravagant and insolent demands.”⁶⁰ Far from being the proud and easily angered father, Bull has reached a low point of powerlessness and disgrace.

Alongside the changing use of John Bull in reference to the American colonies and the war, British newspapers also invoked the character in a variety of other contexts to criticize the economy and politics at home. An article on Scottish-English relations in 1773 published in the anti-government *Public Advertiser*, for example, commented that “every body knows what that was before John Bull in a frantic Fit took the false, fanatical, beggarly old Hag to his Bosom,” while another in 1774 complains about “three or four raw-boned Scotch men, who first lay violent hands on a piece of ground, the property of poor John Bull, then compel him to build a small town for a few scraps of paper worth nothing.”⁶¹ These John Bulls are gullible, easy to persuade, and incompetent. Instances of the character to indicate a generic sort of English everyman are more positive, showing him to be good-natured, blunt, and intellectually slow. The *London Chronicle*, for instance, remarked on “a procession of Watermen the other day, who were walking to the sound of music, with that

⁵⁸ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 2 August 1775, 4.

⁵⁹ *London Evening-Post*, 6–8 January 1778, 4.

⁶⁰ Reprinted in the radical *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 August 1783, 2. The article is cited as “from London.”

⁶¹ *Public Advertiser*, 1 April 1773, 2; *Craftsman*, 7 May 1774, 1.

true kind of John Bull-face, which seemed to be ashamed of that which gave it pleasure,” and the *Morning Chronicle* praised the dancers at Drury Lane by exclaiming that “even John Bull seems to have acquired a taste for graceful motion and elegance of figure.”⁶² The writers of these comments appear to expect their readers to know John Bull already, for they do not elaborate on the character or explain their allusion.

The commonality among all these versions of John Bull is that the writers have low expectations of the character’s abilities and intellect. Critical representations show him as dangerously incompetent and unable to care for his own family. More favorable satires present him as the helpless victim of the plots and machinations of people around him, especially subordinates like servants. Neither is particularly flattering. The negative depictions of John Bull from both American and British papers, which intensified as the war evolved, showed confidence in the British government shaken, and criticism even from supporters. Most of the negative portrayals originate with Patriot and anti-British newspapers. Yet a broader range of newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic began using John Bull in similar ways. Clearly, satirists of a variety of stripes saw Bull as a handy and safe shorthand for criticizing the British government. By the end of the war, even mainstream British papers showed a John Bull who was careless, hapless, neglectful, or beleaguered. This was a signal change from his initial characterization as an admittedly flawed hero yet morally upright and sympathetic character to the very source of the conflict.

JOHN BULL AND AMERICA AFTER THE WAR

The most important postwar portrayal of John Bull in America was a book-length satire by Jeremy Belknap called *The Foresters* (1792), which explicitly imitated Arbuthnot. Belknap allegorizes historical events from the settlement of the colonies to independence in order to blame Parliament for the war and to incorporate the American states into the original story. More generally, John Bull appeared in a wide variety of contexts, and the character was invoked frequently in passing, rather than in more extended allegorical satires. The symbolic depiction of Bull as an animal became common in the decade after the American war—thus taking him out of Arbuthnot’s original characterization.⁶³ Bull’s family also changed, as an independent and unified America no longer made sense as rebellious children: James Kirke Paulding’s *The Diverting History of John Bull and Brother Jonathan* (1812) shows Bull’s son growing to adulthood and surpassing him. By the early nineteenth century, John Bull’s character was seldom described but often invoked, attributing to him a specific set of characteristics that stemmed from the characterization created by satirists during the war.

The Foresters rewrites the history of John Bull from before the events described in Arbuthnot’s pamphlets in order to integrate the American colonies into the story.⁶⁴ Like the original John Bull pamphlets, *The Foresters* has mainly been seen as a work of political or topical allegory rather than as fiction, but it was popular

⁶² *London Chronicle*, 7–9 July 1774, 1; *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 9 November 1776, 3.

