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“Everything Was Strange”: Regional Nationalisms and Ironic Identities in Early National  
American Fiction.

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Brian João Garcia

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Steven Mailloux, Chair  
Professor Michael Clark  
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2015



## **DEDICATION**

To

My parents, Alice and João Garcia,  
my brother, Kevin Garcia,  
and Ashley Montgomery.

Thank you for your patience, support, and love.

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At UCI, I've had the benefit of a scholarly community comprised of some of the most talented, intelligent, and generous people to be found anywhere in academia. More than anyone, Steven Mailloux has walked me through this process with unceasing kindness and patience. His methods are foundational to my work, while his combination of brilliance and humility is an example that I hope to emulate as a scholar. Michael Clark not only provided me with valuable input on my writing and research, but introduced me to several of the texts that would become the backbone of my dissertation. Jack Miles always brought a unique and encouraging perspective to bear on my work, and I will always appreciate the time he spent chatting with me about any number of fascinating topics. Finally, Rodrigo Lazo kept me honest, nudging me little by little toward greater rigor whenever it was lacking.

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My parents—João and Alice Garcia—believed in me and tolerated my nonsense when I was probably deserving of neither their faith nor their indulgence, and from earliest childhood fostered a fascination with languages and a love of intellectual pursuits. They are two of the smartest, kindest, hardest working people I know, and any achievement I can claim is a testament to their love. Despite my more advanced years, I consider my brother Kevin a role model. His work ethic and wisdom are truly something to behold, and his blunt advice has never led me astray.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Everything Was Strange”: Regional Nationalisms and Ironic Identities in Early National American Fiction.

By

Brian João Garcia

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Professor Steven Mailloux, Chair

This dissertation examines the ironic treatment of the idea of the nation in works of US American (henceforth referred to simply as “American”) fiction written and published during the Early National period (approximately 1776-1828). Building from various theories of nationalism, rhetoric, and myth, I argue that authors of this period show an acute awareness of the creative, even mythical, nature of national identity and deliberately seek to invent the nation’s constitutive mythos while also laying the foundation for its emergent literary culture. Though this endeavor is taken on by many (perhaps most) American authors of the period, my study focuses specifically on works that do so by simultaneously undermining, satirizing, and/or deconstructing the national-mythological stances of their rivals’—and sometimes even their own—rhetorical and political stances. By focusing on ostensibly non-didactic works, I will show the ways in which an ongoing concern with emergent national identity pervaded and was shaped by popular culture and regional loyalties.

The critique of national mythologies carried out in this dissertation is two-pronged: firstly, it evaluates how Early National authors use ironic expressions of existing literary forms to reveal their own understanding of the construction of national identity through cultural

production and the ways in which they simultaneously mock and create national foundational myths and traditions. Secondly, it takes a meta-mythographical view, challenging prevailing myths in American literary scholarship which hold to an outmoded understanding of the origins of American literature and the skill set of its practitioners.

## INTRODUCTION: Toward a National Literature

An against-the-grain review in its time that enjoined audiences to read “that flowery Hawthorne” instead as an author characterized by darkness and “Puritanic gloom,” Herman Melville’s 1850 essay “Hawthorne and His Mosses” remains a classic example of the American literary manifesto (2293-96). Like Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “American Scholar” (1837) and Walt Whitman’s preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Melville’s review celebrates the vitality of an emergent American literature in large part by contrasting it with the decay of an aging Europe. Taking special aim at England as “an alien to us,” Melville forcefully declares

And we want no American Goldsmiths; nay, we want no American Miltons. It were the vilest thing you could say of a true American author, that he were an American Tompkins. Call him an American, and have done; for you can not say a nobler thing of him. (2299-300)

Even so, Melville’s “Virginian Spending July in Vermont” does not treat all American authors as equally valuable, seeming to damn with faint praise figures like Washington Irving, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Timothy Dwight (whose pastoral *Greenfield Hill* certainly makes him a candidate for the derisive mantle of “American Goldsmith”).

Though Emerson’s, Whitman’s, and Melville’s American Renaissance manifestos define a literary period later than that to be examined in this study, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” is instructive here for that with which it does *not* contend; for what Melville describes in “Mosses” is not so much the emergence of a new national literature as an advanced stage in its development. The “Virginian’s” argument for an alternative reading and his lukewarm reception of older American authors presupposes an established reception history, while the confidence with which the essay denounces figures like Milton is a far cry from similar manifestos written

by earlier authors whose main objective was quite simply the establishment of a respected national literature where one did not currently exist.

Even at a stage in which he could write with some confidence of a positive reception on both sides of the Atlantic, Washington Irving, in “English Authors on America” and “The Art of Book-Making”, voices anxieties about the development of an Early National<sup>1</sup> literary scene in post-War-of-1812 America to contend with that extant in England. Alongside Irving in the satirical magazine *Salmagundi*, James Kirke Paulding had worked toward the development of a New York-centered national literature from in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and many years later was still sounding a similarly anxious call in a reprise (sans Irving) of *Salmagundi*:

It has often been observed by such as have attempted to account for the scarcity of romantic fiction among our native writers, that the history of the country affords few materials for such works, and offers little in its traditionary lore to warm the heart or elevate the imagination. The remark has been so often repeated that it is now pretty generally received with perfect docility, as an incontrovertible truth, though it seems to me without the shadow of a foundation. It is in fact an observation that never did nor ever will apply to any nation, ancient or modern.

(265)

Published in 1835 but quite explicitly recalling collaboration with Irving that preceded the War of 1812—not to mention the 1819 publication of Irving’s *Sketch-Book*—Paulding’s defiant stance does not so much identify an existing national literature as call for its development.

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<sup>1</sup> “Early National” is defined here as 1776-1828, from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the election of Andrew Jackson. Literary periods cannot help but be arbitrary to a large extent, and it might be just as reasonable to place the actual commencement of the nation at 1783 (Treaty of Paris) or 1787 (ratification of the Constitution), but since this is an analysis of national myths, the arbitrary starting point seems to me to be a reasonable point for considering the legendary start of the United States. The ending

Published in what most literary historians would consider to be a transition period from the developmental stage of early American literature to the American Renaissance, Paulding articulates some Old Guard anxieties in what was not a unique position to take in the Early National period. In 1785, for example, Noah Webster—whose life mission was, of course, American independence and unification through a popular standardization of the vernacular—argued that “America must be as independent in *literature* as she is in *politics*, as famous for *arts* as for *arms*; and it is not impossible but a person of my youth may have some influence in exciting a spirit of literary industry” (qtd. in Strand, 7). Philip Freneau proposed an import tax on foreign works as a means of protecting “native manufactures”; and Royall Tyler’s preface to *The Algerine Captive* (1797) complained that “while so many books are vended, they are not of our own manufacture,” going on to worry that “homespun habits” were being rendered “disgusting” by English novels that “insensibly taught [New Englanders] to admire the levity, and often the vices of the parent country” (6).

Though Tyler’s patriotic didacticism concerns itself with novels in the preface to *The Algerine Captive*, the use of fiction as a vehicle for teaching republican virtue is a continuation of themes addressed in his popular comedy of manners from a decade earlier, *The Contrast*. Modeled after Sheridan’s Restoration comedy *The School for Scandal*, Tyler’s play satirized Americans with a taste for British fashions and made patriotic claims on the public’s attention, explicitly to the exclusion of claiming artistic achievement. Having noted in the advertisement that the play should be attended because it is “the first essay of American genius in a difficult species of composition” and that one night’s profits “were appropriated to the benefit of the sufferers by the fire at *Boston*,” the comedy’s prologue begins:

Exult each patriot heart!—this night is shewn

A piece, which we may fairly call our own;  
Where the proud titles of “My Lord! Your Grace!”  
To humble Mr. and plain Sir give place. (826)

To be sure, nationalistic didacticism overshadows aesthetics in much Early National fiction, drama, and poetry, and can be found permeating attitudes toward literature even leading up to the revolution, as in Thomas Jefferson’s sentiment in 1771 that “When any signal act of charity or gratitude is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts also” (qtd. in McAuley 208).

The didactic tendency usually manifested in works authored anonymously, based on well-known history or current events, and dealing with general moral themes played out in a context allowing for a contrast between America and Europe. These contrasts often took the shape of lessons such as the warnings against seduction found in William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*, Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*, and Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*; or explicitly political satires like Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s picaresque *Modern Chivalry*, which warns against “the evil of men seeking office for which they are not qualified” (205).

Michael T. Gilmore argues that the didactic strain of history-based and anonymously written early American fiction tapers off after the War of 1812 due to the solidifying of American independence and emergence of a more steady American capitalism enabling the fame of individual authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant. In effect, as Gilmore sees it, the necessity of teaching republican virtue as against European decadence is replaced by the question of what American culture should be, while at the

same time an emerging Romanticism encourages individual authorship as a developed market allows for distribution and remuneration.

Whereas Gilmore uses the war as a historical marker after which American literature begins to develop in earnest, many critical receptions locate the beginnings in the 1820s. Considering the various arguments for this position provides a valuable point of departure for various aspects of this dissertation. J. Gerald Kennedy argues that American literature starts around 1820, which he identifies as the historical moment in which mass culture allowed nation-building to start for the first time since the Revolution. Robert S. Levine makes a convincing case for approximately the same starting point, also due to emergent nation-building efforts, and considers the Missouri Compromise of 1820 the spark that ignited culturally productive regional conflicts. Among others, Alfred Bendixen stakes his 1820s origin claim on Washington Irving's success with *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, as it marked the dawn of the professional American author and the greatest transatlantic American literary success to date (4).

Tellingly, literary historians who consider *The Sketch-Book* the true beginning of American literature tend to cite Sydney Smith's infamous query: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book" (190)? Smith's challenge to American culture was posed as Irving's popularity was growing in Europe, to be followed quickly by James Fenimore Cooper's success. As satisfyingly tidy as it is to consider Smith's question legitimate and then tout Irving as the triumphant and timely answer, it seems a rather arbitrary place to start a timeline of the nation's literary history. All cases for *The Sketch-Book* as a founding document fail to make a convincing case for such a paradigm shift, relying on arguments of degree rather than kind. For if Irving's transatlantic success is the marker of American literature's arrival, then it is worth noting that his earlier *A History of New York* had also been well-received in Europe.



Furthermore, to argue that Irving's status as an author unencumbered by other professions marks the beginning of professional authorship, one must ignore his past as a failed lawyer and future as a diplomat—the former of which is a history shared by Charles Brockden Brown. As to book sales, no American title surpassed Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791) until *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852.

This is not to downplay the importance of Irving's contribution to early American literature. On the contrary, I consider the above arguments for *The Sketch-Book's* centrality problematic precisely because they make it all too easy to dismiss. Indeed, the very same critics who make the above case also characterize Irving as either merely paving the way for real innovators or illuminating aspects of American life and culture *despite* being a naïve talent. Kennedy, for example, calls *The Sketch-Book* a “prologue” to American literature, and remarks, “If Irving meant to appease nationalists at home and to show British readers the rich material available to American writers, he simultaneously raised troubling questions about the emerging nation and its patently disunited people” (10). The all-too-prevalent suggestion here is a notion inherited from Irving's 1935 biographer Stanley T. Williams and holds that the inconsistencies in Irving's depiction of the young nation are hypocrisies on his part, contradictions discovered by critics in later eras. This thesis, however, fails to consider the rigor with which Irving's earlier works already mocked and dismantled the very contradictions and naïve hypocrisies with which *The Sketch-Book* is so often charged.

### **The Idea of the Nation**

Given that this dissertation seeks to evaluate Early National literature as it engages with the formation of American national identity, it will be useful to lay out some important

definitions of and statements regarding the concept of nationalism. This analysis uses as its foundation several important statements on nationalism, and seeks not to identify or debate the beginnings of the nation per se, but rather to consider the ways in which the very difficulty of defining national identities manifests itself ironically in works of American fiction from the Early National period.

Much of the most important work on nationalism of the last century builds upon Ernest Renan's 1882 lecture "What is a Nation?" which sought to overturn late nineteenth century notions of racial or linguistic purity by arguing that nations are arbitrarily assembled of various peoples who purport to share a common interest, which is, paradoxically, both the nation's cause and effect. Though Renan posits the national common interest as an affirmative concept, it is founded most crucially on negation which allows for construction of an alleged national history and identity that unites otherwise hostile factions:

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality; the union of northern France with the Midi was the result of massacres and terror lasting for the best part of a century. (186-205)

The "common interest" of the nation is supported by a communal mythos that fills the narrative spaces left open by this "forgetting," and the construction of that mythos through a national literature preoccupies much of the twentieth century theorizing on nationalism.

As part of his argument that the nation is a historical contingency rather than a necessary

condition of human society, Ernest Gellner illustrates the challenge of defining national identity by demonstrating the difficulty of explaining its origins in an entirely adequate way:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members. (7)

As Gellner goes on to argue, each of these definitions points to an important aspect of national identity and yet neither is adequate for properly defining what makes the nation. Barring acceptance of the nationalistic myth of the primordial existence of the nation, a more satisfactory analysis of nationalism requires evaluating the work that culture does in forming the concept of the nation (7).

Building from Gellner's thesis defining nationalism as primarily a theory of political legitimacy whereby "the political and the national unit should be congruent," Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* traces the process of creating the nation to three phases: the first phase is premodern and apolitical, characterized entirely by culture, literature and folklore;

the second is the phase of militant campaigning for the national ideal; and the third phase sees the concept of the nation gaining mass support, a process elided in that nationalist mythos which views the nation and its culture as timeless and primordial. This perceived timelessness is bolstered, Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger show in *The Invention of Tradition*, by the appropriation and exaggeration of obscure local—often rural—traditions by sociopolitical elites. By mass producing the accoutrements of these traditions and proliferating the myth of their presence at the nation's purported birth, these elites amass power around a perceived central interest and bolster their legitimacy as leaders by reinforcing the national ideal.

As will be evident especially in the final chapter's reading of Washington Irving's Christmas sketches, the Gellner/Hobsbawm and Ranger formulation of nationalism provides a useful framework for describing historical strategies for developing an affirmative originary national mythos. The qualitative judgment of authenticity implied in these definitions, with its suggested search for a more authentic sense of origin, runs contrary to the purposes of an analysis concerned mainly with *how* national myths operate discursively. As opposed to this attempt to judge the authenticity of nations, I ground much of this study on Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an imagined community and his assertion that "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). Though working from different assumptions about authenticity, Anderson follows Gellner and Renan by first identifying crucial paradoxes in the concept of the nation:

- (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.
- (2) The formal universality of nationality as a sociocultural concept... vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete

manifestations...(3) The ‘political’ power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. (5)

Finally, Homi K. Bhabha’s work in *Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture* is particularly helpful for considering the formation of national myths as an especially literary and discursive endeavor. Focusing especially on the colonial subject, Bhabha describes an ambivalence in the individual who experiences the national narrative as a “‘double writing’ of the performative and the pedagogical,” whereby the national narrative is both perpetually instructive of the communal identity and constantly disrupted in its performance by cultural and ideological ruptures within the nation on which it seeks to impose a semblance of homogeneity (*LoC* 221). By examining “the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population,” Bhabha provides a framework for considering the young United States not merely as a newly minted postcolonial republic, but as a *federal* republic contending with all of the attendant conflicts that arise within a society as clearly split as was the post-revolutionary US (*LoC* 212). As this dissertation will show, the formation of an American national culture did not consist only—or even primarily—of the construction of affirmative national myths or of contrasting the New World with its former colonizers, but rather built its discursive foundation on regional conflicts and rivalries which manifested even in texts that do not explicitly reference the issues around which those conflicts and rivalries revolved.

### **Originary Myths**

Indeed, while major political questions (such as slavery, militarization, and federal power) undergirded most of the ideological and cultural tensions addressed in the works that this dissertation covers, it is no exaggeration to say that the rivalries played out just as often over who

got to tell the nation's story and how—in other words, who controlled the national mythos and identity. Furthermore, the concern with national narrative was not restricted to authors and permeated much conversation among revolutionaries and politicians in the early republic. John Adams revealed as much in a 1790 letter to Benjamin Rush, which hyperbolically complained, “The history of our Revolution will be that Dr. Franklin’s electric rod smote the earth and out sprung General Washington. That Franklin electrised him with his rod, and thence-forward these two conducted all the policy, negotiations, legislatures, and war” (qtd. in Ferguson 2). Adams’s exasperation with the already-overwhelming mythologization of Franklin and Washington is not exceptional, but rather representative of the attitude of many who were trying to make sense of the nation that was itself considered by many to be—via the Declaration of Independence and Constitution—little more than the reification of a legal fiction.

Of course, though the nation proper gets its start through the great legal fiction of 1776 (or, if one prefers, 1787—or any number of dates in between and after) with the founding documents, its literary culture had already started to form much earlier in the form of belletristic clubs with roots in the literary interests of scholars in the colonies. At the risk of temporarily reinforcing a tendency that this dissertation seeks to challenge, it is worth briefly tracing one thread of this cultural history back to colonial New England.

The beginning of the eighteenth century saw a modernization effort led by liberal-minded New Englanders that weakened the political clout of the Mather family. Led by pastor John Leverett and merchant Thomas Brattle, the Brattle Street Church had been founded in 1699 and instituted several liberal reforms directly aimed at weakening Boston’s leadership. As part of their effort, the reformers brought in as pastor Benjamin Colman, a Harvard graduate who had continued his studies in England and been ordained a Presbyterian minister (Bremer 215). Unlike

some of his more politically ambitious allies, Colman was an admirer of the Mathers, and successfully worked to heal the breach through negotiations with Cotton Mather. The result was that the Mathers temporarily maintained their nominal status as leadership figures while also being pushed to the margins of a modernizing colony (Elliott 280-81).

The Brattle Street Church's progressivism was rooted in a cosmopolitan outlook paradoxically steeped in acceptance of—even reverence for—some previously abandoned Old World practices (Weir 218). Among the practices tolerated by Brattle Street were the Lord's Prayer, Anglican Christmas services, and—perhaps most controversially—a florid preaching style. When, in 1701, control of Harvard's Board of Overseers shifted to the liberals, Brattle Street's movement carried over into education. Not only did this make for a generally more permissive culture all around (periwigs, card games, and medicinal alcohol use were allowed, for example), but it permeated the curriculum as Harvard students were trained in a version of rhetoric and oratory now more heavily influenced by Colman's eloquent and literary style than the previously favored Puritan plain style.

At the same time that Harvard's training of New England's scholars solidified Colman's influence on the public sphere, he was also one of several figures forming belletristic societies in the colonies. Although these were mainly considered to be private diversions, they were well-attended by people who became politically active and socially influential. Indeed, Colman and figures like Henry Brooke, William Byrd, and Ebenezer Cooke saw themselves as “agents of politeness” whose burlesques of tavern culture, politics, and an increasingly commerce-driven society aimed to shape culture by proliferating literary works through an ever-expanding print industry (Shields 310).

The precursors to later literary clubs such as Philadelphia's Friendly Club, New York's Bread and Cheese Club, and Connecticut's Hartford Wits, the discussions and texts produced by these belletristic societies show the early stages of the aforementioned processes that factor into the creation of a nascent national culture: one can see in these works the literary beginnings of inter-and-intraregional conflict as well as the reification of local traditions into regional and eventually national identities. Colman's reform of Christianity in Massachusetts leads to perhaps the most famous examples, but we see the same process taking place with Ebenezer Cooke and Henry Brooke injecting a degree of cosmopolitanism into Baltimore and Philadelphia society, respectively.

I bring up what I will refer to as the "New England mythos" in order to briefly illuminate its import both as partial historical fact and as instructive national myth. New England's relatively high number of printing presses and educational institutions throughout the eighteenth century did, in fact, give it a cultural advantage and disproportionate influence over the other colonies; but it also afforded New Englanders a privileged position as storytellers, both in fiction and in history (which, as we will see, blended more often than not). The still formidable popularity of the story of the nation's roots in New England stems in large part from the capacity of its partisans to proliferate its favored narrative over time, and, though much progress has been made in this area, literary histories still tend to adhere to the New England mythos. As such, when J. Gerald Kennedy claims that American literature did not start until 1820, he can certainly make an appeal to an explosion in print-capitalism and the success of *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*; but his argument falls into the same pattern whereby Irving and his contemporaries are simply paving the way for the midcentury American Renaissance. This devaluation of earlier contributions is not simply a temporal bias or an aesthetic preference, but



rather cleaves to a well-worn model that considers “real” American literature—indeed, much of American culture—to hail from a specifically New England Calvinist tradition. In American studies, we can trace this tendency back to twentieth century giants of literary scholarship such as F.O. Matthiessen and Perry Miller, but even they inherited that narrative from historical figures like Daniel Webster and Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose successful promulgation of the New England mythos can be traced back to pre-revolutionary narratives originating with reverence for the New England Brahmins and pushed at elite New England institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth.<sup>2</sup>

### **Irony and Nationhood**

The primary aim of this study is not merely to challenge the New England mythos (a path already cut by several capable scholars), but to consider the ways in which myths like it were already challenged in American literature of the Early National period even as they were being developed. As a starting point, I reject the notion that the authors covered here were naïve representatives of a literature unconscious of its role in creating a national culture. Rather, this study posits that the works evaluated exhibit a hyperconsciousness of the constructedness of national identity and a playful engagement with its development. This playfulness manifests itself in these works as deeply ironic, self-reflexive ruminations on the creation of a national literature and culture out of the myths that even then were driving political discourse. Steven Mailloux has shown that a dominant cultural discourse is not only made up of tropes but is itself a trope that shapes interpretation and understanding of cultural phenomena. This rhetorical hermeneutic approach considers the ways that texts work within their cultural contexts to make

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<sup>2</sup> F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*; Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*. See also George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*; Randall Fuller, *Emerson's Ghosts*; and Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth*.

sense of culture even as the contexts teach readers to understand the texts.<sup>3</sup> Using Mailloux's approach as a basis for deciphering the cultural work of the texts under consideration, this dissertation considers the predominant foundational myths of American nationalism—its New England Puritan origins, the Revolution, and its being “spoken into existence” by the Declaration of Independence and Constitution—as both crucial to understanding literature of the Early National period and open to being deconstructed.

Yet rather than simply dismantle the American nationalist mythos, I will read these works of fiction as evidence that the construction of early American nationalism was itself a process of deconstruction and constant ironic negation. Terence Martin argues that early American texts show a “beginning by negation,” whereby the young nation's understanding of itself is constructed as against Europe—to be America is to be distinctly *not* Europe (50-51). This is true, and nicely demonstrated in affirmatively patriotic works such as Joel Barlow's *Columbiad*, Philip Freneau's “The Rising Glory of America,” and a number of early American histories; but the texts covered in this dissertation are not so straightforwardly nationalistic. Whereas Barlow's and Freneau's patriotic works—and even more didactic pieces by all of the authors covered here—oppose the United States with Europe so as to contrast the ascendancy of the former with the decay of the latter, the negations at play here address rivalries between regions, ideologies, and discourses *within* the young republic. The ambivalence seen in these works of fiction stems from the triangulated relationship between Europe and opposing factions within the United States. So even as Irving distinguishes American authors from their British contemporaries and influences, he also lodges his opposition to the prevailing New England mythos and makes the

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power*.

case for an American literature and national identity founded upon a burlesque of the very identity politics of which it inevitably ends up partaking.

What emerges from this somewhat schizophrenic engagement with history, myth, and politics might best be described as quixotic nationalism. Much like Cervantes depicts Don Quijote mistaking romances for history, these texts reflect the ambivalence and anxieties of the Early National zeitgeist by attempting to simultaneously establish and pick apart the concept of American identity and a national literature. Literature, history, political commentary, and correspondence from the Early National period abound with proof that this quixotism was deliberate and practiced, with even foreign commentators noticing the tendency. Tocqueville, for example, dismisses as “ridiculous” the dramatic, heroic understanding of the Revolutionary War, the Founding Fathers, and the adoption of the Constitution; but tempers that criticism in the same paragraph with admiration for the American public’s singular capacity for critical self-reflection, declaring it “a novelty in the history of society to see a great people turn a calm and scrutinizing eye upon itself” (92).

In *Nationalism and Irony*, an analysis of the underlying Romantic irony in the conservative nationalisms of Edmund Burke, Walter Scott, and Thomas Carlyle, Yoon Sun Lee argues that employing irony in their dealings with national identity allowed these non-English authors to engage in British nationalist sentiments while also perpetually highlighting and critiquing its contingencies (5). Lee shows how ironic nationalism allowed these authors to both develop and critique “the nation’s claim to be an entity bequeathing itself to itself, a whole that necessarily gave meaning to its parts” (5). Irony enables an engagement with nationalism that simultaneously makes light of nationalistic assumptions and acknowledges their power. Putting this observation to work in an American context, I see the irony of these texts enabling a

discourse whereby a level of creativity in dealing with national identity is authorized by the nation's ruptures even as the voices authorized by this conceptual flexibility attempt to solidify the idea of the nation around their preferred ideological center.

Yet unlike the Great Britain of Burke, Scott, and Carlyle, the Early National United States' fragmentation was magnified by both a surfeit of ethnic and racial identities and a lack of supposedly foundational history. As such, the irony of nationalism is never far from the surface in these texts. The "scrutinizing eye" that Tocqueville celebrates finds expression in widely differing works from the Early National period, and the quixotic nationalism of the young republic is reflected through a variety of genres and forms. Though they initially adopt European forms—a common excuse for dismissing them—the works examined here employ European belletristic traditions to address specifically early American concerns (and to shape those concerns) and engage in debates contemporaneously unfolding in politics, law, and commerce.

### **Making the Nation Strange**

In chapter 1, I read Charles Brockden Brown's first novel, *Wieland*, as an allegory that performs the confusion and ambivalence of the postrevolutionary period. The gothic mode in *Wieland* is paired with biblical typology to depict the isolated and haunted Wieland family as geographically, politically, and temporally detached from the identity-shaping events taking place outside of their utopian estate. Conjuring the histories of Pennsylvania Quakerism, German immigration, anti-Irish sentiment, French Calvinist rebellion, Anglo-Saxon heritage, and the biblical binding of Isaac, *Wieland* uses the gothic to expose a radically ambivalent young nation uncertain as to whether it is worse to be haunted by the violence in its past or tormented by the philosophical struggles of its present.

Chapter 2 evaluates the rhetorical function of the trope of the Muslim as depicted in Early National fiction through a comparative reading of Susanna Rowson's drama *Slaves in Algiers*, Royall Tyler's novel *The Algerine Captive*, and Washington Irving's "Mustapha letters" from the satirical magazine *Salmagundi*. Each of these works uses the familiar Orientalist trope of the Muslim in a form uniquely suited to the necessities of grappling with questions of national identity through regional, cultural, and political conflicts. Whereas Orientalist literature prior to this period employed Muslim characters as a foil to European culture, the portrayals of Muslims in these texts only take the traditional East-West binary as a briefly articulated starting point, developing it more completely not as a means to merely distinguish the West from the East or even America from Europe, but to satirize ideological foes and posit an "authentic" nationalism suited to unification of the young republic's many factions.

Finally, chapter 3 shows the shift from an almost entirely ambivalent satire of national mythmaking to a still vexed embrace of ironic nationalism and attempt to shape the nationalist discourse as against the already dominant New England mythos. The first part of the chapter considers the ways in which Washington Irving's *A History of New York* satirizes Early National historiography and hyperbolizes the heroic import attached to contemporary regional histories so as to expose the absurdity of nationalist myth. This reading is then employed as a hermeneutic when reading *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, which uses familiar characters and storytelling modes as narrative frames for its sketches. I argue that Diedrich Knickerbocker's ironic narration in *A History* provides the basis for understanding Geoffrey Crayon's sketches, which by turns challenge the New England mythos, satirize national identity, play with literary forms, and propose the establishment of unifying national traditions based in a consciously—even gleefully—fabricated history.

This dissertation takes its title from the moment that Rip Van Winkle reenters his village after two decades of sleep to find it altered by revolution, both distressingly alien and uncannily familiar:

The very village was altered; it was larger and more populous. There were rows of houses which he had never seen before, and those which had been his familiar haunts had disappeared. Strange names were over the doors—strange faces as the windows—every thing was strange. His mind now misgave him; he began to doubt whether both he and the world around him were not bewitched. Surely this was his native village, which he had left but the day before. There stood the Kaatskill mountains—there ran the silver Hudson at a distance—there was every hill and dale precisely as it had always been—Rip was sorely perplexed... (42)

We should never lose sight of the fact that what is most magical in “Rip Van Winkle” is that which at first glance may seem most mundane. Yes, Rip drinks with Dutch elfin ghosts and sleeps for over twenty years, but none of the story’s fantastical elements strain the suspension of disbelief or make for major surprises. What is most jarring is that the description of the village’s superficial similarities to its former state throw a thin ironic veil over the fact that, despite being in the same geographic location, Rip wakes up *in a different nation* than that in which he had fallen asleep. It is a deceptively simple exploration of the phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology of nationhood; and Rip’s reintegration into society as village historian stresses the crucial importance of storytelling to that enterprise. The ironic engagement with national identity seen in the works evaluated in this dissertation do just that: they make the nation strange, question its originary myths, and audaciously propose their own myths and stories within the very same texts. In the process, they contribute to the construction of not only a national

literature but a discourse that—for better or worse—undergirds Americans’ understanding of self to this day. From the ways in which American politicians discuss Islamic fundamentalism to the name of the donut and the New York Knicks, the discursive structure shaping the United States’ communal understanding of self owes much to an ironic, sometimes suspicious engagement with the concept of nationhood.

## **Chapter 1: “The image that I once adored”: Interrogating the Nation in *Wieland***

There might be no text in early American fiction whose critical reception is so rife with confusion and disagreement as Charles Brockden Brown’s 1798 *Wieland*. If the trends in interpretation of Brown’s first novel can be said to show any consistency, it is in the frequency with which critics pose questions rather than make definitive statements. Allegorical readings encouraged by Brown’s professed didacticism have resulted in astute interpretations of his political message, but we should treat with a healthy dose of skepticism the notion—adopted by scholars on all sides of the debate over *Wieland*’s significance—that the novel can be said to make a sustained statement about a coherent Early National culture. Though Brown’s furiously productive writing over a short period shows a gradual shift toward strongly Federalist, fiercely anti-republican positions, in *Wieland* any polemic identified must be one of negation, and the critique it launches casts an expansive net.

From Brown’s contemporaries through the New Critics, much older criticism often focused on the biblical implications but dismissed the book as poorly written and failed to examine it carefully.<sup>4</sup> Still others engaged it merely to identify Brown as the first American novelist—a formulation that ignores authors such as William Hill Brown.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1980s, a renewed interest has resulted in many careful readings and an entire “Brown studies” apparatus, yet these tend to read *Wieland* in order to decipher *either* Brown’s politics or his religious attitude; with the latter camp often either trying to make sense of Brown’s lapsed Quakerism or to presumptuously situate his work within the well-worn tradition of early American authors

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<sup>4</sup> For a strong pre-1980 article that summarizes many of the prevailing opinions leading up to a reevaluation of the novel, see Michael D. Butler, “*Wieland*: Method and Meaning”

<sup>5</sup> See David Kazanjian’s “Charles Brockden Brown’s Biloquial Nation: National Culture and White Settler Colonialism in *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*.”



building on New England Puritan motifs.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter attempts to avoid treading the paths described above for rather specific reasons. As the wide range of contradictory interpretations shows, Charles Brockden Brown's politics are not as readily identifiable in *Wieland* as they would become in his later works. To the extent that his political affiliations are identifiable, the many possibilities have been covered extensively by the critics cited in this chapter as well as such trailblazers in the field as Jane Tompkins.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the role of faith in Brown's worldview and writing, it must be said that his devotion to Quakerism is also difficult to gauge at this point in his career. As such, the typical form that an allegorical reading of religious references in early American literature (or American culture in general, even to the present day) takes leads in this case to inaccurate clichés: we cannot simply map New England Puritanism onto all things American and religious. Though Brown's upbringing and trauma as a Quaker are undeniably important for understanding much of what will be discussed, this chapter is far more interested in the liminal spaces that he tries to negotiate—with religion as with politics—and will examine how they operate together to perform a valuation of the newly formed constitutional republic. Rather than reading *Wieland* as staking a conservative or radical ideological claim, this chapter will show that Brown's first novel resists interpretive certainty with regards to institutional or political loyalties by staging tortuously contradictory positions on national formation, faith, Enlightenment philosophy, and literary exegesis. By exploring a seemingly incoherent morass of philosophical positions in an allegory that builds on the biblical story of the binding of Isaac, *Wieland* melds Gothic motifs and biblical typology to paint a picture of the young nation that frustrates interpretation to

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<sup>6</sup> For a useful summary of the development of Brown studies, see the introduction to *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, eds. Philip Barnard, Mark Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

counter the hopes of the Early National period and expose a bleak undercurrent in the political, philosophical, and literary culture of the post-Revolutionary United States.

### **The Indeterminate Ideologue**

Brown's political views in *Wieland* are difficult to place with any certainty because they changed so drastically in such a short period of time. James Dillon has pointed out that "he was a Godwinian romantic in the 1790s but a jingoistic federalist in the 1800s", and that his novels "model for the reader the peculiar version of republican virtue Brown advocates in his criticism" (237-38).<sup>8</sup> Understanding Brown's writing as necessarily falling into categories of either Godwinian or Federalist polemic does not quite hold with *Wieland*, though, since—as Richard P. Moses has noted—the period in which Brown wrote *Wieland* appears to have been the period of his ideological transition (16). Distinguishing him from figures like Royall Tyler and Joel Barlow, Edward Watts observes that the lack of an extra-literary political career makes it difficult to pin down Brown's actual loyalties during the transition from fervently anti-religious Godwinian author of pamphlets on women's suffrage and abolition to jingoistic, xenophobic, Hobbesian reactionary who wasn't so much a loyal Federalist as he was utterly disdainful of Jeffersonian republicanism (100). Furthermore, as Anthony Galluzzo notes, the "sterile debate about Brown's political sympathies takes for granted the binary structure of conservative versus radical, which hardly describes Great Britain in the era of the French Revolution, let alone the United States" (264). This mistaken binary results from an approach that fundamentally misunderstands eighteenth century political movements. As W.M. Verhoeven argues,

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<sup>8</sup> As used here, the term "republican" refers generically to an ideology that favors governance by an elected head of state. Unless otherwise specified (as with, for example, "Jeffersonian republicanism"), it does not refer to a partisan ideology within the larger political landscape, and so is not used here to describe a position that would have been opposed to Federalism.

‘Radicalism’ may cover a wide variety of political or intellectual positions and attitudes, varying from progressive political theory to republicanism, utopianism, anarchism, and atheism; hence, the word ‘radical’ has been used interchangeably along with ‘reformer,’ ‘revolutionary,’ ‘rebel,’ ‘Jacobin,’ ‘Leveller,’ and ‘free-thinker,’ and these slippages persist in contemporary criticism. In addition, British radicalism was different from French, which was different again from Irish and American radicalism; and in all of these countries, radicalism went through several phases... (9)

Indeed, though there is virtually no disagreement that Brown was heavily influenced by William Godwin, even the appellation of “Godwinian” meant different things to different people at different times. Verhoeven notes that some identify Brown’s youthful radicalism not so much as Godwinian as tending toward Enlightenment skepticism. In fact, William Dunlap’s biography of Brown makes precisely this claim, complaining about Brown’s adherence to the radical philosophies not only of Godwin, but of French rationalists such as Rousseau. Indeed, while Godwin’s Gothic novel *Caleb Williams* is an oft-cited inspiration for Brown, *Wieland* also shows heavy borrowing from Rousseau, employing phrases lifted directly from the immensely popular epistolary novel *Julie: ou la nouvelle Héloïse*.

Yet despite the challenge of discerning what exactly is its political stance, the text and context of *Wieland* certainly point to an interest in politics. One would be hard pressed to deny this in light of the fact that Brown sent a copy of his first novel to then Vice President Thomas Jefferson upon publication, with a note saying, “In thus transmitting my book to you I tacitly acknowledge my belief that it is capable of affording you pleasure and of entitling the writer to some portion of your good opinion” (313). Despite its rather deferential tone, Brown’s letter goes

on to issue what might be read as a sly insult:

I am conscious, however, that this form of composition may be regarded by you with indifference or contempt, that social and intellectual theories, that the history of facts in the processes of nature and the operations of government may appear to you the only laudable pursuits; that fictitious narratives in their own nature or in the manner in which they have been hitherto conducted may be thought not to deserve notice, and that, consequently, whatever may be the merit of my book as a fiction, yet it is to be condemned because it is a fiction. (313)

Though this may seem like humility on the part of the author in the form of a nod to the intellectual pursuits of an accomplished politician, thinker, and sometime naturalist, it can also be understood as a dig at the excesses of Jefferson's seemingly laudable diversions: Jefferson was often characterized by his opponents as something of an intellectual prattler, a Romantic windbag whose academic interests interfered with his decision-making.

What Jefferson might reject as of little value was, to Brown, of utmost importance, as he made clear in several writings, including his oft-quoted introduction to *Edgar Huntly*, "To the Public," which (in a way not dissimilar to some of Jefferson's musings in *Notes on the State of Virginia*) characterizes the United States as a nation furnishing unique opportunities for instructive fiction:

The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible [to those in Europe]. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases of the

human frame. (*EH* 641)

Less frequently quoted but of equal value is the earlier introduction to *Wieland*. Before the narrative's commencement, Brown's "Advertisement" situates the novel—if not with complete clarity—historically and ideologically. Like "To the Public," the "Advertisement" also makes clear its intent to illustrate "some important branches of the moral constitution of man," characterizing Brown as one of the nation's "moral painters," whose duty it is "to exhibit their subject in its most instructive and memorable forms" (4). The book, from its start, declares itself didactic, aiming at more than a mere entertaining fiction, and of especial importance to the instruction of citizens of the new republic. That the "Advertisement" declares an aversion to being "classed with the ordinary or frivolous sources of amusement" rather than "ranked with the few productions whose usefulness secures them a lasting reputation" supports the case for an allegorical reading by insisting that the novel be read as more than a mere lurid tale of mass murder lifted from newspapers and complicated by a love story.

This allegory is further hinted at with a bevy of biblical allusions of varied explicitness; and the novel's opening epigraph, a verse written by Brown, reads

From Virtue's blissful paths away  
The double-tongued are sure to stray;  
Good is a forth-right journey still,  
And mazy paths but lead to ill. (3)

Foreshadowing the ventriloquism characteristic of the novel's primary antagonist, the "biloquist" (or ventriloquist) Francis Carwin, the phrase "double-tongued" alludes to 1 Timothy 3:8, which warns deacons against "double-tongued" speech. This verse is, then, simultaneously consistent with the Quaker preference for plain speech and the principle of sincerity as advocated in

William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, which argues, "If every man to-day would tell all the truth he knew, it is impossible to predict how short would be the reign of usurpation and folly" (254). A proto-anarchist individualist, Godwin advocated sincerity as a form of voluntary but necessary social cooperation in a philosophical corpus that repeatedly stressed distrust of established institutions.

### **Pennsylvania's Pious Saxons**

A born Quaker whose young adult distrust of revealed religion led to an affinity for Godwin's philosophy (which he later seemed to outgrow), Brown's reference to 1 Timothy 3:8 covers both secular and sacred fonts of inspiration while also setting the stage for a plot complicated by apparently devilish acts of ventriloquism. Indeed, *Caleb Williams* clearly influenced *Wieland* not only in its fictional content, but in its stated intent to make its author's philosophy more digestible to a novel-reading popular audience. Brown—a disaffected lawyer himself—borrowed from *Caleb Williams* not only a Gothic plot and aesthetic, but a didacticism that expresses intense distrust of the law as an institution capable of doing good, rectifying social wrongs, and pursuing truth or justice. For this artistic objective, Brown had already been criticized by contemporaries in the Friendly Club—a group of authors dedicated to forming an instructive national literature—and was harshly upbraided especially by Elihu Hubbard Smith for a "passion and inconsistency" that made him "the slave of hopes no less criminal than fantastic" (qtd. in Bauer).

Told through a series of letters written after the fact and compiled following the narrator's safe removal to Europe, *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale* centers on the story of Clara Wieland (the narrator) and her older brother Theodore (the novel's

namesake). Set between the French Indian War and the Revolutionary War, the novel's plot takes place at Mettingen, a rural Pennsylvania estate that the Wielands have inherited from a fanatically Calvinist missionary father who claimed to hear celestial voices before dying a mysterious death by apparent spontaneous combustion in his self-made Greek Revival temple.

The main action of the plot takes place several years later, after their mother's death. By this time, a well-rounded classical education has rendered both Wieland siblings well versed in the requisite ideals of the Enlightenment. Wieland exhibits signs of having inherited his father's somber reflection and religious devotion, but these tendencies are counterbalanced by an abiding interest in philosophy and science, and he marries Clara's closest (and seemingly only) friend, Catharine Pleyel. The Mettingen group is completed with the arrival from Europe of Henry Pleyel, Catharine's brother, whose fierce and irreverent skepticism provides a counterbalance to Wieland's melancholy religiosity, and they spend their days debating the finer points of abstruse texts and philosophies in happy isolation. Pleyel becomes Clara's unrequited love interest over time, and his atheistic skepticism a source of entertainment and enlightenment for the self-exiled group of friends.

Pleyel and Wieland's explorations of the grounds of belief move from mere academic exercises to a matter of urgency when unexplained voices begin to disrupt Mettingen's tranquil isolation. In the first incident, Wieland believes that he hears Catharine's voice calling him when he goes to retrieve a letter from the temple, only to find out that Catharine had never left the house. Though naturally inclined toward a supernatural explanation, Wieland accepts Pleyel's assertion that the voice was a simple momentary deception of the senses. This interpretation becomes difficult to maintain, however, when both Pleyel and Wieland hear the voice twice more, with the second instance notifying Pleyel that his lover in Europe has died. Clara also

begins to hear unexplained voices, including one incident in which she hears two male voices inside of her closet plotting her murder.

The commencement of voices coincides with the arrival at Mettingen of Francis Carwin, a shadowy character known to Pleyel through his travels in Spain. Carwin endears himself to the group, though it will eventually be revealed that he is the source of the voices, and possibly the cause of the novel's central tragedy when Wieland—echoing his father's engagement with supernatural voices—obeys what he believes to be the voice of God ordering him to execute his wife and children.

The novel's major crisis recalls “an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of Wieland” (Brown 4-5). This description refers to the case of James Yates, a member of the Shaker community in Tomhanick, New York, who murdered his wife and children at the behest of “two Spirits” (267). An article printed fifteen years after the fact in *New-York Weekly Magazine* contains details bearing a strong resemblance to the events described in *Wieland*, including such details as mysterious “effulgent” lights and a conflict between the father's love for his family and his devotion to God. As an inspiration for *Wieland*, the story of the Yates family furnishes a model for the basic narrative as well as several important themes explored throughout the novel. For example, the delay in reportage may have been a true inspiration for Brown's depiction of the difficulties that Clara Wieland experiences telling her story, due in large part to having received or relayed information late herself.

As with much of the novel's action—a constant recombination of similar mysterious incidents—Carwin's backstory fits the typically Gothic bill: an impoverished convert to Catholicism, he would be recognizable to the reader of Gothic novels as a character whose very presence should be a predictable cause for concern to the rich, Protestant, isolated inhabitants of



Mettingen. However, the rather derivative mode of setting up the novel's terrors by othering an undesirable figure is complicated by the German-American-ness of the Wielands.