⁶³ On Bull as an animal (an actual bull) in political cartoons, see Hunt, *Defining John Bull*, 144–49.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Belknap, *The Foresters, An American Tale: Being A Sequel To The History Of John Bull the Clothier* (Boston, 1792). For an explanation of Belknap’s allegory, see George E. Hastings, “John Bull and His American Descendants,” *American Literature* 1, no. 1 (March 1929): 40–68.

in its day.⁶⁵ John Bull lets Walter Pipeweed claim land in his name to prevent Lewis Baboon, Nicholas Frog, and Lord Strutt from taking it all. Their relationship is fraught from the beginning: Bull sends Walter “a waggon load of ordure, the sweepings of his back yard, the scrapings of his dog kennel, and the contents of his own water closet,” which he considers “a mark of politeness” since as he explains, “I get a cursed stink removed from under my nose, and my good friend has the advantage of it upon his farm.”⁶⁶ A footnote identifies Bull’s trash as the convicts and other undesirables sent over to populate the American continent. According to *The Foresters*, then, relations between Bull and his servant (the British government and the colonists) were problematic from the beginning—so subsequent anger is justified by a lengthy history of mistreatment. The war with America is similarly blamed on John Bull in *The Foresters*, and his “tenants” are shown to be responding to unjustified provocation—but Bull is portrayed as a pawn in the hands of his wife (Parliament) and advisors (politicians). Belknap, a former Patriot and a Federalist, emphasizes that Bull’s fault was listening to bad advice: “Had he been let alone to pursue his own business *himself*, his plain, natural good sense, and generosity of mind, would have kept him clear of many difficulties; but he had his advisers, his hangers on, his levee hunters, his toad eaters, and sycophants, forever about him.”⁶⁷ His wife is so demanding and runs up such high debts that “Mr. Bull was reduced to that humiliating condition, which, by whatever fashionable name it may now go, was formerly called *petticoat-government*.”⁶⁸ The war is presented as a lawsuit between the Foresters and Bull, emphasizing the monetary causes and impacts of the conflict. The problems in Bull’s family are his fault, according to this version of the story, but they are the result of neglect, incompetence, and willful ignorance, not overreaction.

The Foresters concludes by resolving the tensions and showing hope for a peaceful future. The Foresters themselves unite in a mutually beneficial and happy partnership. Bull keeps some territories in the north and maintains a good enough trading relationship with the Foresters that he “supplies them with cloths of various kinds, but they feel themselves at liberty either to purchase of him or his neighbours, or to manufacture for themselves.”⁶⁹ Bull’s “wife still rules him according to her usual maxims,” but his mother “found her influence decreasing and retired to her chamber.”⁷⁰ Lewis is the only one who has really fared badly, and his mismanagement of his own household has led to rebellion among his tenants. Despite all of the blame put on Bull and his wife for starting the trouble, Belknap is careful to end his allegory with a peaceful situation that seems as though it could continue indefinitely. The causes of the lawsuit are carefully addressed to ensure that they have been permanently settled, and both the Foresters and Bull are left in a more mutually profitable situation than they had been at any previous point in the narrative.

⁶⁵ Walter H. Eitner, “Jeremy Belknap’s *The Foresters*: A Thrice-Told Tale,” *Early American Literature* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1979): 156–62, at 156; George B. Kirsch, “Jeremy Belknap: Man of Letters in the Young Republic,” *New England Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (March 1981): 33–53, at 49.

⁶⁶ Belknap, *The Foresters*, 10–11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110–11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 203–4.

Later versions of John Bull in American publications show him to be similar to the John Bull of *The Foresters*: well-meaning but rather incompetent, and unable to control his temper and emotions. One of the most notable examples of was Paulding's *John Bull and Brother Jonathan*, published during the War of 1812.⁷¹ This book-length satire portrays Anglo-American relations as an elderly father fighting with his ambitious youngest son. Paulding's John Bull is described in similar language as Arbuthnot's: he is "a choleric old fellow ... an excellent bottle companion, and a generous, brave, hospitable old lad, as ever lived," yet he also had "a devilish quarrelsome, overbearing disposition, which was always getting him in some scrape or other."⁷² After their initial fight and split (the Revolutionary War), John Bull and Jonathan are never on good terms, mainly because of Bull's stubbornness. Paulding comments that Jonathan "felt many yearnings of affection for his old dad, and if he had been treated with any sort of fatherly kindness, would have loved him with all his heart. But the old fellow never missed a chance of doing Jonathan an ill turn."⁷³ As their relations deteriorate through misunderstandings and miscommunications, Bull exploits divisions among Jonathan's tenants.⁷⁴ The war is presented as the natural outcome of escalating hostile action largely instigated by Bull. Even if the initial causes could have been forgiven, explained, or overlooked, Bull used them as an excuse to agitate Jonathan rather than work for peace.