As an element of the setting and a precursor to the main plot, the story of the Wieland family's origins in Germany provides some Gothic bona fides in the form of ruined nobles and an inherited sense of gloom: as Clara tells it, her and Theodore's grandfather is born to Saxon nobility and educated before being disowned for marrying the only daughter of a mysterious Hamburg merchant named Leonard Weise. In need of a mode of subsistence, he turns a childhood love of literature and music into a career composing sonatas and dramas in the Saxon dialect until his untimely death (followed shortly thereafter by his wife) "in the bloom of his life" (9). In a moment that makes a clear reference to both the biblical connotations of the subsequent narrative and to Brown's own stated project of constructing a national literature, Clara goes so far as to claim that her grandfather was "the founder of the German Theatre", adding that "The modern poet of the same name is sprung from the same family, and, perhaps, surpasses but little, in the fruitfulness of his invention, or the soundness of his taste, the elder Wieland" (9). The "modern poet" in question is Christoph Martin Wieland, author of the 1777 *Trial of Abraham* and an avowed German nationalist who advocated love of "the entire Reich" over fealty to individual German principedoms (qtd. in Fichte xiv). Sydney J. Krause points out that many of *Wieland's* references to the Binding of Isaac employ details that echo the English translation of *The Trial of Abraham*: the cedar-flanked altar at the summit of a hill, the use of words like "effulgence," and the emotional struggles of Theodore Wieland, for example, are all closer in their description to C.M. Wieland's account than that found in Genesis (Krause 99-100).

Krause's perceptive reading of the German presence in *Wieland* posits conflicting attitudes toward *The Trial of Abraham*. On one hand, Brown's contemporaneous letters

denouncing Christianity as a source of division and suffering suggest an ironic presentation of the Abrahamic tale, not least of all because he would not likely have been sympathetic to Herr Wieland's admonition that "the proper scope" of poetry should be "the advancement of religion" (qtd. in Krause 100). On the other hand, Brown's later writing reflects a fear of national disunity not unlike C.M. Wieland's proto-Romantic nationalism. This is perhaps best exemplified in his 1803 "Address to the government of the United States on the cession of Louisiana to the French," which partially blames unassimilated Frenchmen for sowing discord in the United States (Brown).<sup>9</sup> Noting that such sentiments would have been still more pertinent in 1798 during heated debates over the Alien and Sedition Acts, Krause argues that the novel is a fundamentally anti-German reflection of Brown's emerging chauvinistic Federalism (86).

Whether Krause is correct in reading Brown's "German novel" as an indicator of its author having fully transitioned from radical to conservative, the German roots of its protagonists (as opposed to Irish, the likely ethnicity of James Yates as well as the primary targets of the Alien and Sedition Acts) highlights an anxiety about German immigrants that persisted in Philadelphia during the decades spanning both the novel's plot and its publication. In 1753—when the novel's protagonists would have been children—Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to Peter Collinson, compared working class German immigrants to their English counterparts. Though the letter expresses admiration for the "habitual Industry and Frugality they bring with them," Franklin also laments that "Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation," and that a substantial German population in Pennsylvania has

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<sup>9</sup> Though 1803 was the year that France ceded the Louisiana territory to the United States, the Louisiana Purchase took place five months after the publication of Brown's "Address," which refers to the secret Spanish cession of Louisiana to the French in the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso of 1800. In the "Address," Brown attempts to stoke anger and foment war over the Spanish-French agreement by fabricating a story of a plot for Napoleon to invade New Orleans. Luckily, though perhaps confusingly for my dissertation, the Louisiana Purchase rendered Brown's bizarre attempt at propaganda obsolete.

conferred upon them political and economic influence without assimilation into Anglo-American society. (Franklin 407)

Every subsequent major political event provided fertile ground for anti-German stereotypes: when the French Indian War commenced the following year, many British colonials suspected German immigrants of sympathy with their continental European brethren; during the Revolution, despite the cooperation of many high profile Germans and widespread German Lutheran sympathy with Washington, Mennonite pacifism/Loyalism and Hessian mercenaries became most popularly emblematic of the German position in Philadelphia; and this animus carried over after the Revolution in both suspicions of lingering loyalty to the crown and resentment toward pacifist Mennonites for their refusal to serve on local militias. The era in which Brown wrote and published *Wieland* saw this widespread prejudice build upon all of the aforementioned causes, contradictory as they often were. As such, anti-German sentiment in the 1790s had no central feature or ideological valence; rather, it was justified as much by the perceived royalism of Mennonites and Germans' stereotypical inclination to tyranny as it was by the fear of republican German radicals aligned with post-Terror Jacobins and supposedly infiltrated by the Illuminati (Krause 91-92).

Yet, even taking into account Brown's later xenophobia and support for the (again, mainly anti-Irish) Alien and Sedition Acts, a wholesale denunciation of Germans on the grounds that Krause identifies seems rather unlikely given the ways in which Brown's own ideological loyalties intersect with those of the factions stereotypically associated with stigmatized German populations. Since American political discourse in the Early National period so often deployed the German as a trope for extreme positions on both ideological poles, examining the manifestations of these positions with which Brown harbored some sympathy illuminates how

German-ness in *Wieland* works alongside various historical and philosophical references to deliberately confound attempts to extract a clear political stance from the text.

On the radical and/or republican side, *Wieland*—despite its apparent conservatism—still has instances of un-ironic admiration for figures like Godwin and Rousseau. Godwin, as has already been noted, furnished for Brown an underlying anti-establishmentarian philosophical ideal, a strategy for delivering said ideal to a popular audience via Gothic romance, and even a courtroom scene to bring it all together. Rousseau’s contribution, according to Ralph Bauer, is the confessional mode of self-examining narration in *Wieland*, which Bauer attributes to Brown’s reading of *The Confessions*. More readily observable, though, is the presence of a phrase lifted almost verbatim from the English translation of *Julie: ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau’s wildly popular epistolary novel. “The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense,” Clara observes. “If the senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding.” (30) “Depravity of the senses” is a concept that Rousseau employs in his novel to ruminate on possible deficiencies in philosophical judgment due to mistaken *a priori* ideas. What constitutes depravity of the senses is a question posed implicitly throughout *Wieland*, not to mention an important problem undergirding the interplay of philosophies at play in the novel.

On the more conservative side, as Richard P. Moses argues, it would be remiss to ignore the traumatic impact of the Revolutionary War on Brown the Quaker, who, as a child, saw his community persecuted and his father exiled for alleged Toryism (21). The Quakers were aligned with the Mennonites in their pacifism and the two were often conflated in the eyes of many Philadelphians. So while readings of the German-ness of the *Wieland* family struggle to decipher whether it points to pro-or-anti-revolutionary sentiments, radical liberalism, reactionary

conservatism, anti-religious derision, or sympathy with marginalized Christian groups, it might be more useful to see this confusion as precisely the point. The intersection of German ethnicity, religious fervor, and Enlightenment philosophy is not only confusing within the novel, but significantly vexing within the historical worlds that it both depicted and inhabited. Jane Tompkins has argued that, “As the telegraphic expression of complex clusters of value, stereotyped characters are *essential* to popularly successful narrative” (xvi). As we will see in this dissertation’s later chapters, stereotypes do, in fact operate as clusters of value—the Connecticut Yankee as illustrated by both Royall Tyler and Washington Irving, for example—which illuminate aspects of a text’s meaning by carrying enough expository weight to deliver great amounts of meaning in relatively small spaces. What we see in *Wieland*, however, is not a straightforward deployment of stereotypes as clusters of value. Rather, the complexity of a trope like German ethnicity challenges readers to not only interpret its implications but to evaluate their own prejudices with regard to German-ness.

What *Wieland* ultimately performs with its heavy Germanic suggestiveness is what Steven Mailloux might describe as “teaching the reader to read” (36). Indeed, Clara’s later insistence that her implied interlocutors judge the epistolary novel’s events makes it a terrific example of a text wherein “the reader’s response is a topic of the story” (Mailloux 44). The stereotypical implications of the novel’s German-ness employ the rhetorical tactic of setting up reader expectations so as to deliberately disappoint them and create “disorientation [as] an authorial means for a more significant end, such as the moral trial of the reader” (Mailloux 48). As “complex clusters of value,” *Wieland*’s German-ness both triggers familiar stereotypical understandings of “the German” and collides with other clusters of value such as Protestant history, Enlightenment philosophy, and Pennsylvania history—a series of collisions which

complicate otherwise simplistic interpretations of German characters in a Gothic novel. By urging readers to make sense of this confluence of factors, *Wieland* does not merely comment on but also enacts the many areas of ambivalence that plagued the young republic by forcing readers to interrogate their own understanding of interactions between various ethnic groups, philosophies, political ideologies, and faith profiles.

A sense of ambivalence permeates much of Brown's work, but none more so than this first novel, whose depiction of German-Americans most plays on the intersection of American politics and various European religious movements and the fact that, as Moses observes, "the ingrown Quaker community in the city of Philadelphia represented a peculiar people withdrawn from the world around them except in trade... (18)." We see echoes of that withdrawal in the Wielands' isolation at their rural Pennsylvania estate, Mettingen, with its roots in the elder Wieland's peculiarly Franco-Germanic religious fanaticism.

After his father's death, the elder Wieland—then a child—is placed under the care of his grandfather, Leonard Weise, whose tutelage is described as unpleasant and oppressive for the boy:

He was treated with rigor, and full employment was provided for every hour of his time. His duties were laborious and mechanical. He had been educated with a view to this profession, and, therefore, was not tormented with unsatisfied desires. He did not hold his present occupations in abhorrence, because they withheld him from paths more flowery and more smooth, but he found in unremitted labour, and in the sternness of his master, sufficient occasions for discontent. No opportunities of recreation were allowed him. He spent all his time pent up in a gloomy apartment, or traversing narrow and crowded streets. His food was coarse,

and his lodging humble. (9)

The boy “gradually contract[s] a habit of morose and gloomy reflection” and is generally ignorant as to what is “wanting to his happiness” (9). This, then, establishes the Wieland family patriarch as a virtually enslaved captive of a mysterious grandfather and propels him toward excessive piety.

Clara’s properly (some of Brown’s contemporaries and many subsequent critics would say derivatively) Gothic description of the elder Wieland’s upbringing gives some credence to the truism that *Wieland* is, first and foremost, an anti-religious text. That Clara describes her father as being ignorant of the power books “possessed to delight or instruct” primes readers for the danger of fanaticism, makes a Horatian reference which reinforces the didacticism of Brown’s horror story, and reveals the elder Wieland’s naïve ignorance (9). It also sets in motion a string of family inheritances: the union between an erudite and artistic Wieland of noble Saxon birth with the daughter of a merchant produces a son who is raised to be stern, humorless, morose, and disciplined, and who—like his own son later—becomes a religious fanatic due to the books that he reads. At one point Clara says of her father’s faith,

His understanding had received a particular direction. All his reveries were fashioned in the same mould. His progress towards the formation of his creed was rapid. Every fact and sentiment in this book [the Bible] were viewed through a medium which the writings of the Camisard apostle had suggested. (10)

Foreshadowing Theodore’s fanaticism, this description of the elder Wieland’s faith strongly hints at a future predetermined by coercive ideologies mediated through questionable interlocutors. The father’s religion thrives on a sense of fear and constant awe, and so is at odds with the Enlightenment deism that Theodore and Clara later develop in their comfortable utopian

existence at Mettingen. In addition to providing the haunted gloom on which the novel's tone relies, this allusion to a "Camisard apostle" ties the Wielands' various brushes with fanaticism to historical movements and locates the family's ideological origins at the sites of political and religious strife, a theme expanded upon when the elder Wieland is described as happening upon "a book written by one of the teachers of the Albigenses, or French Protestants" (Brown 9).

The Albigensians were a medieval sect of neo-Manichean heretics from southern France who, in the early thirteenth century, faced elimination in a twenty year-long military campaign initiated by Pope Innocent III and led by several religious orders in an attempt to both stamp out heresy and bring the county of Toulouse under control of the French crown. Also from southern France, the Camisards were an apocalyptic sect of Huguenots who revolted after the 1685 Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the Edict of Nantes and subjected all Protestants in France to violent persecution. Labeling their leaders "prophets," the Camisards were particularly reviled by Catholics and even denounced by other Protestants, and were embroiled in heavy fighting until about 1710. As is the case with their Saxon ethnic origins, the Wielands' rootedness in these French heresies conjures a number of associations that may split in either direction on the ideological spectrum. When contrasted with Enlightenment philosophies and considered as the origin of the religious fanaticism in *Wieland*, such millenarian associations strike a note of religious fundamentalism and regression. However, these particular brands of militant religiosity are also intimately linked with reform and rebellion against orthodoxy; and so, foreshadowing much of the thematic layering that takes place in the novel, the Wielands' religious lineage seems to combine depictions of religious and revolutionary fervor, as the Albigensians and Camisards—unlike the Pennsylvania Quakers—reacted to persecution with acts that took on great political significance and led to major revolts. Melancholy German though he may be, the



sources of the elder Wieland's faith tie him to a history of French radicalism.

Edwin Sill Fussel has made the connection between Brown's depiction of fanatical evangelical Protestantism and revolutionary fervor, but reads it mainly as an analogy whereby the religious fanaticism of the Wieland men is symbolic of the dangers of revolutionary action and post-revolutionary chaos. In Fussel's reading, Carwin is the revolutionary author, a symbolic amalgam of Jefferson and Robespierre, and Wieland is the foolish countryman easily led astray. Such a reading interprets the misguided faith of the Wielands as a metaphor for the young nation's naïve acceptance of the Revolution, a radical Enlightenment position at the opposite end of the spectrum from orthodox ideologies, and a source of post-Revolutionary chaos; but this fails to account for how multifaceted these associations can be, or how committed Brown's novel is to saddling characters with such ideologically fraught backgrounds. Rather, the elder Wieland's combined legacy of French radicalism and German pietism, of American bourgeois egalitarianism and colonial domination, all make up one legacy to be passed on to his offspring. Just as Gothic setting and the overarching biblical allusion both point to the symbolic importance of inheritance and family history, the religious and political forms that radicalism takes in the history of the Wielands should not be seen as separate symbolic items but rather combined pieces of a familial—and national—patchwork.

This symbolic layering of various elements of the Wieland family's history is seen in Clara's exposition about her father's religious awakening. By immersing himself in the Albigensian heresy, the elder Wieland is inspired to do missionary work, especially when he happens upon the synoptic gospel directive to "Seek and ye shall find" in a Camisard text (10). In a study perhaps detailed enough to satisfy the same biblical admonition, Peter Kafer shows that the link between German immigrants, French Protestants, and Pennsylvania Quakers is not a

random assemblage of pious signifiers but rather a carefully curated series of allusions to figures with links to Brown's family and persecuted community. Anthony Benezet, a friend of the Brown family best known as the radical Quaker who founded the first American abolitionist society, was closely associated with the Camisards (Kafer 114). Also, as described in *Wieland*, Mettingen appears to be located at the spot outside of Philadelphia where German radical pietists had joined their colony to an already existing pietist settlement. The lives of the founders of those settlements—often referred to as “seekers”—match closely the story of how the elder Wieland heads down a path to fanaticism. Kafer argues that the elder Wieland's story might be read as a generic telling of the spiritual journey of hundreds of seekers from Pennsylvania history. Even his premonitions—and the eventual manifestation—of “a strange and terrible death” echo intense visions of light and fire recorded by such renowned seekers as John Woolman, John Churchman, Johannes Kelpius, George Fox, and even William Penn (Kafer 113). As Christopher Looby puts it, the elder Wieland “represents a *reductio ad absurdum* of antinomian religious enthusiasm as well as what might be called the limit case of the displacement of a decaying public sphere by private familial life” (149).

By linking the elder Wieland's solitary fanaticism to historical revolutionary Protestant movements, *Wieland* establishes the groundwork for both a typology of fanaticism and the recurrent tropes on which its Gothic aesthetic hinges. That is, the perpetual gloom, apparent haunting, and prophetic voices which emerge over the course of the novel stem from the elder Wieland's religious fervor; but this fervor also establishes him as an early Abrahamic figure against whom the symbolic valence of the tale's various biblical allusions will be measured throughout.

## **Isolation, Inheritance, Education**

In contrast to their father, the Wieland siblings are given a rounded classical liberal education and grow up to embody something approaching the ideal of American Enlightenment deism. However, this too is a form of inheritance and symbolism that proves to be far more layered than a simple chronology, since even apart from the familiar evolution from Calvinism to Enlightenment deism, the utopian deist paradise that Clara sees in Mettingen is not separate from the father's past—rather, it is a direct material result of a history of agrarian (and enslaved) labor resulting in not only the estate but the leisure to develop his fanatical belief without interruption. The displaced, decaying public sphere identified by Looby is not merely the result of melancholy religious gloom, but a bourgeois affectation: with adequate means, the Wielands can afford to choose their relationship with the public sphere, and they choose to reject it. At Mettingen, what leads to a tendency toward fanaticism is an excess of leisure, since the father is able to take up his religious mission and subsequent devotion as a result of his previous industry. In this way, the inheritance left by the elder Wieland for his children is manifold: a gloomy temperament, an isolated retreat, and the financial stability to be able to pursue one's interests without interruption or without concern for the world at large. Indeed, where the elder Wieland departs from the histories that his fanaticism references is in his fiercely nondenominational isolation, which provides both the reason for his temple and the legacy that he bequeaths to his all-too-sheltered children.

The avoidance of outside interference is emphasized long before the events of the main plot, but the father's devotion also foreshadows his children's behavior in relation to the world at large:

He rigidly interpreted that precept which enjoins us, when we worship, to retire

into solitude, and shut out every species of society. According to him, devotion was not only a silent office, but must be performed alone. An hour at noon, and an hour at midnight were thus appropriated. (12)

Alluding to Matthew 6:6, this description of the father's worship presages his children's isolation at Mettingen. Emphasizing the insularity with which the Wielands and their social circle distance themselves from and aestheticize the world in which they live, Brown stresses the significance of the historical moment by setting the story in between the French-Indian War and the Revolution, bringing to mind associations relevant to issues of national identity. This historical setting situates the plot in a transition toward the Revolution, but one with very specific linguistic and cultural implications in addition to the obvious political ones. As Clara describes the French-Indian War, "The Indians were repulsed on one side, and Canada was conquered on the other" (23). As with the Wielands' German-American lineage and French Protestant religious forebears, the historical setting raises issues of ethnicity, language, and national identity in the young republic by referring to the legacy from which it has sprung. The French-Indian War secured British cultural hegemony over the North American colonies, and in the process made British social institutions and the English language predominate the diversely populated colonies. Paradoxically, the strengthening of English as the dominant cultural idiom did not strengthen ties with the colonies. Rather, its military triumphs—led and fought in large part by colonists—emboldened independence-oriented colonials precisely when the crown was both cash-poor and inclined toward flexing its muscles. Thus, the historical backdrop to *Wieland* is a series of political, economic, and military events coeval with and linked to emergent philosophies encouraging individual rights, popular sovereignty, and social contract theories espoused mainly by British and French thinkers.

The significance of isolation for the novel's political commentary, and its exemplification in the historical setting between a war for colonial hegemony and a war for national independence, cannot be overemphasized. By setting the plot "between the conclusion of the French and the beginning of the revolutionary war," *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale*, draws special attention to the historical and political implications of its subtitles, and in so doing especially points to the complete non-involvement of its protagonists in the distinctly American transformations taking place (Brown 5). Roberta Weldon reads the isolation of Wieland, Catharine, and Clara as a metaphor for "the alienation of an entire family who are pursuing the philosophy of individual perfection as a social model," and observes that "It is rather disconcerting that the Wieland family lacks any substantial feeling about the Colonial crisis and about the fate of those involved in the war" (4). With disturbingly strong hints at incestuous (though implicit and repressed) desires between the Wieland siblings, Clara's narration suggests the detrimental effects of isolation even as she describes it as a utopian arrangement. This shuts the residents of Mettingen off from the world, creating a situation in which outsiders are perhaps too welcome, and at least severely misunderstood, without which the novel's events would not likely have taken place.

To Clara, Theodore, Pleyel, and Catharine, the war is little more than an opportunity for aesthetic speculation, as we see when Clara rather callously remarks that, "Revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation" (23). This is made ironic when Clara muses that the group members "were frequently reminded how much happiness depends upon society" (23). Anthony Galluzzo notes that Clara Wieland's retrospective account portrays the Wielands and Pleyels as understanding the French and Indian

war in primarily imaginative, aesthetic terms; and that her aestheticization of the distant war exemplifies the sublime as described by both Kant and Burke: an ideal pondered from a safe distance, and—much like the Gothic novel—a terror that pleases (255). The Wielands, Galluzzo argues, “reconstitute the *ancien regime* in the new world,” and it is this pseudo-aristocratic utopian isolation that eventually allows for Carwin—described in so many ways as a proverbial forked-tongued snake in their Garden of Eden—to infiltrate their circle (258).

As to *Wieland*'s philosophical underpinnings, implicit though rather clear in the novel's interpretive problems is an exhibition of various Enlightenment ideals at crosscurrents in the words and actions of the Mettingen group. If Clara Wieland's concern is that her senses may be depraved, the problem is a classic issue of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Empiricism, with her stated epistemological outlook being a clearly articulated instance of Lockean sensational psychology. Everything about the ways in which Clara proposes to evaluate evidence and memories—as well as her despair at subsequent failures to do so—is rooted in an understanding of the senses and sensual perceptions as the source of knowledge and the precursor to reason. Clara's worry about depraved senses expresses a fear of non-empirical *a priori* notions that taint one's ability to reason even from clear sense perceptions. Furthermore, Clara's “depraved” homage to Rousseau highlights the French sensualist augmentation to Lockean epistemology, as the sensualists viewed refinement of the senses as the Enlightenment's primary project and the key to perfecting humanity. Thus we see the Wielands represent these ideals in their moral, religious, political, and philosophical opinions, all of which are described as being instilled through a classical liberal education and refined through rigorous debates and artistic expression at Mettingen.

The intersection of Locke and Rousseau also sheds light on contemporaneous political ideals that find expression in the novel's mysteries, as Locke and Rousseau build upon the

theories of Thomas Hobbes to develop an ever more egalitarian form of Social Contract theory (267). As the economist James Devine summarizes it, Hobbes's Social Contract theory subordinates individual rights to the power of the monarch in the interest of preventing chaos; Locke mistrusts the monarch's power and subordinates the sovereign to the people, but also considers property rights part of Natural Law and a sufficient means of determining social order and hierarchy; Rousseau sees in Locke's presumptions the potential for conflict over resources, and aims to level all by prioritizing individual sovereignty over all else and determining that the Social Contract and human nature itself are social creations which are invented and can be molded by humans (267-68). Although Clara is explicitly a Lockean throughout, the failures of her senses and judgment reveal ruptures in the philosophy that she purports to follow. As such, the events that unfold at Mettingen enact an internal debate that performs a number of philosophical, political positions—from Hobbesian tyranny to Godwinian anarchism—in circulation at the time of *Wieland's* writing and publication.

The political and philosophical debates implied in the text are especially important when considering that the Mettingen group lives in a state of self-imposed exile, shielded from matters crucial to national identity and steeped in seemingly contradictory ideals: French-influenced, Latin-loving, German-English-American, the Wielands find themselves isolated from all of the most important military action in between the final ascension of British culture and the rise of the American Revolution. As to the education received during this exile, Shirley Samuels has pointed out that, following their parents' deaths, the Wieland children's upbringing by a nanny was in the style of the Enlightenment; and indeed, Theodore and Pleyel's tendency as adults to obsessively argue about Cicero reflects a preoccupation with classical republican rhetoric and philosophy, rounding out the proto-American allusions made in the Wielands' Franco-Calvinist,

Anglo-Saxon origins (394). There is no surer sign of Wieland's stake in the enterprise of the Enlightenment (via classical education) than his veneration for Cicero, a bust of whom is placed in the now secularized neoclassical temple (22). Wieland and Pleyel thus represent the classical education expected of the intelligentsia in the young republic, most of whom were members of the legal profession. Because an early American lawyer at the highest level was expected to accumulate a vast body of knowledge and order it into workable rational systems, a narrowly specialized education was considered a weakness for lawyers, who under this form of education were consistently ranked among the most well-read and roundly educated citizens of the post-Revolutionary United States. As a result, the nation's literati consisted mainly of lawyers or politicians with legal training.

Given the prevalence of lawyers active in American literature, Brown may have been—as Robert A. Ferguson argues—taking shots at his rejected profession in favor of authorship on its own (130-40). However, one need not read authorial biography into the novel to see the significance of Wieland and Pleyel's intellectual pursuits. In a study of classical education in early America, Carl J. Richard shows that the conditioning of the “founding fathers” from the late sixteenth through the nineteenth century was remarkably consistent in its inclusion of certain works (12-38). From Jefferson and Madison to all of the Trumbulls, John Winthrop, and Noah Webster, there were some variations in the syllabi, but every single one was steeped in Ciceronian rhetoric. Thus the novel's depiction of Wieland and Pleyel's conversations is not a mere review of a general classicism, but a representation of the curricula from which the professional, political, and literary classes constructed national institutions, ideals, arts, and culture.

Clara effectively describes the Wielands' religious beliefs as an identifiable form of



Enlightenment deism, saying,

Our education had been modeled by no religious standard. We were left to the guidance of our own understanding, and the casual impressions which society might make upon us...It must not be supposed that we were without religion, but with us it was the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature. We sought not a basis for our faith, in the weighing of proofs, and the dissection of creeds (20).

Yet despite sharing this background, Theodore's inherited melancholy contrasts strongly with the attitude of his sister, not to mention that of his wife and brother-in-law. Notwithstanding Clara's insistence that the future was of no concern to the group at Mettingen, Theodore Wieland proves an exception. "The future," says Clara, "either as anterior, or subsequent to death, was a scene that required some preparation and provision to be made for it. These positions we could not deny, but what distinguished him was a propensity to ruminate on these truths" (21).

Also in direct contrast to his peers, Theodore "deemed it indispensable to examine the grounds of his belief..." (21) The need to "examine the grounds of his belief" is multivalent, its meaning dependent on one's interpretation of Theodore Wieland's relationship to faith, skepticism, and the principles of the Enlightenment. Unlike his father, Wieland's examination of the basis of understanding includes not only faith but also the secular, and he dedicates himself to the tireless study of Latin and Ciceronian oratory. Pleyel is his atheistic counterpart here, and they spend much time in debate. While on one hand Wieland's concern with "the grounds of his belief" implies an obsession with foundational texts inherited from his fanatical father, it also denotes a careful evaluation of those foundations, an enterprise in keeping with the empirical, enlightened approach of the others at Mettingen.

Still, although Theodore Wieland is not described as the misguided fanatic that we see in his father, he is, at Mettingen, the proponent of faith and a foil to the atheistic Pleyel:

Where one discovered only confirmations of his faith, the other could find nothing but reasons for doubt. Moral necessity, and calvinistic inspiration, were the props on which my brother thought proper to repose. Pleyel was the champion of intellectual liberty, and rejected all guidance but that of his reason. (23)

The similarities between Theodore and his father (and so the hint of his having inherited the unfinished duty to God) do not go unnoticed, as Clara notes that

There was an obvious resemblance between him and my father, in their conceptions of the importance of certain topics, and in the light in which the vicissitudes of human life were accustomed to be viewed. Their characters were similar, but the mind of the son was enriched by science, and embellished with literature. (21)

While his scientific and literary enrichment identifies Wieland as of a different time (and class) from his father, Clara's description also labels an essence that marks him as of a particular type. This is especially important when considering the conflicts both within the text and in its various interpretations, as it seems to simultaneously raise and then reconcile a paradox. The conflict between the sacred and the secular is often read as playing out between Wieland and Pleyel, but it would be just as accurate to say that it plays out most importantly within Wieland himself. This conflicted characterization of Wieland puts him between secular Enlightenment progress and religious traditionalism; but while the novel is typically read as favoring skepticism over faith, Wieland's dueling interests point to a novel that does not so much look forward or backward as it enacts a cyclical story and encourages a cyclical reading. This is just as true in form as in

content, as both the Gothic and typological modes warrant such readings: in Wieland's intellectual pursuits as well as his faith, in his economic circumstances as well as his melancholy disposition, and in his symbolic resonance as Enlightenment deist or Abrahamic antitype, the tale told is one of inheritance. By telling a story that is both Gothic romance and typological exercise, *Wieland* engages issues of ethnic, political, philosophical, and religious identity in the young republic by both pulling events out of historical time via Gothic/typological cycles *and* highlighting the ways in which these cycles are themselves markers of the historical development of those identities.

The perceived conflict between the sacred and secular—or, perhaps more accurately, belief and non-belief—is emphasized repeatedly in the perpetual conversations and debates that take place in the temple at Mettingen. The debates are largely academic—such as a highly symbolic argument in which Pleyel and Wieland disagree as to whether the family saga of Cicero's oration for Cluentius should be read as an allegory for an entire nation—and the argumentative style rooted in empirical, rational data. In fact, from the start, Clara's narration emphasizes nothing so much as her insistence on an epistemology rooted in empiricism, sincerity, and dispassionate judgment:

I acknowledge your right to be informed of the events that have lately happened in my family. Make what use of the tale you shall think proper. If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit. It will exemplify the force of early impressions, and show the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline. (7)

In both its focus on early impressions and its hope to educate, Clara's stated intention is thoroughly and explicitly Lockean; in its fear of the social repercussions of deceit, it subscribes

to the necessary causality of Godwin's radical idealism. However, as Edward Cahill points out, the omission of any details in between the elder Wieland's death and the younger Wieland's isolated utopian adulthood at Mettingen leaves the reader with no sense as to what are the early impressions or imperfect discipline from which immeasurable evils have flowed (42). Whereas the elder Wieland's fanatical roots are traced to the Camisard text, Theodore Wieland's "early impressions"—or those of anyone at Mettingen—remain a mystery.

### **Mediation and Skepticism**

Another area in which *Wieland* deliberately sows confusion is in its narration. Before the main plot unfolds to reveal acts of ventriloquism and misjudgment due to deception, Clara signals a need for caution with regards to the inaccuracies born of mediation. In the hands of a clearly shaken and emotional narrator, the epistolary mode already gives the reader pause, more so because she brings repeated attention from the start to the strangeness of her story and insists upon the existence and importance of corroborating evidence. This skepticism extends to the treatment of texts. For example, the exposition about the elder Wieland, in its implied indictment of his Manichean mode of Christianity, gestures toward the dangers of mediation; and this emphasis on the mediated word continues with Clara's account of her father's last day when she remarks, "My mother's brother, whose profession was that of a surgeon, chanced to spend the night at our house. It was from him that I have frequently received an exact account of the mournful catastrophe that followed" (14). As has been the case since the book's opening, Clara's insistence upon the reliability of the information being presented has quite the opposite of its intended effect by pointing to how removed she is from the events being reported. Even the phrase "my mother's brother" instead of "uncle" works to put as many layers between the

narrative and the reader as possible.

Ultimately, the uncle's credibility as storyteller stems entirely from his seemingly unrelated profession as a surgeon. This matters, we see, when the father is stricken by some mysterious force and our source for a description of the event is the uncle's account of the stricken father's dying words:

By his imperfect account, it appeared, that while engaged in silent orisons, with thoughts full of confusion and anxiety, a faint gleam suddenly shot athwart the apartment. His fancy immediately pictured to itself, a person bearing a lamp. It seemed to come from behind. He was in the act of turning to examine the visitant, when his right arm received a blow from a heavy club. At the same instant, a very bright spark was seen to light upon his clothes. In a moment, the whole was reduced to ashes. This was the sum of the information which he chose to give.

There was somewhat in his manner that indicated an imperfect tale. My uncle was inclined to believe that half the truth had been suppressed. (17)

As Clara tells it, the uncle cannot be doubted. "My uncle's testimony is peculiarly worthy of credit," she insists, "because no man's temper is more sceptical, and his belief is unalterably attached to natural causes" (18). With this, Clara declares a position in the tug-of-war taking place between religion and the scientific approach of Enlightenment empiricist thinking. In so doing, she also introduces a forensic approach that will shape the narration of the events to come.

In keeping with the forensic approach introduced in the episode of her father's death, Clara insists repeatedly throughout the narrative that her judgments are based on the principles of a well-informed and sincere empiricism. However, this approach is made problematic by the fact that very little of what Clara details is experienced firsthand or with any certainty. Her uncle's

account of the elder Wieland's death, for example, is not received until six years after the fact. This ostensible commitment to strict empiricism becomes, more than anything else, the central problem of the novel once its protagonists are confronted with disembodied voices. Because the first voice is heard only by Wieland, there is a chance that it is illusory, a mere "chimera of the mind." However, the second incident involves Pleyel, which enlists the rational benefits of both corroboration and—as was the case with the uncle—the eyewitness account of an avowed skeptic. Faced with this seemingly nonsensical but (to her) logically incontrovertible evidence, Clara muses thusly on "tales of apparitions and enchantments":

I saw nothing in them but ignorance and folly, and was a stranger even to that terror which is pleasing. But this incident was different from any that I had ever before known. Here were proofs of a sensible and intelligent existence, which could not be denied. Here was information obtained and imparted by means unquestionably super-human. (38)

"That there are conscious beings," she continues, "beside ourselves, in existence, whose modes of activity and information surpass our own, can scarcely be denied" (38). Clara is thus forced to either admit the corroborated evidence or dismiss both Pleyel and Wieland as deluded, which she knows *a priori* not to be true. Whereas Wieland's solitary voice might be doubted, the corroboration of a notoriously skeptical Pleyel is admissible evidence for Clara; and so, based on the very principles of empiricism and rationalism by which she would have originally rejected such chimeras, our narrator is forced to admit belief.

The character of Carwin, once he enters the scene, both furthers and muddles the contrast between the sacred and secular, given that he is described as remarkably intelligent, with a capacity for great insight and acute reasoning; but also as a convert to Catholicism, a trait seen as

contradicting any of those more enlightened tendencies. It is a typical Enlightenment Protestant qualm and of course a red flag for Gothic villainy, but in this case such a “*transformation*” (italics Brown’s) makes of Carwin a suspicious, mysterious character specifically as opposed to the classically educated and stringently isolated Mettingen group (55). The matter of Carwin’s papism vexes Clara enormously, and she obsesses over it for the duration of a chapter. This obsession continues with the whole group when Carwin joins them in their gatherings at the temple. Goaded on by a curiosity born of their insularity, their conversations make for an unusually careful attention to the details of his personality. “Not a gesture, or glance, or accent,” says Clara, “that was not, in our private assemblies, discussed, and inferences deduced from it” (57). For his part, Carwin’s contributions to conversation and replies to personal queries are described as carefully balanced between candor and discretion, Ciceronian artfulness and Godwinian sincerity:

All topics were handled by him with skill, and without pedantry or affectation. He uttered no sentiment calculated to produce a disadvantageous impression: on the contrary, his observations denoted a mind so alive to every generous and heroic feeling. They were introduced without parade, and accompanied with that degree of earnestness which indicates sincerity. (57)

The Enlightenment rhetoric of empiricism persists when the group discusses the mysterious voices, as Carwin agrees that supernatural voices might communicate with humans, which is described as a deduction “from his own reasonings” (59). In his telling of these reasonings, he is described as a master orator whose “narratives were constructed with so much skill, and rehearsed with so much energy, that all the effects of a dramatic exhibition were frequently produced by them” (59). At this point, though, Carwin also introduces the idea of

ventriloquism, noting that such mimicry is a common practice. In addition to acting as an early hint at Carwin's deceptions, this conversation works retrospectively as a case for rejecting the notion that any of Mettingen's regular inhabitants might be seen as avatars of reason. No matter their personal character traits and faith profile, all of the Mettingen regulars display a credulity derived from their exceptionally sheltered existence; a point Clara acknowledges when she wonders, in response to Carwin's description of ventriloquism, "How imperfectly acquainted were we with the condition and designs of the beings that surrounded us? (60)" Though Carwin certainly emerges as the villain of this novel, it is difficult to read lines like these as flattering to the intelligence of a group of characters so easily duped as this one. Entirely removed from whatever struggles exist—colonial or independent—the Mettingen group is, despite its purported intellectual curiosity, a rather ignorant bunch. By contrast, Clara describes Carwin thusly: "No man possessed a larger store of knowledge, or a greater degree of skill in the communication of it to others: Hence he was regarded as an inestimable addition to our society" (61). It is telling that Carwin's inestimable importance to the group is despite a constant "gravity" which leads to an "uncertainty whether this fellowship tended to good or evil" (61). If this is a judgment applied in retrospect, then Clara casts doubt on her own memory and judgment; if it was actually applied by the group during the events of the plot, then their judgment as a whole is highly suspect throughout the novel's events.

Clara's legalistic, forensic approach to recounting and judging the plot's events makes her, in Fussell's interpretation, an analogue to the nation's founding documents. Pleyel's description of Clara as a model of virtue and "transcendent intelligence" follows the rhetoric that permeated discussions of the Constitution, and Fussell describes it as "an infatuated version of *The Federalist Papers*" (387). To be sure, Clara's dogmatic reliance on syllogism for making



sense of the novel's incidents might be read as a hyperbolic representation of the logic of the Declaration of Independence, thus reinforcing an allegory about a nation newly founded on the authority of a series of documents. In fact, it is precisely as an allegory about the nation's foundational documents that the novel's biblical allusions should be considered, for Genesis 19—the Binding of Isaac, or *Akedah*—is itself the story of the founding of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the manifestation of the covenant on which the nation of Israel is to be founded. The audience's attention is drawn to this most explicitly with the central tragedy, but the biblical parallels are suggested throughout.

**“If the senses be depraved...”**

One night when Clara is in bed, she hears a voice near her. After realizing that it cannot be the servant, she hears two voices in the closet arguing about how to murder her—one favors suffocation and the other shooting. After fleeing, fainting at her brother's house, and waking, Clara recounts the experience and the men go to investigate. They find nothing, but to Clara this verifies that all of the previous voices were real, and she stops questioning those heard by Wieland and Pleyel.

Later, Clara again hears one of the voices from the closet assuring her that he will not hurt her. Although the voices will all turn out to be Carwin's, this scene obliquely foreshadows the novel's central tragedy by containing clear echoes of the *Akedah*. The admonition to “Hold! Hold!” is itself similar to the angel of God's “Abraham! Abraham!” and the voice advises Clara to “be not terrified” of “A friend; one come, not to injure, but to save you...(51).” The voice then concludes by warning, “Remember your father, and be faithful (51).” The analogy does not map cleanly onto the biblical story, though, as Clara occupies the spot of Abraham in taking

orders from the voice but of Isaac in being nearly killed; the voice is God in its original order, Abraham in its near-murderous incarnation, and the saving angel in its admonition to hold; and elder Wieland stands in for the father in both of that word's Abrahamic connotations: God, to whom one must have faith, and Abraham, the patriarch whose memory is the origin of faith. The analogues are imbricated and confused, but the reference is clear. The syntax is explicitly allusive, and the meaning of the allusion is convoluted.

Given that the story revolves around a tragedy that also alludes to the *Akedah*, the reader is drawn to interpret the reference, and yet the evidence is difficult to decipher. In this way, the story enacts the cyclical narrative typical of both Gothic romance and biblical typology. The Gothic and typological understandings of history both resist straightforward narratives of progress, rather coming back constantly to incidents and characterizations that recall similar moments elsewhere in the text. As with the cycles in both the Gothic and biblical narratives, the typology set up by *Wieland* muddles beginnings and ends by evoking readings that refer to typological antecedents not only outside of the text but also within its narrative in a constant self-referential feedback loop. The reader is thus implicated in the interpretive endeavor, but based on possible allegorical valences rather than the characters' superstitions, inferences, or perceived data. In so many words, the reader is asked—rather than told—what *Wieland* is about.

The biblical allusions near the end of the novel are merely the most clear of a series of such references starting at the beginning of the expository narrative. Though it becomes far more apparent after the novel's climactic tragedy, the description of the elder Wieland's devotion has strong Abrahamic overtones. Among more obvious similarities that emerge with revelations of divine commands and Theodore's filicide, the location of the elder Wieland's temple at the top of a hill echoes Abraham's altar atop Mount Moriah, as is emphasized with a small tension-

building detail: when the elder Wieland ventures up the hill to face his vaguely foretold doom, his wife stays behind despite her concern because “He was going to a place whither no power on earth could induce him to suffer an attendant” (15). This brings to mind Genesis 22:5, when Abraham admonishes his servants to stay behind while he scales the mountain. Unlike the biblical Abraham, however, the elder Wieland in this case is described in a state of having failed to fulfill his covenant with God. Recalling the days before his death, Clara describes her father as more melancholy than usual and largely uncommunicative. When he finally does speak, he expresses a sense of “deviation from his duty”:

A command had been laid upon him, which he had delayed to perform. He felt as if a certain period of hesitation and reluctance had been allowed him, but that this period was passed. He was no longer permitted to obey. The duty assigned to him was transferred, in consequence of his disobedience, to another, and all that remained was to endure the penalty. (13)

This “deviation,” we are led to believe, leads to the father’s death under completely mystifying circumstances. Yet though the elder Wieland fails to heed his supernatural call to duty, the implication that its consequences will be passed on to future generations is very much in keeping with the allusions to Abraham and his covenant with God. This transferred prophecy comprises as clear an inheritance as Wieland’s gloom or the elder Wieland’s estate, and permeates every subsequent mystery.

After the incident with the “murderers,” Clara articulates doubts that might be applied to her own words and even her senses, admitting,

What I have related will, no doubt, appear to you a fable. You will believe that calamity has subverted my reason, and that I am amusing you with the chimeras

of my brain, instead of facts that have really happened. I shall not be surprized or offended, if these be your suspicions. I know not, indeed, how you can deny them admission. For, if to me, the immediate witness, they were fertile of perplexity and doubt, how must they affect another to whom they are recommended only by my testimony? (53)

As before, however, she goes on to introduce corroborating evidence as having the potential to dispel these doubts, adding, “It was only by subsequent events, that I was fully and incontestably assured of the veracity of my senses” (53).

Additionally, the reliability of Clara’s forensic approach is repeatedly compromised by the frequency with which she finds herself unable to recall or describe the thing to which she bears testimony. For example, when discussing the subplot of the orphaned Louisa Conway, Clara seems at a constant a loss for words, tempering each attempt to narrate with phrases like “I cannot do justice,” “It is impossible to describe,” and “Who shall describe” (25). Tellingly enough, the first instance of Carwin’s voices occurs right after this revealing exercise in Clara’s utter inability to describe things, some of which she did not experience herself. All of this occurs directly following the heated discussion of Cicero’s Oration for Cluentius, with Pleyel declaring it ridiculous to use a family’s story as national allegory. As Wieland and Pleyel are “bandying questions and syllogisms,” the interpretive debate takes a shape quite similar to Clara’s own logical enterprise throughout the novel (30). More importantly, though, the argument about Cicero addresses allegory, with Pleyel arguing that taking the exaggerations of an advocate as reflective of the condition of a nation was absurd, and Wieland considering the Oration instructive as a lesson on national morality. Though Clara’s narration takes no side in the debate,

it turns out that Pleyel's understanding of the text is based on a mistranslation.<sup>10</sup>

Despite her stated commitment to dispassionate judgment based on observation through the senses, Clara's (and everyone else's) difficulties deciphering the events from empirical data run up against the classic problem of empiricism: that its deductions must always be probable at best, but never certain; and that the level of certainty must also always be drawn from data obtained through senses of variable reliability. It is for precisely this reason that corroboration is held to such a premium throughout Clara's deductions, and in repeatedly summoning corroboration, her forensic rhetoric repeatedly enlists the reader in the enterprise of investigation and judgment.

At times the confusion seems stereotypically gendered, such as when, at various points in the story, Clara highlights the difficulty that she has being dispassionate about her memories. Especially when introducing the character of Carwin, she declares herself almost unfit to tell the story. Furthermore, one of the reasons that Clara misses so much of the action is that she faints no less than five times—always at crucial moments—throughout the story. However, it should be noted that Clara's weaknesses are no greater than anyone else's in a cast of characters who might all be charged with verging on some level of insanity (139).