One final example of an American portrayal of John Bull shows how the character remained much the same as it was at the end of the Revolutionary War—a more incompetent and weaker figure than Arbuthnot's original creation. Washington Irving included a far from flattering section on John Bull in his *Sketch Book*. He criticized the English for using the character to disguise faults: "they sometimes make their boasted Bullism an apology for their prejudice or grossness ... His very proneness to be gulled by strangers, and to pay extravagantly for absurdities, is excused under the plea of munificence."⁷⁵ Although Dennis D. Gartner sees Irving as "ever mindful of finding good in Bull's weaknesses and of at most only respectfully remonstrating him," I would argue that Irving's choice of details is in fact highly condemnatory.⁷⁶ Irving's Bull is quick to anger and "singularly fond of being in the midst of contention," though "he only relishes the beginning of an affray;" "his manor is encumbered by old retainer ... his mansion is like a great hospital of invalids;" and he is so proud that despite his troubles "If you drop the least expression of sympathy or concern, he takes fire in an instant."⁷⁷ Irving mentions the characteristics that Arbuthnot first employed to describe Bull, but shows how each of those turn out to be a fault rather than an asset, or how they have become perverted by failure, pride, and stubbornness. The original John Bull is shown to be a problematic symbol given the result of his anger and generosity.

⁷¹ James Kirke Paulding, *The Diverting History Of John Bull And Brother Jonathan* (New York, 1812).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁵ Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book Of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (New York, 1819), 248.

⁷⁶ Dennis D. Gartner, "The Influence of James Kirke Paulding's *Diverting History* on Washington Irving's Sketch 'John Bull,'" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 67 (1973): 310–14, at 314.

⁷⁷ Irving, *The Sketch Book*, 249, 252, 255–56.

After the Revolutionary War, portrayals of John Bull in America were largely negative. Even British papers featured the foolish and incompetent version of the character as well as the trusty good companion.⁷⁸ John Bull was mainly used to criticize either the government or the people, so he was often shown to be the source of a problem: either too weak and negligent to take care of his own business, or too quick to anger and too stubborn to back down even when losing. The changing portrayal of the other characters in the allegory (specifically, Bull's wife, mother, and children, and Lewis Baboon) demonstrates how Bull lost power after losing the war in America, and never regained the prestige enjoyed before. The fact that Irving's devastating character sketch of Bull was printed in Britain almost as soon as it was issued in America shows that there was similar feeling of irritation and disgruntlement on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of John Bull from a single topical satire to a widely recognized character is a cultural index to a changing nation. American Patriot usage of John Bull is a crucial and understudied satirical context. The characteristics that were positive and made John Bull sympathetic and appealing in Arbuthnot's pamphlets were his undoing as the war with America evolved. Bull's generosity was portrayed as wanton squandering; his steadfastness was really an inability to compromise or admit defeat; his directness turned to aggression that led him to instigate conflict rather than resolve it. This negative representation of John Bull increased as the Revolutionary War continued, and British as well as American writers depicted Bull in a highly unflattering way. This more nuanced version of the character was functional for satire on a wide variety of topics.

While still retaining some features of Arbuthnot's creation, the John Bull of the early nineteenth century was severely flawed and his weaknesses had been exposed—reflecting, perhaps more broadly than ever before, the diversity of opinions on Britain's changing position in the world. By the twentieth century, the character was so widely known that the British government itself employed it in war propaganda. I have argued that many of the important shifts in representations of Bull were made by people geographically or politically outside the Britain he was meant to portray. While John Bull is only one example from a long century of satire, his transformations are indicative of the fraught circumstances in which writers, readers, citizens, and colonists attempted to carve out a national identity. In referring to John Bull, we are invoking a deep history of political strife, speculation, and blame, but also a history that increasingly saw the government as only one part of the broader nation and not always representative of the people. As Bull became more of a stereotype, he reflected a growing sense that a single figurehead is inadequate for a global empire. By criticizing Bull, eighteenth-century writers recognized the political, geographic, and economic variety of the British people—and established a more diverse picture of the British nation.

⁷⁸ See, for example, the piece about “the knowing ones” who at election time will “ridicule the gullibility of John Bull.” *Liverpool Mercury*, 14 March 1820, 8.

⁷⁹ Reprinted in *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, 3 August 1820, 2.