As the plot's tension thickens, Clara describes ever more incidents that force a choice between reason and superstition. Like her father before her, she has dark forebodings. "Something whispered that the happiness we at present enjoyed was set on mutable foundations," she says when introducing her own initial experience with the voices of "murderers" in her closet. "Death must happen to all. Whether our felicity was to be subverted by it to-morrow, or whether it was ordained that we should lay down our heads full of years and

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<sup>10</sup> See ed. notes 4 and 5 in the Norton Critical Edition of *Wieland*. (26-27)

honor, was a question that no human being could solve” (45). Of course, the contents of these forebodings aren’t exactly prophetic—all people die—but the timing is crucial, given that she feels this when Carwin enters. Likewise, when she finally hears Carwin’s biloquial voice for the first time, she feels the possibility of a threat coming not from a stranger, from her brother. Though wrong in that instance, her premonition eventually proves correct. Here again, the novel encourages its reader to consider the various explanations for these premonitions and voices, but gives no satisfactory answers. One inclined to reason through the available evidence might grow frustrated with Clara’s budding superstitions, but her premonitions turn out to be correct. Readers more sympathetic to the supernatural explanation, on the other hand, are eventually thwarted by the presence and actions of Carwin. Either way, there are clear and deliberate clues to different interpretations which all meet dead ends.

Given Clara’s apparent clairvoyance, it is interesting that we get another parallel with her father when the voice of the “murderers” in her closet commence at midnight (46). This follows intimations of horror felt as a result of reading a history of the Godfrey of Bouillon, a history driven by the familiar themes of war, religion, colonial settlement. All of these links, if narrated in sequence as they occurred, would indeed be something remarkable; but it should be remembered that Clara’s narration has retroactively flagged this entire episode as marred by her distress. It invites skepticism and questions as to Clara’s reliability—not to discard her testimony, but to wonder at the significance of these intimations. Did everything happen in such a dramatically coincidental way, or has her memory assigned it a sequence that makes for a stronger set of associations? In fact, within the episode itself she makes sure to remind us of the unreliability of what she thinks she heard, and ignores the sounds until the second instance. Even after she hears the “murderers,” she does not trust her own senses, which she says, “assured me

of the truth of [the incidents], and yet their abruptness and improbability made me, in my turn, somewhat incredulous” (49).

Clara tries to reason through the second shrieking incident. She *knows* that the shriek (“Hold! Hold!”) was a hallucination, though she also strongly feels the proximity of the source of the shrieking. The first time she’d heard “Hold! Hold!” she also reasoned that it had been a dream, even though what followed was not. That this seemingly real shriek should be the same words screamed in a noticeably similar voice might stand as a corroboration, but instead it leads her to wonder whether she had in fact been deceived by her hearing or by her sight, which did not perceive the source of the shrieking. In other words, Clara no longer trusts her senses.

In this case, Clara’s intimation (not an inference drawn from evidence) is that the threat is from her brother, whom she believes to be hiding in the closet. Though she marvels at the thought, she continues to think that her brother is the one holding the closet door until none other than Carwin emerges. He still does not admit to bilquism at this point, instead bizarrely covering it up with a story about how he wanted to rape her and an unknown voice stopped him; and how that voice is such a strong protector to Clara that it would “reduce [him] to a heap of ashes” should he think of hurting her (72). His entire explanation is farcically distasteful, and is eventually denied later when he admits to having set something (though he denies that it was the main tragedy) in motion (71). Whether we should believe Carwin the first time, the second time, or at all seems beside the point and undeterminable. The book furnishes very little with which to come to a satisfactory conclusion. What it *does* provide is evidence for is Clara’s poor judgment, and indeed, she seems to utterly lose faith in her ability to reason:

I used to suppose that certain evils could never befall a being in possession of a sound mind; that true virtue supplies us with energy which vice can never resist;

that it was always in our power to obstruct, by his own death, the designs of an enemy who aimed at less than our life. (72)

This marks a turning point in the novel's narration and orientation toward its own reliability, as Clara declares herself unfit to deduce causes from the evidence provided. In so doing, Clara reminds the reader to consider just how consistently her letters tell stories by inference and logical deduction rather than firsthand experience. We are thus reminded that, despite her commitment to empirical evidence, Clara does not experience much of the action directly, leading to an ever-mounting tendency to question one or more of her senses even when she *does* experience the novel's events.

The problem of Clara's inability to make sense of her experiences reaches an apex of sorts with Carwin's confession, and she recalls, "I reviewed every conversation in which Carwin had borne a part. I studied to discover the true inferences deducible from his deportment and words with regard to his former adventures and actual views." (75) After some consideration, she eventually takes Carwin at his word that an unseen force protected her from his alleged rape attempt:

Surely, said I, there is omnipotence in the cause that changed the views of a man like Carwin. The divinity that shielded me from his attempts will take suitable care of my future safety. Thus to yield to my fears is to deserve that they should be realized. (77)

Of course, Carwin has by this point been sowing discord in all corners of Mettingen, and in so doing has also convinced Pleyel (by mimicking a conversation with Clara in the dark) that he has been carrying on an illicit sexual affair with Clara, to whom Pleyel now histrionically refers as "A ruin so complete—so unheard of!" (81) The conversation between Clara and Pleyel regarding



her alleged nighttime rendezvouses with Carwin ironically absolves Clara of her narrative sins by showing how widespread is the difficulty of proper judgment, as it now highlights the ongoing challenges by having Pleyel—the group’s most avowed skeptic—succumb to the same problems that plague everyone else: having heard Carwin’s feigned conversation, he accuses Clara of having sacrificed her virtue. His accusation makes repeated reference to the senses (“That my eyes, my ears, should bear witness to thy fall!”) as does Clara’s defense (“He has judged me without hearing. He has drawn from dubious appearances, conclusions the most improbable and unjust.”), and his unshakeable conviction that Clara is guilty runs counter to any evidence accessed by the reader (81-2). This cycle completes itself when Clara discusses the matter with Wieland, who has already heard Pleyel’s account. After listening to Clara’s side of the story, Wieland judges thusly:

That he should be deceived, is not possible. That he himself is not the deceiver, could not be believed, if his testimony were not inconsistent with yours; but the doubts which I entertained are now removed...[Your account is] believed by me, because I have known you from childhood, because a thousand instances have attested your veracity, and because nothing less than my own hearing and vision would convince me, in opposition to her own assertions, that my sister had fallen into wickedness like this. (85-6)

Wieland’s judgment here walks a middle line between Clara’s confused emotional panic and Pleyel’s strict acceptance of what he heard in the dark, illustrating the paradox at the center of so much of the novel’s confusion: on one hand, by evoking the need to have seen and heard the events himself, he expresses a stringent commitment to empirical bases of judgment and reasons from his knowledge of Clara’s character. On the other hand, his deduction from previous

knowledge is effectively premised on an article of faith. That is, despite evidence to the contrary—evidence that he admits to have believed—Wieland trusts in Clara’s virtue enough to take her at her word. To the extent that we have access to any information, Wieland seems to be correct, yet the soundness of his reasoning is questionable. In this way, the discussion of Clara’s virtue highlights the problem of judgment in the novel by revealing weaknesses in each character’s evaluative criteria.

### **The Great Nation, on Paper**

Issues of evidence and judgment come to a head with the novel’s central tragedy, in which Wieland murders his wife and children. Although the murders themselves take place off-stage, as it were, Clara discovers Catharine’s dead body just before a crazed Wieland enters the scene and argues with an unseen/unheard interlocutor before advancing on Clara to kill her. However, he turns and runs upon hearing footsteps approaching the house. Again following a logic flawed at its outset by her understanding of Wieland’s personality, Clara determines that his madness is an effect rather than the cause of Catharine’s death. Upon being told that Wieland’s entire family is dead (but not yet that he is the murderer), Clara faints.

What plays out upon Clara’s revival is a rapidly paced microcosm of the novel’s exploration of the themes of inheritance, reasoning through the evidence of fallible senses, and the authority of documentation. Like his father before him—the main difference being that he obeys—Wieland has acted on the orders of an apparently celestial voice. Despite her insistence that Carwin must be “the author” of the crime, Clara is assured that “the execution was another’s” and handed a copy of Wieland’s statement to the court (121-23). The court deposition is the most solid piece of evidence in the whole book, and this is because it has all the marks of a

good legal proceeding: the defendant admits to the crime on record and is judged by a jury of his peers. It is also, however, a display of dueling logics; for though Wieland admits to murdering his family, he does not accept guilt, proclaiming, “It is true, they were slain by me; they all perished by my hand. The task of vindication is ignoble. What is it that I am called to vindicate? and before whom?” (123) His faith in the divine order is expressed in terms that echo Brown’s pietist and Quaker Pennsylvanian forebears when he proclaims, “It is needless to say that God is the object of my supreme passion. I have cherished, in his presence, a single and upright heart. I have thirsted for the knowledge of his will. I have burnt with ardor to approve my faith and obedience.” (124)

Given that *Wieland* is so often read—with good reason—as an allegory about the early republic, the force of a legal document in providing one of the only definitive statements of the entire novel must draw our attention to the fact that its allegory extends to founding documents on both ends of the sacred/secular spectrum. For just as Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence provides the foundation for a nation, so does the Abrahamic covenant. More than a simple denunciation of faith in favor of secular reason, the obvious allusion to Genesis 22 analogizes the founding documents of the United States with those of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, in their radical isolation, the Wielands’ only real exposure to the public sphere comes in the form of legal proceedings that stem from Wieland’s Abrahamic actions.

In *God: A Biography*, Jack Miles argues that the test of Abraham and his attempt to claim God’s promise of fertility is a story not of faith but of doubt:

He has not, after all, slain his son, and perhaps he would never have done so.

Abraham goes as far as he possibly can without actually doing the deed, and God chooses to be satisfied with this much. By the time he begins this test, there is no

longer any question that God knows what kind of acknowledgment he wants from Abraham. That much of God's self-discovery is plainly in place. By the time he concludes this test, however, God knows how much acknowledgment he can get and how much he cannot get from Abraham. (59)

This reading of the *Akedah* is an important and instructive one for considering how *Wieland's* allegory engages the national mythos by dealing with both secular and sacred aspects of culture in the young republic. For the question of what *Wieland* heard is never answered. Though a finger might be pointed squarely at Carwin and his ventriloquism, it is equally true that *Wieland's* court statement describes visual hallucinations for which Carwin's ventriloquism furnishes no explanation. Furthermore, Carwin's appearance cannot possibly have anything to do with the elder *Wieland's* strikingly similar and portentous incident.

Just as the Abrahamic covenant is a promise of fertility and of Isaac's offspring becoming a great nation, so does Brown's take on the *Akedah* explore a possible outcome revolving around the issue of fertility and inheritance: separated from the seminal national-historical events of their day, the members of the Mettingen group are orphans who have inherited a fortune but fail to pass it on in the service of the "great nation" taking shape outside of their compound. Like Abraham, *Wieland* starts with that hope, but unlike Abraham, he removes his line from the narrative of future greatness. Even Clara and Pleyel, who eventually marry, must do so outside of America, eventually making a happy life for themselves in Europe.

With its cyclical Gothic typology, *Wieland* does not merely pose more questions than answers, it actively impedes coming to satisfactory conclusions through any of the means that it suggests. By endlessly layering and looping anxieties about the young republic's issues of language, ethnicity, religion, politics, and philosophy, Charles Brockden Brown's first novel

does more than denounce strict adherence to faith *or* to reason. Rather, it expresses a deep and abiding anxiety with the entire enterprise, a desperately uncertain fear of all possible outcomes, and a radical ambivalence about the potential couched in the promise of the “great nation.”

## **Chapter 2: (Per)forming the American Through Islam in Early American Literature**

On October 3, 2014, an episode of Bill Maher's *Real Time* devolved into shouting between—on one side—Maher and neuroscientist Sam Harris, and on the other actor Ben Affleck, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, and former Republican National Convention chairman Michael Steele. As high profile mouthpieces for the “New Atheist” movement and self-proclaimed experts on the shortcomings of Islam, Harris and Maher had launched into a characteristically sweeping indictment of Islam and Muslims when they were challenged by Affleck, who denounced their characterizations—in a now much-quoted line—as “gross and racist” (*Real Time*). What unfolded to occasional applause from the studio audience (almost exclusively for Maher and Harris's points) was not a terribly enlightening discussion. Maher and Harris, the only participants in the conversation who claimed any expertise, ignored inconvenient rebuttals, employed deceptively selective interpretations of international polls, and repeatedly circled back around to well-worn Arab stereotypes to support their position. But their opposition's rhetorical strategy did little to correct this tendency, naming figures such as eventual Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai as shorthand for similarly generalized “good Muslim” abstractions.

Although the *Real Time* debate will (one should hope) never be used to educate westerners on Islam, it is rather interesting for what it shows about American popular culture vis-a-vis Islam and Muslims. For though Maher and Harris cast a rather broad net in their evaluation of the ostensible subject of the debate (Muslims), their stance on Americans in this conversation was much more clearly defined. “All I'm saying,” Maher opined,

is that liberal principles like freedom of speech, freedom to practice any religion

you want without fear of violence, freedom to leave a religion, equality for women, equality for minorities including homosexuals—these are liberal principles that liberals applaud for. But when you say, ‘In the Muslim world, this is what’s lacking,’ then they get upset.” (*Real Time*)

Harris, who previously authored an article titled “The End of Liberalism?”, chimed in by observing that

Liberals have really failed on the topic of theocracy. They’ll criticize white theocracy, they’ll criticize Christians. They’ll still get agitated over the abortion clinic bombing that happened in 1984. But when you want to talk about the treatment of women and homosexuals and free thinkers and public intellectuals in the Muslim world, I would argue that liberals have failed us. (*Real Time*)

With Affleck fuming and Steele haplessly stammering, Kristof jumped in to disagree that Maher and Harris were even espousing “basic liberal principles” (*Real Time*).

In the days that followed, Maher avoided revisiting the argument except to situate himself ideologically, telling *Salon* magazine that

We’re liberals! We’re liberals. We’re not crazy tea-baggers, y’know, and so it’s kind of hard to be making this case—based on facts, based on polling, I think based on what everybody really knows...I mean, do the people arguing with us, would they really open a lesbian art gallery in Ramallah? Or Karachi? Or Cairo? I don’t know if they would back up what they’re saying with actions...We are not bigoted people. On the contrary, we’re trying to stand up for the principles of liberalism! And so, y’know, I think we’re just saying we need to identify illiberalism wherever we find it in the world, and not forgive it because it comes

from [a group] people perceive as a minority...If you're a liberal, stand up for liberal principles. I'm the liberal in this debate...I'm proud to be a liberal, I think liberal principles have always been what I've stood up for, but I don't really need the affirmation of an entire community and I certainly don't need to agree with the majority of liberals on everything. (Isquith)

For his part, Harris defended his position in an article titled “Can Liberalism Be Saved from Itself?”

At stake for Maher and Harris—as well as for their adversaries—in the *Real Time* debate was not an understanding of the geopolitical situation existing between the “liberal” West and Islam, as the very framing of the debate in such terms makes evident by casting “the Muslim world” as a monolithic entity that cannot help being a caricature. That caricature served not to better understand a complex situation, but to make of Muslims a rhetorical figure deployed for the purpose of establishing an American political identity. In this way, Maher, Harris, and their hostile interlocutors all partook of an American rhetorical tradition that has persisted since at least the Barbary Wars. Whereas classical Orientalism pits the enlightened European against the barbaric Muslim, in its American incarnation the juxtaposition assumes one more facet, using depictions of recognizable Muslim caricatures to register identification with a political ideology and cast opposing political opinions as incompatible with participation in the necessary functions of a democratic republic.

### **Coherence, Fragmentation, and Orientalism**

Since the Middle Ages, the Muslim has been a figure fraught with negative connotations in the European popular and literary imagination. Following a tradition rooted in the Crusades,



alarm over the spread of Islam, and medieval fear of the Ottoman Turks, the Muslim came to be typically portrayed as the quintessential anti-European—brutal, devious, reckless, sacrilegious—against which the European defines himself as civilized, virtuous, sensible, and Christian. As Marwan Obeidat describes, centuries of European literature cast Muhammad as a politically opportunistic “author of a false religion based on deceit, and...Muslims [as] more or less infidels identified with the devil” (9). From Christian polemics, to Dante’s sentencing of Muhammad and Ali to some of the most gruesome punishments suffered in the entire *Inferno*, all the way through Enlightenment burlesques and serious historiography, the European trope of the Muslim as passed down over the centuries exists in many forms, but always functions to distinguish “the Orient” from “the Occident”, a way of identifying the non-European so as to reinforce the myth of a somewhat uniform European identity.<sup>11</sup> Edward Said describes European attitudes toward the Muslim East as being unified in an artificially conceived “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views about it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). By conceiving the Orient as a concept, European culture authorizes its own use of any cultural phenomena considered “Oriental” to reinforce “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (7). Hence the European identity—much of which rests on the assumption of inherent European superiority—defines itself against its negatively constructed Other, the Orient. As we know, Said’s point is not merely to expose “the Orient” as a western myth, but to show that the Orientalist mode of constructing an eastern Other is a way of seeing the east always through a

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<sup>11</sup> Obeidat provides useful exposition for considering the origins of specific rhetorical strategies in European depictions of Islamic characters. See also David F. Wondrich, “The Crusade Within: ‘L’Arabo imbelle’ in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*” and Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites*.

western lens: the Orient is not only a myth, but a way of viewing the world as filtered through Europe's own self-constructing vision of itself. Specifically, the Orientalist view of the Muslim world has traditionally interpreted Islam as shorthand for cruel barbarism, despotism, and all sorts of deviance; stereotypes so ingrained that polemics can employ Islam as a figure for its assumed attributes with little to no explanation as a means of justifying western power and dominance.

Yet the typically dichotomous formula is complicated in post-European contexts (as distinguished, here, from postcolonial) such as the former British colonies of North America, which in the post-revolutionary period view themselves as distinct from—even morally and politically superior to—the metropole. In a more positively conceived form of non-European-ness, emergent American nationalism eventually defines the United States as a vibrant and virtuous answer to the decay and decadence of the Old World. Yet the struggle to define this non-European plurality as a monolithic American people must contend with all of the factionalism against which a homogeneous conception of American nationhood strives. “Thus,” Malini Schueller observes when discussing the American-imperialist<sup>12</sup> writings of Timothy Dwight and John Fiske, “a naturalized discourse of empire, predicated on oppositions, was interrupted by a violent destabilization of these oppositions, usually revealed in moments when questions of national incoherence surface. The Orient served the dual purpose of containing national schisms and constructing an imperial nationhood” (3).

One way to unify is to return to the perennial Other—the Muslim—as a rhetorical counterexample to what the American is and should be; but Said's model of constitutive alterity

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<sup>12</sup> I use the terms “empire” and “imperialism” not in a pejorative critical sense, but as an accurate depiction of the imperial striving of many factions in American politics and letters, represented here by Dwight's 1780 “America: or, a Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies, Addressed to the Friends of Freedom and Their Country” and Fiske's 1885 “American Political Ideas, Viewed from the Standpoint of Evolution,” both of which champion a teleology of American westward imperial expansion.

does not transfer so cleanly into the context of the post-revolutionary United States, where the new nation attempted to carve an identity from its unique position between former colony and emergent imperial power. The very idea of an American identity implies a homogeneity that simply did not exist, and attempting to apply the European Orientalist paradigm to an examination of the early U.S. risks overlooking a peculiarly American situation: not quite native, contact-zone hybrid, colonist, or immigrant, the Americans of the post-revolutionary United States—if they comprise an identity at all—can only be defined as a people under construction. It is telling, then, that Schueller’s description of the disruption of clean East/West binaries is delivered as a critique of Dwight and Fiske, since they both represent rather simplistic views of American identity and history. The former was a highly derivative epic that attempted to shoehorn American content into European form; the latter a pseudoscientific apology for American imperialistic jingoism. Focused less on imperial hubris and more on questions of identity in a fragmented young republic, this chapter considers texts that reveal destabilization and incoherence not because their authors failed to argue convincingly for Manifest Destiny, but because such fragmentation was an integral part of the conversation into which Orientalist tropes were inserted as useful rhetorical devices. In the works of fiction, drama, satire, and history examined here, authors employ Muslim characters as a remarkably versatile cipher for a number of traditional Orientalist qualities; but do so in the service of often non-traditional works whereby a number of ideological differences are addressed in an attempt to decipher and foster a coherent identity for the young republic.

One useful way of looking at the process by which a national culture makes itself coherent in an attempt to transcend internal (and distinctly postcolonial) divisions is Homi K.

Bhabha's analysis of "the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture" (200).

This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than 'community'; more symbolic than 'society; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than 'the subject'; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (200-01)

In describing how one might attempt to locate a nation's culture, Bhabha emphasizes "complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives" (201). Thus the notion of a cohesive unit such as "the nation" provides a mythical essence, a transcendent past which represents the nation as such and a teleology to which its people strive. And yet this striving manifests itself in an attempted performance of the national myth that must contend with contemporary phenomena and contingencies that inevitably compromise its perceived authenticity. Thus the narrative of the nation is always in the process of being made through the ambivalence of the pedagogical history and the performative present:

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the

conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.  
(Bhabha 209)

Bhabha's conception of the pedagogical describes the homogeneous time of the nation, the teleology through which the nation conceives its development toward cohesion and the historical narrative by which a coherent national identity is signified and maintained. Yet the lived present of people within the nation inevitably has its own more fragmented story to tell, and so the nation whose narrative constitutes a pedagogical past must also construct itself from the multifarious narratives of the performative present. This tension whereby "the people" (as a coherent national unit) simultaneously abide by the pedagogical past and live in the performative present creates the intersices through which conflicting voices make themselves heard.

Though Bhabha's critique of the "progressive metaphor of social cohesion—*the many as one*" focuses on migrant and diasporic populations in postcolonial states bearing little resemblance to the emerging neo-imperial power of the young United States, the concept of this friction is quite applicable (204). Considered through the concept of a pedagogical past, attempts to identify what it is that makes one American inevitably fall into the pattern of constructing a pre-revolutionary essence by which the contemporary American of a given time period is identified; and yet even a cursory look at the post-revolutionary United States reveals a nation split along regional, political, economic, and ethnic lines. Furthermore, at the same time that the post-revolutionary American defines him/herself from within in accordance with the frictions that Bhabha describes, the United States as a whole also employs the model of alterity adopted from Europe in order to define itself negatively from without.

Hence the figure of the Muslim becomes useful in part just as it had always been for Europe, and during the early post-revolutionary period, the near east's conflicts with European

imperialism and developing American international interests provided for incidents and tales that allowed Americans to appropriate the figure of the Muslim as a sort of rhetorical bogeyman whereby “ideas about the immoral, cowardly, and bloodthirsty Arab helped define the nation as moral, brave, and peace-loving” (Schueller viii). On the other hand, the rhetorical Muslim is also deployed in distinctly American ways, providing contrasts between more than just East and West. In addition to Euro-American conflicts with Muslim states, European (including colonial American) history and literature provided an aesthetic and rhetorical tradition on which later American works could be built. Through such genres as the Barbary captivity narrative, the Muslim was borrowed from European Orientalism and employed as a racial palimpsest onto which particular factions might project their own didactic narratives according to the agendas by which their distinct version of “the American” was (per)formed. As such, the Muslim provides both an external Other against which the American defines himself nationally and a more specific rhetorical figure used within the internal narrative through which the friction between the pedagogical and performative is negotiated. Thus it is that the representation of Muslims in early American literature assists in attempts to create a coherent American identity by facilitating narratives that define “the American” not only (or even primarily) in opposition to the near east but also to Europe; and especially casts the “true” American as against undesirables within national borders.

### **Beginnings**

Although the Barbary captivity narrative was put to unique use in the United States during the Early National period, it was already representative of a well-established genre with a long history by the time of the American Revolution. Perhaps the most famous precedent is that

of the captivity story from *Don Quijote*, based on Cervantes's own five year long experience as a captive in Algiers. Over a century prior, however, the 1492 *Reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula had also inadvertently contributed much to the future of the captivity genre: on one hand, the resulting exodus of Portuguese and Spanish Muslims (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Jews) to North Africa swelled the population of what would become known as the "Barbary states" (Marr 26-31). Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, the simultaneous exploration of the Americas and century-long purge of the Moors from the Iberian peninsula—carried out as they were by people with the same mission, military training, and orientation toward vanquished peoples—ensured that writings about captivity on American or North African soil, by Indians or Muslims, was written about similarly (Rana).

In North America, Barbary captivity narratives comprise a significant part of the eyewitness account genres that would come to form the colonial American canon. John Smith, for example, was allegedly enslaved by Turkish captors in the early seventeenth century and the ordeal is chronicled in his journals as having happened well before he traveled to the Americas. (Barbour) William Okeley's *Eben-Ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy Appearing in the Miraculous Deliverance of John Anthony, William Okeley, William Adams, John Jephys and John Carpenter* (1675), an early example of the Algerian captivity narrative, was published seven years before Mary Rowlandson's Indian captivity narrative; and several well-known Puritan figures (among them William Bradford and Cotton Mather) wrote sermons, journal entries, and published articles about ongoing concerns regarding New Englanders taken captive by Barbary pirates. Like Rowlandson's far more popular account, William Okeley's is also a conversion narrative in which the protagonist's adventure leads to a spiritual awakening and repentance for past sinfulness through the horrific trials endured among the savages (Baepler 228). As with the

influence of the *Reconquista* on depictions of Native Americans, it is telling that so many narratives involving early contact between Europeans and Native Americans include descriptions of the Indians which compare them to Turks—dark skinned, “savage”, superstitious—since the process involved is largely the same: the creation of a static Other, against which the European can “make” him/herself within the narrative. In this role the Oriental—like the Native American—serves a didactic function, providing a foil to the European identity so that the European might define what he/she *is* by playing the opposite of what he/she *is not*.

The similar rhetorical uses of Muslims and Native Americans can be seen throughout captivity narratives from Europe and the Americas alike, and show remarkable overlap especially among notable figures whose histories involve contact with both Muslims and indigenous American populations. One visual example is the similar use of vanquished peoples as symbols on the coats of arms of John Smith and Hernán Cortés. Granted by the Transylvanian prince Sigismund Báthory for having reportedly killed three Turks during the Thirteen Years’ War, John Smith’s coat of arms—which reads “Vincere est vivere,” or “To conquer is to live”—displays on its shield the disembodied heads of three Ottoman Turks, complete with turbans and ostentatiously curled mustaches. For his conquest of Mexico, Hernán Cortés was granted a coat of arms with similar imagery. In addition to three crowns symbolizing the three Aztec emperors against which Cortés had fought, and a depiction of the vanquished city of Tenochtitlan, Cortés’s coat of arms is, like Smith’s, adorned with the generic heads of conquered peoples. In this case, the shield is bordered by seven Aztec heads—recognizable by their haircuts just as Smith’s Turks were distinguished by their turbans and mustaches—bound together with a chain which is pad-locked at the bottom of the crest. Comparing these coats of arms, we see that, in the early days of European colonization of the Americas, Muslims and Native Americans served a similar



purpose in the European imaginary: as figures against which European society defined itself, and the conquest of which legitimated the narrative through which national identity was conceived and disseminated.

However, though American Indians and Muslim Orientals provide a rather stable Other against which westerners define themselves for centuries, the didactic self/Other split is complicated by the situation of late-eighteenth century North America, in which the descendants of European settlers began to define themselves clearly as Americans as such—that is, distinctly *not* European—using the same forms, tropes, and motifs traditionally used to define European identity. Thus we see that with the emergence of a distinctly American subject position the model of alterity is modified to include not only the difference between the European and non-European, but also the difference between the Old and New Worlds (whereby Europe and the East are both depicted as “Old”). Once we have allowed the alterity model to branch off into new territories, it must be acknowledged that these newer categories are not stable but always in the process of making themselves through multiple others, multiple agendas, and multiple didactic narratives. Hence the need to look at the formation of “the American” both in terms of the Occident/Orient binary and the friction between pedagogical and performative modes within an American context.

### **Islam vs. Republican Womanhood**

Since I will suggest that all of the works presented in this analysis have a didactic component to them, it may be appropriate to start with the writer whose work—in addition to being the earliest chronologically—is explicitly didactic in its purpose. Building a successful run on its author’s recently established literary reputation, Susanna Rowson’s 1794 play, *Slaves in*

*Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom* was part of a well-represented movement in the 1790s to raise awareness of and funds for the plight of the Barbary captives. Having premiered at Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia before being staged in Baltimore, Boston, and New York, *Slaves in Algiers* was one of dozens of plays that treated the theme of Barbary pirates and their American captives. Despite their many differences, as Jennifer Margulis and Karen Poremski show, “all [of the Barbary dramas] included reflections on the nature of freedom, liberty, power, slavery, race, culture, and individuality” (ix-x).

Like Rowson’s bestselling novel *Charlotte Temple*, *Slaves in Algiers* appears to concern itself primarily with the maintenance of feminine virtue in a contemporary sinful world. This Barbary captivity drama uses themes of seduction and entrapment to distinguish the vibrancy of America from the fading brilliance of Europe, but in *Slaves in Algiers* this contrast is a secondary concern. In heroic couplets and with allusions to *The Iliad*, the play’s prologue draws a clear distinction between the freedoms for which the revolution had been fought and the tyranny represented by North African piracy and enslavement of westerners. While the neoclassical form and classical allusion hearken back to the endurance of European literary tradition, the prologue’s third stanza marks the play’s clash of civilizations as an expressly American concern:

What then behoves it, they who help’d to gain,  
A nation’s freedom, feel the galling chain?  
They, who a more than ten year’s war withstood,  
And stamp’d their country’s honor with their blood?  
Or, shall the noble Eagle see her brood,  
Beneath the pirate kite’s fell claw subdu’d? (7)

The implication here is distinctly American, as the prologue conjures images that evoke pride not in colonial history and European heritage leading (as Dwight had posited before) teleologically to the establishment of an American utopia, but in the success of the revolution. Rowson portrays a rupture occurring in relatively recent history as mythic past, giving the young nation an identity derived from its virtuous principles and verified by its violent birth. As portrayed in these lines, though the ancestor of the American is the colonial European, his essence is to be found in the independent revolutionary—a somewhat mythic and still hotly contested identity still under construction when the play was written in 1794. Yet this is not to imply that the prologue somehow sets the new nation against its colonial European history, but rather that it posits the United States' independence as providing the young nation with a foundation of uniquely unquestionable virtue that equips it to combat the evils of the Muslim world. Embodied by the kite, the rapacious pirates of Algiers are shown to be a threat both to individual Americans and to the principles (incarnated in the “noble Eagle”) upon which American identity is founded.

The Eagle/kite binary of the prologue might as well be a conflict between the cross and the crescent, and contemporary audiences would have recognized it as such. The American principles of freedom and independence are portrayed throughout the play as manifestations of Christianity, in large part by virtue of their depiction as distinctly non-Muslim. This requires no buildup, and begins with a notably Cervantine scene that starts *en medias res*, in which two “Moriscan” (by which Rowson means Moorish, despite this being a slight mistranslation) women converse at the home of the Dey of Algiers. The complacent Selima notes that her companion, Fetnah, should enjoy her position as the Dey's “favorite”; to which the free-thinking Fetnah states her dissatisfaction with her high position in the royal household:

...In the first place, I wish for liberty. Why do you talk of my being a favorite; is the poor bird that is confined in a cage (because a favorite with its enslaver) consoled for the loss of freedom. No! tho' its prison is of golden wire, its food delicious, and it is overwhelm'd with caresses, its little heart still pants for liberty... (13)

The function of this statement and others like it is twofold: as in *Charlotte Temple*, Rowson introduces her audience to intelligent and articulate female characters confined by the tyrannical limitations of patriarchal society (a parallel which becomes even more pronounced with the eventual revelation that most of the imprisoned Moriscan women are actually kidnapped Americans); but rather than being seduced by dashing young European-American men, the young ladies of *Slaves in Algiers* are bound by the lecherous appetites of Algerian males. Of these enslavers, one—Ben Hassan—is in fact a Jew who has converted to Islam only to reap the financial benefits. In addition to these stock Oriental characters, the plot includes the Spaniard Sebastian, a vengeful, foolish, belligerent drunkard. Although Sebastian is a fellow captive, his excesses provide a foil for the intelligence and virtue of the American male captives whom the play ultimately credits with actions that result in the abolition of Algerian slavery and the Dey's conversion to Christianity. The implications thus far are not subversive by any means, towing the line of both early American nationalism and the classic Occident/Orient binary. Europe is portrayed as effete and immoral, Islam as absurd superstition propagated to buttress the power of tyrannical savages, and Americans stand at the vanguard of right, spreading justice and showing the way to freedom. Even Rowson's proto-feminism is utilized to patriotic effect, showing that the benighted North Africans (and, to a lesser extent, the Europeans) have much to learn from educated American women. Of course, lines such as "woman was never formed to be the abject

slave of man” critique the treatment of women in the United States as well, but this message is somewhat tempered by “othering” the Algerians, so that ultimately we are shown that America at least provides the opportunity for women “to render [them]selves superior” (Rowson 16).

Where Rowson truly makes a statement is in her treatment of slavery, which—by portraying mainly white captives enslaved by North Africans—forces identification with those in bondage and equates American slaveholders with the detestable tyrants of Algiers. Rowson’s didactic approach is by no means subtle, as can be seen when Ben Hassan’s captive, Rebecca, laments her plight:

Oh!—long—long since I have been dead to all that bear the name.—In early youth—torn from the husband of my heart’s election—the first only object of my love—bereft of friends, cast on an unfeeling world, with only one poor stay, on which to rest the hope of future joy.—I have a son—my child! my dear Augustus—where are you now?—in slavery. (18)

The theme of family separation was a commonly employed pathetic device not only among abolitionists, but less radical northerners with anti-slavery sympathies and even ambivalent slaveholders (Thomas Jefferson being perhaps the best known example of a citizen who owned slaves but expressed revulsion with slavery’s effect on the families of the enslaved). Thus the captivity narrative—a genre with a well-established history of reinforcing western patriotism by setting the white westerner against the non-white Other—is here used to criticize Americans for their hypocrisy. Though the slaves depicted by Rowson are whites enslaved by Moors, the anti-slavery rhetoric employed aims to be universal in its scope, implicating any Christian who denies the benefits of freedom to a fellow Christian, as seen in the play’s epilogue:

Say!—You who feel humanity’s soft glow,

What rapt'rous joy must the poor captive know;  
Who, free'd from slavery's ignominious chain,  
Views his native land, and friends again? (78)

The ignominy of slavery's oppression is not limited to that seen in the relatively mild captivity story of *Slaves in Algiers*, and the epilogue—like the prologue before it—casts American principles as far-reaching absolutes. Benilde Montgomery remarks that the opening and closing poems “subvert the characters’ patriotic rhetoric, so powerful in converting the Muslims, and call attention to the actual social offenses in America that such rhetoric screens” (621). This is consistent with Michelle Burnham’s observation that “narratives and novels of captivity demonstrate that crossing transcultural borders exposes the captive to physical hardship and psychological trauma. But they also reveal that such crossings expose the captive and her readers to the alternative cultural paradigms of her captors. In collision with other, more dominant paradigms, these emergent hybrid formations can generate forms of critical and subversive agency, both within and outside of the text” (3). Structured, as Malini Schueller notes, “around raced and gendered distinctions between liberty and slavery, morality and licentiousness,” *Slaves in Algiers* invokes the East/West binary as setting more than as theme (43). That is, rather than entrapping women in an Algerian harem so that they may triumph over the barbarism of North African slavery and prove American and Christian superiority over Islam, the play takes Moorish symbolic associations for granted and uses the seraglio to frame conversations among women which analogize their captivity with unequal treatment of women at home, and furthermore with the wider and always pressing issue of American slavery.

Yet despite this highlighting of tensions between feminist/abolitionist American ideals and practice in the young republic, it would be a mistake to read the patriotism of Rowson’s

characters as entirely ironic. The conversion of the Muslims at the end serves to prove the superiority of American Christian ideals and provides an opportunity to put them into practice. When the Dey, panicked by a nationwide slave revolt, frees his captives, the American Frederic resists Sebastian's vengeful impulse and refuses to murder or enslave the Dey, proclaiming, "we are free men, and while we assert the rights of men, we dare not infringe upon the privileges of a fellow creature" (73). It is this show of compassion that softens the Dey's heart, showing the possibility of repentance and setting up Rebecca's declaration that "By Christian law, no man should be a slave; it is a word so abject, that, but to speak it dyes the cheek with crimson. Let us assert our own prerogative, to be free ourselves, but let us not throw on another's neck the chains we scorn to wear" (73). For Rowson, the subversion of patriotic rhetoric noted by Montgomery does not give the lie to American ideals, but rather attempts to show how *slavery* subverts those ideals. By equating American slaveholders with easily recognizable archetypes of anti-Americans, Rowson shows their actions to be inconsistent with the principles of their "native land, where liberty has established her court—where the warlike Eagle extends his glittering pinions in the sunshine of prosperity" (Rowson 74). Additionally, Christianity is one of the most important aspects of true American-ness as portrayed in *Slaves in Algiers*, and especially the fact that the characters remain true to their religion and do not convert to Islam. Although it would have won them their freedom, the inference carried throughout the play is that such a conversion would have implicated the virtuous Americans in collusion with an oppressive culture whose relationship with slavery is not ambivalent—as it is in the United States—but inherent. Rowson never portrays the seduction of Muslim conversion as a true threat for the simple fact that—as it is depicted—no self-respecting American would ever adopt such a lifestyle, and in fact even noble Muslims have enough sense to convert to Christianity. Again conjuring American heritage

as mythical and mysterious harbinger of progress, Rowson's conclusion does not question the young nation as such, but questions the American-ness and Christian faith of an especially pernicious tendency in its population. The patriotism of *Slaves in Algiers* pits "true" Americans—Christian, freedom-loving opponents of patriarchal oppression and slavery—against those whose actions are inconsistent with the rhetoric of the revolution. In so doing, Rowson portrays frictions between regions and ideologies under one federal government, but also suggests a solution—the education of women and abolition of slavery—by which these factions might reconcile their differences while abiding by the principles of their nation and religion, the very principles that provide a foundation for the assumed East/West dichotomy audiences would have instantly recognized.

### **The Algerian Picaresque**

By contrast, Royall Tyler's *Algerine Captive*—written three years later—is far more ambivalent about Islam and far less prone to employing simple dichotomies. Unlike Rowson's Ben Hassan, Tyler's Muslim converts are among the most sympathetic, intelligent characters in the novel. Furthermore, *The Algerine Captive*'s treatment of American Christianity is largely unflattering, emphasizing many of the same shortcomings detailed by Rowson but complicating the redemptive possibilities. In fact, many of the stereotypical superstitions and savageries of Muslims are mirrored by the apparent ridiculousness of early Americans, as the first volume of the novel serves to lampoon the prevailing narrative of American identity. Detailing the history of protagonist Updike Underhill's family background, Volume I is a picaresque that provides a satirical survey of American history through the eyes of a failed country pedagogue turned doctor.



Indeed, the picaresque mode in this case provides a crucial point for understanding the important continuity of quixotism in the stereotypes employed in early American fiction. Updike Underhill is often (and with good reason) read as an expansion upon Jonathan, the sympathetic doofus of Tyler's 1787 play *The Contrast*. Though Underhill undergoes a classical education, both he and Jonathan embody the Yankee stereotypes that Tyler himself helped to popularize: earnest, simple, well-meaning, and gullible, both Jonathan and Underhill hail from a proud "homespun" New England lineage and confuse fiction for reality.

Jonathan's Massachusetts Yankee becomes Updike's Connecticut Yankee—an enduring stereotype in its own right—but the most important transposition is that from stage play to picaresque novel. Not only is the episodic plot of *The Algerine Captive's* first volume a picaresque through and through, it is—like *The Contrast* before it—self-reflexive. In the same way that Jonathan mistakes the stage for the real world, Updike Underhill's reading leads him to a misunderstanding of history gleaned from romanticized tales of his family's past. An American Don Quijote, Updike Underhill in the first volume is both led astray by books and—in his failures as a wandering schoolmaster and doctor—cast in the role of laughable knight errant. Tyler's Yankees thus become the prototypes for a slew of picaresque protagonists, nearly all from New England and employed as itinerant teachers, quack doctors, or naïve adventurers. Thus Updike Underhill is something of a fulcrum in American literature, his Connecticut-Yankee-as-American-Quijote strain carrying on in characters like Irving's Ichabod Crane. As I will show in the third chapter, the implications of this quixotic characterization run much deeper than aesthetic or formal similarities, rather exploiting an ironic attitude toward narrative and history to make a point about national identity. Simply put, it is no coincidence that a Barbary captivity novel from 1797 shows clear genetic links to both Cervantes's depiction of Muslims and

Washington Irving's mockery of Connecticut's contribution to American nationalism. The common thematic link throughout is a vexed relationship with the historical record.

Beginning with the history of Updike Underhill's ancestry as traced through the actual historical dissenter Captain John Underhill, the early part of *The Algerine Captive* exhibits a concerted effort to both distinguish American identity from European and question the legitimacy of written history. The historical Underhill's story abounds with rebellion against authority, shifting loyalties, and historical uncertainties. In the novel, a quick account is given of his being a dissenter in London and joining the Puritans in Holland and then on to the New World. Arriving in New England with John Winthrop, Captain Underhill quickly finds himself in trouble with the authorities for "his ideas of religious toleration being more liberal than those around him" (Tyler 13). Updike's account—which is no more than a hurried summary—distinguishes the Underhill clan from an oppressive Old World status quo while repeatedly hinting at the questionable nature of its narrator's scholarship. For example, he admits that he is not sure how Captain Underhill came to be with John Winthrop, and the tale of his banishment from Boston is repeatedly qualified with phrases such as "It is said by some authors...", yet Underhill uses it to construct an illustrious past that he credits with providing a foundation for his patriotic fervor and love of liberty (Tyler 14). Still, despite his clear American pedigree, Updike receives an Old World education when his precocity comes to the attention of a local minister. "With him," he recounts, "I studied four years, labouring incessantly at Greek and Latin: as to English grammar, my preceptor, knowing nothing of it himself, could communicate nothing to me" (25). Under the instruction of men to whom "dead languages were more estimable than living," young Updike receives lessons that reveal the absurdity of classical education:

One of them gravely observed that he was sure General Washington read Greek; and that he never would have captured the Hessians at Trenton, if he had not taken his plan of operation from that of Ulysses and Diomedes seizing the horses of Rhesus, as described in the tenth book of the Iliad. (Tyler 26)

Silly as this portrayal is, we see in it the tension between the pedagogical history of the young nation's heritage and attempts to perform the roles prescribed by the mythology that informs its citizens' collective identity. No matter how hard it tries to throw off the yoke of colonial "slavery", the nation's mythology is built upon a European foundation. Thus the actions of the "father of the nation" are described in antiquated terms (as, in fact, he was analogized with Cincinnatus) by hyper-educated yet ignorant academics, showing the obsolescence of Old World knowledge as opposed to New World action. The implication cuts into the idea of historical narrative itself for, though Underhill shows great pride in his past, it must be presumed that all hitherto existing American history—and likely most of the history written during his own lifetime—would have been written by the same sort of foolish academics that trained him.

In fact, Volume I's attitude toward history sets up several of the novel's tensions before its narrator's story really even begins. Updike Underhill describes himself as

lineally descended from Captain John Underhill, who came into the Massachusetts in the year one thousand six hundred and thirty; of whom the honourable mention is made by that elegant, accurate, and interesting historian, the Reverend Jeremy Belknap, in the History of New Hampshire. (12)

Given Tyler's sustained satire of American neoclassicism, historiography, and obsession with the Puritan mythos, it is rather safe to read these flattering adjectives applied to Belknap's history as ironic: Belknap's stadialist New England history employed the archetypal Puritan-narrative-as-

national-teleology, a simplistic and heroic view of history at odds with the ambivalent view of American identity suggested by Tyler's satire. If anything, Underhill's "honoured ancestor," who "had early imbibed an ardent love of liberty, civil and religious," is a character fraught with issues that justify the ambivalence of the novel's irony. A professional soldier involved with both the original New England dissenters and the Antinomians, Captain John Underhill's eventful and violent life placed him at important moments in the history of both New England and New Amsterdam. In the Pequot War, he led the expedition that ended in the Mystic Massacre, which nearly decimated the Pequots and resulted in several prisoners being sold into slavery—a controversial result which Underhill defended by claiming that his actions were ordained by God. This historical detail, glossed over by Captain Underhill's proud descendent, foreshadows the novel's inciting incident and the protagonist's struggle with the conflict between its results and American Christianity; for it is as a wandering surgeon that Updike Underhill finds himself aboard an American ship bound for "the coast of Africa" to bring slaves back to South Carolina (Tyler 95). Of this, he later recalls, "I execrated myself, for even the involuntary part I bore in this execrable traffic: I thought of my native land and blushed" (95). By having Underhill blush for his native land, Tyler does not merely express regret for his protagonist's part in the immoral practices of a region alien to his own; he indicts an entire nation of complacent citizens for their "involuntary part in this execrable traffic," and aligns such inaction with the historical precedents so cavalierly mythologized by historians like Belknap.

Yet the sort of mythologizing impulse that would inspire Washington's Cincinnatus image goes a long way toward explaining the notion of American unity to which Underhill subscribes. This unity is challenged repeatedly throughout the book, with one of the earliest examples being the fact that his training does not equip him for life as an American, be it as

farmer or pedagogue, because he and rural New Englanders do not—literally or figuratively—speak the same language. “Their conversation I could not relish,” he laments, “mine they could not comprehend” (32). Dejected and defeated, Underhill leaves teaching, remarking, “I am sometimes led to believe, that my emancipation from real slavery in Algiers, did not afford me sincerer joy, than I experienced at that moment” (34). Coupled with his mother’s dramatically ironic relief that this ordeal has fulfilled a nightmare portending his capture by “savages”, the inference of Euro-American savagery is quite clear, and transitions nicely into Updike’s foray into medicine.

Although Updike Underhill’s budding medical career serves the narrative purpose of placing him in a situation to be captured by the Algerian corsairs, rhetorically it is perhaps more important before he sets sail; for it is during his tenure as an American physician that his tale provides accounts against which the second volume will juxtapose a host of eerily similar stock Oriental characters and clichéd incidents. Early in his medical studies, Underhill is challenged to a duel sparked by his opponents’ misunderstanding of poetry. Since neither man intends to fight or back down, they are instructed to fire over each other’s heads in a performance of bravado that allows each man to escape with his life and the title of “man of honour” (Tyler 51). Underhill’s reputation wins him acclaim and he notes, “The girls, of my age, respected me, as a man of spirit; but I was more fond of being esteemed, as a man of learning” (54). When one young lady expresses interest in literature, Underhill begins to court her only to find that her interest is superficial and that she merely pretends to read the books that he lends her. When Underhill finally secures employment as a country doctor, he is hired in a town that already has four doctors: “a Learned, a Cheap, a Safe, and a Musical Doctor” (Tyler 64). The first of these is the only doctor truly educated in medicine, the second knows nothing and prescribes enormous

doses of drugs that immediately cure or kill, the third gives no treatment or medication and so neither exacerbates nor ameliorates anyone's condition, and the fourth is gifted with loquacity and a reputation for enjoyable prayers (Tyler 65-6). But none of these gain such a loyal following as the fifth quack doctor, who backs his nonsensical prescriptions ("powdered, burnt crust, chalk, and juice of beets and carrots") with non sequiturs quoted in Latin from classical and neoclassical literature (69). "They judged naturally enough, that I was the most learned man," he says, "because the most unintelligible" (69). Underhill discovers that the foolish townspeople prefer the quacks to competent doctors, and that his own legitimate treatments are received with hostility unless supported by opaque passages from Lily's Grammar.

Through Underhill's search for a stable medical career, Tyler casts the archetypal American—rural, hardworking people as described in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*—in much the same light that Rowson (and countless others before her) had cast her Muslim characters. He shows that America too has its streak of vindictive violence, rampant ignorance, empty and absurd formalism, superstition, and a hierarchy that allows an elite class to take advantage of the rubes at the lower tiers of society. Although Tyler will also use his narrative to harshly criticize American slavery, we see here that even before slavery enters the plot Americans are portrayed as savages on par with the prevailing image of the unsavory Oriental. By portraying the northeastern United States as an anarchic and backwards land filled with conniving opportunists and credulous fools, Underhill's narration sets the reader up for a unique effect when familiar Barbary captivity images are employed to paint a picture of his captors and patients in Algiers. Though, as in Rowson's drama, the reader might be expected to anticipate what Underhill will face in captivity, it is now filtered through an entire volume in which the United States citizenry is depicted as composed of either naively patrician Northerners

or savagely cruel Southerners. As contrasts with the “Old World” as represented by either Europe or the Muslim near east, either prospect is rather bleak.

Also differently portrayed is Islam itself, since the Muslim converts with whom Underhill associates are highly intelligent, rational, and compassionate. Though *The Algerine Captive* still often portrays the apparently inherent cruelty of the Algerians, his depiction of Islam can be distinguished from Rowson’s in that its European converts are not the covetous, treacherous characters that Rowson presents in Ben Hassan. The first, an English “renegado”—or former Christian converted to Islam—appeals to Underhill to convert and save himself from slavery. Reasoning with Underhill, he notes the benefits of being a Muslim in Algiers: freedom, the liberty to conduct business for profit, and the right to marry up to four wives: “Come, added he, let me send my friend, the Mollah, to you. He will remove your scruples, and, in a few days, you will be as free and happy as I am” (Tyler 126). Defiant, Underhill expresses disdain for the renegado’s treason to country and religion:

I had ever viewed the character of an apostate as odious and detestable. I turned from him with abhorrence, and for once embraced my burthen with pleasure.

Indeed I pity you, said he. I sorrow for your distresses, and pity your prejudices. I pity you too, replied I, the tears standing in my eyes. My body is in slavery, but my mind is free. Your body is at liberty, but your soul is in the most abject slavery... (126)

Underhill’s sudden righteousness seems contrived, as do all of his religious proclamations, and his anger unfounded since—if nothing else—the renegado does seem genuinely interested in helping. Besides, one page later, Underhill’s hatred of “the Mahometan imposture” abates

enough to warrant some curiosity (as well as the desire to lighten his burden) and a request to see the mullah (Tyler 127).

The mullah, a former Greek Orthodox Christian, has the authority to relieve Underhill of his duties as a slave during the period in which he attempts to proselytize. Underhill's accommodations are luxurious and in keeping with the sensual excesses with which Orientalist stereotypes had long credited the east; and the mullah is so kind to him that, "for the first time," he trembles and weeps in fear of being seduced away from Christianity by Islam (Tyler 130). But the mullah's appeal does not end with his kindness and, during a discussion about religion, he makes Underhill look rather foolish. Edward Watts notes that "this European Muslim is a hybrid, a cosmopolitan capable of merging and mixing the best of both Eastern and Western traditions" (90). In contrast to the typical portrayal of barbaric Muslims for constituting Christian civility, Tyler's positive portrayal of the mullah provides the image of a Muslim whose most notable quality—a cosmopolitanism attained through hybridity—is a typical point of pride among the "right kind" of Americans. On points of religious doctrine, faith, evangelization strategies, worldwide popularity, and putative cultures of violence, the mullah repeatedly shows that Christians cannot claim the moral or ethical high ground. Following the mullah's clear victory in the argument and an appeal to conversion, Underhill offers this feeble refusal on the unconvincing grounds of the mullah's conniving nature:

I have thus given a few sketches of the manner of this artful priest. After five days conversation, disgusted with his fables, abashed by his assurance, and almost confounded by his sophistry, I resumed my slave's attire, and sought safety in my former servitude. (136)



Despite Underhill's obstinate insistence on the superiority of Christian faith and American politics, his narration inevitably results in an ambivalent portrayal of the east as cruel and savage, but no more so than the west; thus momentarily rejecting the easily defined binaries so commonly employed to define east from west (Watts 90). If nothing else, Underhill's abrupt rejection of the mullah's ideological and religious seduction is staged as a credit to a virtue being cultivated in the young republic especially among the literati. More complex than showing the American as opposed to the decay of Europe and immorality of Islam, the implied polemic of this scene is that American Christian (and, in Tyler's case, somewhat tempered Federalist) institutions prove superior only when buttressed by a virtuous cosmopolitanism that practices empathy, examines available evidence, and makes principled decisions. Having thus experienced the cultures (or at least effects) of Europe, the Muslim east, and the slaveholding South, Underhill's uncorked and informed opinion still inclines toward Christian-informed American Federalism.

Underhill's empathetic approach is bolstered by what follows in the majority of Volume II: an extended slave's eye view of Algiers, which, like Rowson's account, serves to humanize the slave and cast the American slaveholder in the same light as the cruel Algerine. However, Tyler's satire is farther reaching, and uses what at times seems little more than an anti-slavery narrative to level pointed criticism at outmoded European political methods and American mimicry of those modes of diplomacy. Underhill's sketch of Algerine history includes an exposition of the roots of his own enslavement, starting with a change in British policy following the American revolution, which lifted protection of American ships against attacks from Barbary pirates. Of course, such a policy shift is hardly surprising, but Underhill focuses instead on the accepted method for protecting European ships from such attacks: bribery. Arguing that a

coalition of European powers would easily beat back the threat of Algerian piracy, Underhill opines that the greed and envy of individual nations prompts them to constantly renegotiate foolish contracts with North African powers that weaken them and endanger their citizens. Underhill's "small specimen of European policy" obviously functions as a critique of the causes of Old World decay, but he does not neglect to mention that the American government is directly at fault for his captivity due to its own weakness and indecisiveness in dealing with the Algerine hostage crisis—a weakness itself caused by factionalism and political feuds.

This call for strength and unity instead of European discord supports the political stance taken by *The Algerine Captive*, which at the end of the novel culminates in what sounds like Federalist propaganda:

My ardent wish is, that my fellow citizens may profit by my misfortunes. If they peruse these pages with attention they will perceive the necessity of uniting our federal strength to enforce a due respect among other nations...Our first object is union among ourselves. For to no nation besides the United States can the antient saying be more emphatically applied; BY UNITING WE STAND, BY DIVIDING WE FALL. (226)

Thus we see that the ultimate goal of Underhill's narrative is national cohesion and cooperation in cultivating a unified identity of strength through freedom. This is, of course, easier said than done, especially when seen through the debate over slavery. Underhill's narrative clearly points the finger at the American south for its betrayal of American principles, and is even more specific about the true location of American culture when defining his own compassion in opposition to that of the bloodthirsty Algerines. After vividly describing the horrific torture and execution of an escaped slave, Underhill recalls, "How long he lived, I cannot tell, I never gave

but one look at him: one was enough to appal a New England heart” (143). With this remark, Underhill’s experiences culminate in the conclusion that true American-ness is that which abides by the principles of the cosmopolitan north. If nationwide unity is necessary to confront the threat of enemies including, but not limited to, outmoded European empires and hostile North Africans, it requires a level of understanding unachievable in the current situation. As portrayed in Underhill’s conclusion, national unity must be achieved under the aegis of the birthplace of the Revolution, the mythic genesis of the young nation.

Watts reads this patriotic call for national cohesion as a bitterly ironic critique of the growing power of the republican faction in American politics and the “loss of revolutionary energy as colonial order was reinstalled” (93). He argues that “Tyler uses *The Algerine Captive* to ‘disintegrate’ the hollow image of social and political coherence republican recolonization sought to impose on the new nation” (93). This may be so, but it seems that even this effort to dissolve republican coherence constitutes an attempt to establish a coherence based on other—perhaps more general, less rigidly defined—principles of national identity. If Tyler celebrates difference and the cosmopolitanism that it creates, he does so through an idealization of the liberties and opportunities that enable such difference; and these are the principles that provide the foundation for every faction’s pedagogical American mythology. The differences lie in the attempts to perform that mythology, and *The Algerine Captive* is Tyler’s performance. By parodying early American didactic literature, he shows how attempts to define “the American” through moralistic platitudes leads to hypocrisy. His critique of foolhardy American politics based on European precedents parallels the same opinion held about American literature—an especially salient point since David Humphreys, the ambassador deployed to defuse the Algerine crisis, was one of the Hartford Wits. If, as Watts claims, Tyler challenges American cohesion, it

is not because he favors a chaotic plurality but because he sees the cohesion of early America as misguided and wrongheaded. By lampooning the prevailing narrative by which early Americans are defined, he adds his own voice to that narrative, attempting to define the American and teach American-ness on his own terms.

### **Mustapha, the Metropolis, and the Logocracy**

As domestic satire goes, one of the most interesting cases is that of *Salmagundi*, a journal founded by Washington Irving, his brother William, and James Kirke Paulding. Mary Weatherspoon Bowden points out that *Salmagundi* was founded as a satirical answer to *The Town*, a New York culture publication that, started on January 1, 1807, declared its mission of “elevating New York by instructing it in the arts: ‘It was thus that the SPECTATOR accomplished so much...it awoke the thoughtless, purified the debauchee, stung folly, refined the rustic, elevated the merchant, and softened political controversy’” (Bowden 133-34). The Anglophilic and Francophobic thrust of *The Town*’s attempts to educate New York society deepened the Eurocentric pomposity of the publication and provided a pretentiously elitist rhetoric ripe for being lampooned by the Salmagundians, whose own introductory statement clearly mocked *The Town*’s position on everything from New York’s underdeveloped culture, the attractiveness of its ladies, and the inherent dancing abilities of the French, criticism of whom was shorthand for the more pro-British federalists to criticize republicans. Positioning itself as the anti-*Town* in every possible way (by, for example, claiming to take the theatre under its wing in response to *The Town*’s constant denunciations of the theatre), *Salmagundi* devoted its first two issues almost exclusively to ridiculing *The Town* (Bowden 134). *Salmagundi*’s mockery did not go unnoticed by other publications, and even after *The Town*’s collapse, “Thomas Green

Fessenden, editor (under the name Dr. Christopher Caustic) of the *Weekly Inspector*, saw fit to advise *Salmagundi* to ‘spare us your whipped syllabub, if you have nothing but *flummery* to substitute’” (Bowden 134). Naturally, then, Fessenden became one of *Salmagundi*’s next targets in its third issue.

The third issue also begins the Salmagundians’ foray into explicitly political satire, as all four New York political factions (Lewisites, Burrrites, Clintonites, and Federalists) come under fire for various reasons.<sup>13</sup> From this moment emerged the character Mustapha Rub-a-dub Kheli Khan, introduced by fellow pseudonym Launcelot Langstaff as “a most illustrious Captain of a Ketch, who figured some time since, in our fashionable circles, at the head of a ragged regiment of tripolitan prisoners” (Irving 78).<sup>14</sup> Warren S. Walker has identified Mustapha as parodying a group of “Tripolitan sailors captured in August of 1804 during an early stage of the war with the Barbary powers,” and describes these Tripolitans as “seven Turks [who] had been brought to New York aboard the frigate *John Adams* in February 1805” (477). While awaiting government action, these sailors became mainstays in fashionable New York society, celebrated as actual examples of exotic characters hitherto only experienced through literature and the arts. As Tripoli was under Ottoman control and specifically ruled by Karamanli Turks, Walker points out that the references to “bashaws” (i.e., pashas, a Turkish military officer) are not careless mistakes but rather accurate depictions of the Tripolitan prisoners (478-79). Timothy Marr is still more

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<sup>13</sup> It is also worth noting that, as Bowden makes clear, *Salmagundi*’s “North-river Society” satirizes the interests of the North River Steamboat monopoly secured by capitalists Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton with the legislative help of Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, whose history of New York eventually became the target of mockery that formed the basis of Irving’s *A History of New York*.

<sup>14</sup> As will so often be the case in Irving’s later and more celebrated texts, the narrator Langstaff here introduces Mustapha’s letters in such a way as to highlight possible unreliability due to layers of mediation and questionable expertise: “...I so far gained his confidence, that at his departure, he presented me with a bundle of papers, containing among other articles, several copies of letters, which he had written to his friends in Tripoli.—The following is a translation of one of them. The original is in arabic-greek, but by the assistance of Will Wizard, who understands all languages, not excepting that manufactured by Psalmanazar, I have been enabled to accomplish a tolerable translation. We should have found little difficulty in rendering it into english, had it not been for Mustapha’s confounded pot-hooks and trammels.”

specific, showing that Mustapha is a composite of an actual “Mustaffa, Captain of the Ketch”—one of the sailors—and the Tunisian envoy to Thomas Jefferson, Sidi Soliman Mellimelni.<sup>15</sup> In both cases, these characters would have been familiar to *Salmagundi*’s readers, for whom the escapades of the Barbary Turks had achieved the status of popular entertainment. In this way, as Malini Schueller points out, the character of Mustapha reverses the movement of familiarity with Orientalist depictions: rather than simply assuming familiarity with the literary archetype of the Tripolitan sailor, *Salmagundi*’s depiction paradoxically makes of this wandering Muslim an indigenous reference. By parodying actual incidents, such as the theater benefit held to raise funds for new clothes for the prisoners, Mustapha’s letters also play on readers’ familiarity with current events.

Though the joke works because much of Mustapha’s characterization still adheres to familiar stereotypes and traits seen in the texts previously discussed here (such as mocking American classical education and the priority given to Latin over the English vernacular),<sup>16</sup> more often than not the relationship between his eastern character traits and the west is reversed. This reversal begins, of course, with the flipped gaze: in these letters it is Mustapha who views the west with wonder. Though not entirely original—the Oriental letter-writer conceit had been employed most famously in Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1722) and Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* (1760), both of which influenced Peter Markoe’s *The Algerine Spy in*

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<sup>15</sup> Now mainly remembered as the man for whom Thomas Jefferson held the first White House Iftar meal, Mellimelni was once known as a fascinating diplomatic annoyance who, among other things, demanded that the United States government procure several prostitutes in order to replace the harem he had at home—a request which Jefferson’s administration granted. Though little is known of the historical “Mustaffa, Captain of the Ketch,” the sensual excesses and absurd oaths attributed to Irving’s Mustapha bear a strong resemblance to recorded descriptions of Mellimelni. See also Ray Watkins Irwin, “The Mission of Soliman Mellimelni, Tunisian Ambassador to the United States, 1805-7,” *Americana*. Oct. 1932 (465-71) and Plumer, William. *Plumer’s Memorandum of Proceedings in the United States Senate, 1803-1807* (358-9)

*Pennsylvania* (1787)—Irving’s Mustapha provides insight into the versatility of the Muslim as rhetorical cipher and that figure’s role in political dialogue and literature in the early republic.

In contrast with the internal critiques of American society posited by so many other works (including those covered in this chapter), Mustapha displays stereotypical behaviors comedically and to far different effect. For example, though he acts as a servant to one Asem Hachem, “principal slave-driver to his highness the Bashaw of Tripoli,” slavery never figures as an important issue in the satire of Mustapha’s letters, but rather serves to establish him as a character so callous as to be comical (79). This is especially evident in his observations on gender relations, which register with the familiar themes of patriarchal power dynamics, temptation, seduction, and licentiousness. But if Mustapha’s hyperbolic misogyny strikes the reader as typical, it also serves to ironically suggest the emasculation of American men by a class of emancipated coquettes and termagant housewives. In a foreshadowing of what will be referred to in “Rip Van Winkle” as the “tyranny” wrought by “petticoat government” (itself a familiar reference to John Adams and the notion of “petticoat tyranny”), Mustapha expresses constant shock at scenes of men oppressed by women. “In walking the streets,” he reports, “I have actually seen an exceeding good looking woman with soul enough to box her husband’s ears to his heart’s content, and my very whiskers trembled with indignation at the abject state of these wretched infidels” (80). The usual movement of seduction and danger is reversed here, as it is Mustapha who fears temptation when he assures his interlocutor, “Be not alarmed, I conjure thee, my dear Asem, lest I should be tempted by these beautiful barbarians to break the faith I owe to the three-and-twenty wives from whom my unhappy destiny has perhaps severed me forever...” (322). Scandalized by both the comportment and physical appearance of American women as compared to his Tripolitan wives, Mustapha goes on in another letter to express

bewilderment at the courtship practices of the upper classes, mistaking a formal dance for a slave market and then characterizing “dancing mania” as an infectious disease plaguing New York society (332). In another precursor to Rip Van Winkle’s confusion over the painting of George Washington/King George, Mustapha, upon seeing the president’s image hung above the dancehall door, assumes that Washington is a nationally renowned dancer (*Sketch-Book* 43). Upon being corrected, he quips that as the United States is “remarkable for gratitude to great men, it always does honour to their memory, by placing their monument over the doors of taverns or in the corners of dancing-rooms” (334).

Comparisons to “Rip Van Winkle” are not arbitrary, but rather reflect an early manifestation of a satirical strategy that distinguishes Irving’s career and reflects Bhabha’s description of the nation’s locality being “more *around* temporality than *about* historicity” (200). For, though Rip’s ability to time travel without technology is certainly remarkable, the real magic of his story lies in its deceptively simple way of exploring the ontology of nationhood: despite physically never leaving the Catskill mountains, Rip Van Winkle falls asleep in one nation and *wakes in another*. The uncanny near familiarity Rip senses in the most mundane details of the now American village serve not as aids for recognition but to remind readers that in the post-revolutionary United States, “every thing was strange” (42). Noting these parallels between Rip and Mustapha shows that Irving’s Orientalist characterization of Mustapha belies Schueller’s argument that

Irving’s views indicate, without questioning it, a certain assurance about the availability of the Orient as a new frontier in the cultural imaginary. The use of an Oriental observer similarly signifies a certain comic subversion of Oriental



hierarchies at the same time that it assumes a rhetorical certainty about being able to speak for the Orient. (69)

On the contrary, the familiarity of *Salmagundi's* Orientalism is so hyperbolic as to constitute a subversion of the Orient that Schueller considers unquestioned. A brutish, misogynistic, ignorant, slave-trading Arab national of Turkish descent, with twenty-three wives, whose fanatical Islamic faith is constantly expressed in the form of idolatrous oaths to the Prophet's beard or camel, Mustapha is not just a negative Muslim caricature: he is an attempt to consolidate *every* negative Muslim caricature, so complete in his familiar traits yet unfamiliar in their overdetermined combinations as to be an entirely absurd satire of the very stereotypes that his character embodies. In this way, Mustapha's most repulsive qualities render him an ironically sympathetic observer of American mores, an amusing outsider uniquely positioned to make the young republic strange even for its own citizenry.

Nothing, perhaps, better epitomizes the satirical utility of Irving's take on the "oriental letter" genre than Mustapha's alarmed descriptions of the sociopolitical system in the United States. Deducing from definitions circulated during actual contemporary debates, Mustapha sets out to first explain what the nation is not:

I find that the people of this country are strangely at a loss to determine the nature and proper character of their government. Even their dervises are extremely in the dark as to this particular, and are continually indulging in the most preposterous disquisitions on the subject; some have insisted that it savors of an *aristocracy*; others maintain that it is a *pure* democracy; and a third set of theorists declare absolutely that it is nothing more nor less than a *mobocracy*. The latter, I must confess, though still wide in error, have come nearest to the truth. (143)

Next, picking up a point also satirized in *The Algerine Captive*, he muses on the premium Early National Americans place on classical education and obsolete poetic languages to the exclusion of pragmatic uses of the English vernacular:

A man, my dear Asem, who talks good sense in his native tongue, is held in tolerable estimation in this country; but a fool, who clothes his feeble ideas in a foreign or antique garb, is bowed down to, as a literary prodigy. While I conversed with these people in plain english, I was but little attended to, but the moment I prosed away in greek, every one looked up to me with veneration as an oracle. (143)

Finally, putting his classical Greek to use in naming obscure political systems, he pronounces a verdict that ironically deploys Orientalist Muslim stereotypes to describe a nation riven by irreparable internal divisions:

The simple truth of the matter is, that these people are totally ignorant of their own true character; for, according to the best of my observation, they are the most warlike, and I must say, the most savage nation that I have as yet discovered among all the barbarians. They are not only at war (in their own way) with almost every nation on earth, but they are at the same time engaged in the most complicated knot of civil wars that ever infested any poor unhappy country on which ALLA has denounced his malediction!

To let thee at once into a secret, which is unknown to these people themselves, their government is a pure unadulterated LOGOCRACY or *government of words*. The whole nation does everything *viva voce*, or, by word of mouth, and in this manner is one of the most military nations in existence. (144)

Satirizing debates such as that about better equipping New York's militia (which, to Jeffersonian republicans, smacked of a standing army and steps toward reestablishing monarchy) and the newspaper war taking place between political factions (all of which accused each other of harboring treasonous loyalties), Mustapha's "logocracy" label bemusedly describes the United States government as a government by words, whose wars were fought primarily by "SLANG WHANGERS", or journalists. The extended war analogy never abates, reaching ever greater levels of allegorically violent absurdity:

In a logocracy thou well knowest there is little or no occasion for fire arms, or any such destructive weapons. Every offensive or defensive measure is enforced by *wordy battle*, and *paper war*; he who has the longest tongue, or the readiest quill, is sure to gain the victory—will carry horror, abuse, and *ink-shed* into the very trenches of the enemy, and without mercy or remorse, put men, women, and children, to the point of the—pen!" (144-45)

Alongside descriptions of "the present bashaw" as one who responds to threats of violence with long proclamations while offending anti-British sentiment by "wearing *red breeches*," this letter's rather unsparing satire is clearly aimed at the Thomas Jefferson, who remains a favored satirical punching bag for Irving even throughout Knickerbocker's *History of New York* (in which he is represented by the equally loquacious William Kieft, or "William the Testy" (145). However, reading Mustapha's mockery of Bashaw Jefferson as a solidly partisan hack piece would be to underestimate the depths of Irving's employment of Mustapha's cultural misunderstandings. Though Irving is usually identified as a conservative (some would say aristocratic) Federalist, neither his writings nor his considerable political connections attest to strict and unyielding partisanship. Furthermore, *Salmagundi's* satire was rather evenhanded,

derided for French-loving republicanism by unsympathetic Federalists and aristocratic British-apologist Federalism by some republicans.

In fact, if read as a straight anti-Jeffersonian burlesque, Mustapha makes a case rather weak for a satirist as acute as Irving. Though Jefferson's notorious proclamations certainly irked more militant citizens and Federalist opponents, the truth of the matter is that most of the speeches mentioned by Mustapha achieved their goals. In the case of various incidents off the coast of Tripoli, as well as an illegal clandestine plot by Aaron Burr to seize Spanish land on the lower Mississippi, Jefferson's speeches defused potentially violent conflicts and cowed belligerents into backing down without unnecessary bloodshed (Irving 1113). His embargo against Britain and resistance to a standing navy were less effective, but he eventually compromised on both positions. Though the concept of logocracy is often read as a wholesale denunciation of ineffectual or dishonest governance (and to be sure, Jefferson era Barbary captivity narratives abound with examples of such criticism), it would be a mistake to view logocracy simply as the negative side of a binary contrast with a more desirable form of government prescribed by the text. Christopher Looby, whose book *Voicing America* takes Mustapha as its presiding theorist, describes texts exploring ideas like logocracy as

...those that made discursively available to early national Americans the knowledge that the social and political world they lived in was linguistically constituted and historically malleable, and therefore effectively open to purposive verbal action. As *literary* texts that persistently called attention to their own formal linguistic artifice, they raised to an unusually high pitch of self-reflexivity this knowledgeability about the conditions of historical agency and verbal performativity in the United States. (9)

By raising the “collective historical moment of linguistic self-scrutiny to a high level of self-consciousness,” the Mustapha letters articulate not an unequivocal denunciation of Jeffersonian democracy in favor of aristocratic Federalism, but an attempt to navigate anxieties over difficult ontological and epistemological questions abounding in the new republic. What exactly, the logocratic critique goads its reader to ask, *is* a constitutional republic?

To that point, it is notable that among *Salmagundi*'s various pseudonyms, only Mustapha's letters take on matters that transcend New York society. Whereas European-American figures like Launcelot Langstaff, Jeremy Cockloft, and William Wizard limit their scope to local (or, at most, regional) habits, publications, arts, theatrical productions, and politicians, the “grand national divan, or congress” is discussed at length only by the Tripolitan prisoner, who details “a blustery windy assembly where every thing is carried by noise, tumult and debate,” and whose members “do not meet together to find out wisdom in the multitude of counsellors, but to wrangle, call each other hard names and hear *themselves talk*” (147). The ironic distance provided by Mustapha's hyperbolic Orientalism provides cover for discussing heated political issues (the others pseudonyms were all identifiable parodies of New York notables), but also allows for a critical look at largely unquestioned institutions by enabling *Salmagundi*'s readers to view their society through the eyes of one who takes very little for granted and understands even less.

Mustapha's ambivalence toward the nation is evident in his description of a military parade (which William Wizard introduces as “military foppery”) upon the presenting of colors at City Hall (112). Describing a scene in which republican democracy amounts to gaudy ostentation, in which political leaders are merely well-dressed, better placed commoners, his observations satirize martial culture and administrative title as amplifying the trappings of ceremonial

aristocracy rather than decreasing it through democratization. At first, he sounds like a benighted fool who misunderstands the proceedings to be a pitched battle. When the ranks have difficulty doing maneuvers around a pump and decide to march past it, Mustapha takes this to be a conquest; when a military band plays at a building, he determines that they are trying to blow down the walls; a spirited political speech is described the “grand bashaw” being “run through” by a “little bashaw” (115). He is eventually corrected by a corporal (whom he describes as a tailor temporarily exalted to a higher position), and declares what will become something of a refrain in his ruminations on logocracy: “Oh, my friend, surely every thing in this country is on a great scale!” (116).

Remarking on the “great scale” of American institutions comes to be Mustapha’s stock response to what he considers the massively bureaucratic workings of the “windy” logocracy. Incredulous about the debate required to fund a pair of new breeches for him, Mustapha observes that

...we were prisoners of state, that we must therefore be clothed at the expense of the government; that as no provision had been made by congress for an emergency of the kind, it was impossible to furnish me with a pair of breeches, until all the sages of the nation had been conveyed to *talk* over the matter, and debate upon the expediency of granting my request. Sword of the immortal Khalid, thought I, but this is great!—this is truly sublime! All the sages of an immense *logocracy* assembled together to talk about my breeches! (179)

In a sense, the notion that everything in the American logocracy should be on a grand, sublime scale has the opposite effect satirically: especially in examples such as this one, Mustapha’s observations on American logocratic grandiosity effectively highlights the ways in which

prolonged and expensive debates over relatively small affairs threaten to hamstring the governing process. And if Mustapha's take on governance and ceremony in the young republic strikes us as aristocratically antidemocratic satire, his horror at the democratic process does little to assuage that judgment:

I have seen, in short, that awful despot, *the people*, in the moment of unlimited power, wielding newspapers in one hand, and with the other scattering mud and filth about, like some desperate lunatic relieved from the restraints of his strait waistcoat. I have seen beggars on horseback, ragamuffins riding in coaches, and swine seated in places of honour—I have seen liberty, I have seen equality, I have seen fraternity!—I have seen that great political puppet-show—an election. (202)

Invoking “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” suggests a mob affair on par with the French Revolution, casting this as an example of either Irving's antidemocratic aristocratic leanings or a sendup of the panicked fears of aristocratic, francophobic Federalists. It might, in fact, be read as a combination of the two, considering the inherent ambivalence of Mustapha's apparent disdain for democracy—a puppet show, after all, implies the polar opposite of mob rule.

Given the thick irony with which Mustapha describes the election, his description of its grand ceremony might as well be read as *mere* ceremony; and his disdain for democracy continues when he says, “Equality, Asem, is one of the most consummate scoundrels that ever crept from the brain of a political juggler” (259). Here again, Mustapha builds on a satire that seems like an apology for aristocracy, going on to argue that “There will always be an inequality among mankind, so long as a portion of it is enlightened and industrious, and the rest idle and ignorant” (259). Still, this section ends with Mustapha strongly criticizing not the indolence of

the lower orders, but their inability to turn discontent into revolution rather than simply participating in the very form of logocracy by which they are currently oppressed (260-61).

At the literal level, Mustapha's ambivalence is that of the archetypal Muslim foreigner—the Oriental letter writer—confused by American institutions; as satire it gives voice to the very real confusion and bitter discord emerging from the era's partisan politics. In fact, the critique that eventually emerges from Mustapha's complaints is neither republican nor Federalist in its ideological orientation, but a wider dismissal of a process whereby “—once differ in *politicks*, in mere theories, visions and chimeras, the growth of interest, of folly, or madness, and deadly warfare ensues; every eye flashes fire, every tongue is loaded with reproach, and every heart is filled with gall and bitterness” (257). The crucial problem here is not democracy as such, and at times this satire even hints at an air of democratic egalitarianism. Though—as already noted—Irving is usually identified as a conservative Federalist, his writings in *Salmagundi* (for example, mocking “slang whangers” who denounce opponents as “jacobins, frenchmen, and *irish rebels*”) often specifically satirize the Federalist position (260). What Mustapha's observations reveal is not a denunciation of democracy per se, but the divisions resulting from its political process and the ever present potential for a disunity that “threatens to impair all social intercourse, and even to sever the sacred union of family and kindred” (259).

According to *Salmagundi*'s satire, in a constitutional republic—a nation perceived as having been rather magically spoken or written into existence—political speech is a dangerous and tension-inducing medium, a critique of which reveals divisions that emphasize how far the nation remains from social cohesion and national coherence. As Looby astutely observes, “It would not be too much to claim that Irving's denomination of America as a ‘logocracy’ was meant to suggest that in the endemic legitimization crises that beset the new nation—in the



absence of established institutions of social control and traditional means of securing consent—the *only* social institution readily available to the young republic was language itself” (82).

This anxiety about the primacy of language in American society haunts the first half of Irving’s career, eventually inspiring brilliant (and ultimately successful) attempts to manipulate national identity through works of fiction deployed as myth-making pseudo-histories geared toward establishing a set of cohesive national traditions. This more positive take on logocracy manifests early, however, as the other side of Mustapha’s ambivalent satirical take on democracy in the young republic. For example, among his indictments of logocracy, we also find Mustapha cataloging the predominant traits of several national characters:

The infidel nations have each a separate characteristic trait, by which they may be distinguished from each other:—the spaniards, for instance, may be said to *sleep* upon every affair of importance—the italians to *fiddle* upon every thing—the french to *dance* upon every thing—the germans to *smoke* upon every thing—the british islanders to *eat* upon every thing,—and the *windy* subjects of the american logocracy to *talk* upon every thing. (150)

As archetypal behaviors go, this is relatively benign, if perhaps somewhat suggestive of an effete approach to problem-solving. Yet much later, Mustapha once again highlights a silver lining in his exasperation at finding that Americans in the logocracy do not, in fact all build “political safety on ruined characters and the persecution of individuals” (256). In an undeniably flattering depiction of logocratic freedoms punctuated by a quote lifted from Irving’s perennial target, Thomas Jefferson, Mustapha observes:

How fertile in these contradictions is this extensive logocracy! Men of different nations, manners, and languages, live in this country in the most perfect harmony,

and nothing is more common than to see individuals, whose respective governments are at variance, taking each other by the hand and exchanging offices of friendship. Nay, even on the subject of religion, which as it affects our dearest interests, our earliest opinions and prejudices, some warmth and heart-burning might be excused, which even in *our* enlightened country is so fruitful in difference between man and man—even religion occasions no dissension among these people, and it has even been discovered by one of their *sages*, that believing in one God or twenty Gods, “neither breaks a man’s leg, nor picks his pocket.”

(256)

In Looby’s words, “What amazed Mustapha (and, presumably, Irving too) was that despite the conflicts tearing apart the fabric of the nation, it yet endured” (82). Mustapha’s amazement is edifyingly surprising, in large part, because it provides a somewhat optimistic concession to the logocracy among seemingly relentless assaults against its contrivance. In a series of “Oriental letters” that deflate American progressive pretensions by ironically inflating them until they burst, this excerpt seems to earnestly offer the possibility of national success within the logocracy’s incessant and precarious cacophony.

More complexly, though, this hopeful moment in Irving’s ambivalent look at America through politics in Early National New York provides yet another wrinkle to be deciphered in Irving’s Salmagundian Orientalist satire on the vicissitudes of building a nascent culture on a foundation comprised primarily of words. By employing the “Oriental letter” popularized by Montesquieu and Goldsmith, Mustapha’s take on Irving’s logocratic conceit uses the Muslim figure as a means to the end of establishing a distinctly American cosmopolitanism whereby education and empathy might help to construct a new, coherent artistic and political culture. As

already noted, both Rowson's and Tyler's Algerian narratives—both in their captivity and picaresque elements—use *Don Quijote* as a reference; but Irving's Mustapha reverses the gaze and employs the Muslim captive to enact a truly quixotic set of ironies: rather than arguing for an emergent American cosmopolitanism merely by presuming to model it, Mustapha takes a slightly less paranoid page from Clara Wieland's book and implicates the audience in the text's project by making the nation strange. Ultimately, his project of deflating the pretensions of New York politics attempts to dethrone powerful and popular figures such as prominent journalists and politicians so as to posit the author as a viable alternative for national cultural construction. If the logocracy is—for better or worse—run *viva voce*, who better to establish its foundation than narrators with artistically suggestive names like Geoffrey Crayon? In both their characters' tendencies and the structure of their quixotic ironies, *Salmagundi's* Mustapha letters employ the “Oriental letter” writer as a bridge between the Orientalisms of the immediate post-revolutionary period and that of the Antebellum era.

**Chapter 3: Mockery, Mimicry, and Mutability: National Character and Literary Tradition in Washington Irving's *A History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon***

Much has been written on Washington Irving's engagement with history, identity, and nationalism. That Irving shaped American national identity and literature is hardly a matter of debate, though his importance to either has been downplayed by both literary and historical scholars as a result of twentieth century canonical curating. Contemporary criticisms of Irving tended to focus on his not having broken enough with English tradition: while favorable reviews saw Irving as the sign that American literature had finally arrived, his detractors saw that arrival as a mere imitation of the mother country's literature through a mastery of properly English language and aesthetics not seen in his predecessors.<sup>17</sup> Whereas during Irving's lifetime this accusation came mostly from English critics seeking to denigrate American authors, it was solidified in the twentieth century by American scholars, including Irving's notoriously unimpressed biographer, Stanley T. Williams, whose introduction describes Irving as "a talented writer, hardly more; as the author of two or three enduring sketches or tales..." (xiii).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In *The Spirit of the Age, or: Contemporary Portraits*, William Hazlitt remarked that

Mr Irving's writings are literary *anachronisms*. He comes to England for the first time; and being on the spot, fancies himself in the midst of those characters and manners which he had read of in the *Spectator*, and other approved authors, and which were the only idea he had hitherto formed of the parent country. Instead of looking round to see what *we are*, he sets to work to describe us as *we were*—at second hand. (379)

<sup>18</sup> Though it is the first complete and still most exhaustive look at Irving's life and career, one of the most comically distinctive characteristics of *The Life of Washington Irving* is the apparent self-consciousness with which Williams seeks to assure the reader about his own distaste for Irving's writing. The introduction alone spends most of its four short pages either damning Irving with faint praise ("a man singularly lovable"), declaring him inferior to Hawthorne, Poe, and even Cooper ("tested by which he is often trivial"), or maligning his talents outright ("Lacking force and concentration"). (xiii-xvi)

More recent evaluations of Irving's corpus reveal a much more deliberately nuanced engagement with history and identity than that with which he has been credited in the past. Alfred Bendixen, for example, praises Irving for solidifying both the short story and local color as major idioms in American literature, bringing "the American landscape to life in works of fiction, giving the short story a specificity and definiteness of locale and ultimately making it the dominant form for expressions of literary regionalism in the United States" (4). *The Cambridge History of American Literature* goes so far as to declare Irving the "Father of American Literature," though the appellation refers almost entirely to Irving's commercial success rather than literary contributions (661). In this way, the *Cambridge History* does not stray far from Williams's opinion that "Irving's career, in contrast to his writings, had that volume and variety which entitle him to be remembered, through a full biography, as a famous American; this, despite his modesty, his caution, and the slenderness of his talents, he was" (xvi).

In a much more generous and compelling reading of *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Susan Manning considers the ambivalence of Irving's debt to English literature a major theme of the work, his immersion in English national monuments and history an attempt to come to terms with tradition while developing a literature both distinctly American and acceptable to a legitimating European audience (ix-x). This paradox provides the foundation for much of the current reading of Irving's two first major works, *A History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. This chapter will show that Irving attempts to establish not only an American literature but a wider-reaching culture and identity for the young republic, and does so through a complex, multilayered satire of national identity and historiography by which he simultaneously mocks existing nationalistic artifacts and seeks to construct a set of artifacts worthy of a "true and authentic" national identity.

### The “Pedantic Lore” of Knickerbocker’s *History*

Undertaken at first as a parody of Samuel Latham Mitchill’s 1807 history, *The Picture of New-York, or The Traveller’s Guide Through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States by a Gentleman Residing in this City*, Irving’s—that is, Diedrich Knickerbocker’s—*A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* lampoons the spirit of the age in Early National New York, especially with regards to the blossoming historiography which had seen the founding of the New-York Historical Society in 1804 and, from there, a flurry of activity by which, as Jeffrey Scraba observes, “not only were American writers urged to match British Enlightenment historiographers, but they were also incited to produce new types of history to celebrate the new country” (394). This enthusiasm for the continued production of new histories resulted in a literary hierarchy that ranked the pursuit of objective historical knowledge above the production of literature (the legacy of which was a strong American propensity for historical fiction), but in the rush for exhaustiveness it also yielded questionable results, and Mitchill’s history (among others) often strikes the reader as more pedantic than erudite. Seizing on this, Irving’s parody—narrated by the now legendary Knickerbocker—takes aim squarely at the post-Enlightenment historian’s enterprise right from the title page, which reads, in its entirety,

*A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty. Containing Among many Surprising and Curious Matters, the Unutterable Ponderings of Walter the Doubter, the Disastrous Projects of William the Testy, and the Chivalric Achievements of Peter the Headstrong, the three Dutch Governors of New Amsterdam; being the only Authentic History of the Times that ever hath been, or ever will be Published.*

Guided by the title’s audacious goal, Knickerbocker introduces this history of Dutch New York (1624-1664) with an ironic manifesto strikingly similar to that of the New-York Historical

Society—itsself a self-conscious attempt at justifying the N-YHS’s project to New Yorkers and against its counterparts in New England.<sup>19</sup> As Scraba notes, “To the Public”

recollected the N-YHS’s manifesto and was later recollected by it. This symbiotic but ambivalent relationship is emphasized by Knickerbocker’s dedication of his text to the N-YHS. Though this dedication might be construed as either a backhanded appreciation or a sardonic dismissal of the society’s activities, it does raise the issue, newly important in the American postcolonial context, of collecting and disseminating historical materials. (395)

Knickerbocker goes on to outline a methodology purportedly inspired by Gibbon and Hume and Smollett in the Enlightenment and—in antiquity—Xenophon, Sallust, Thucydides, Tacitus, Livy, Pylorus, and especially Herodotus; a methodology which includes “gather[ing] all the fragments of our ancient history”, but also, “where no written records could be found...to continue the chain of history by well authenticated traditions” (6). In so many words—and in the tradition of Herodotus—folk tales, rumors, and wild speculations are fair game and shall be used liberally to supplement the written record.

From the start, then, Knickerbocker’s *History* satirically deflates the august concept of history as superior to storytelling, and, if in its irony it elevates the historian at all, it is chiefly as the purveyor of enjoyable national myths. This puncturing of history’s respectability can be seen in the entirety of Book I, the chapters of which display Knickerbocker’s Enlightenment credentials through an absurd, overwhelming stew of biblical, classical and neoclassical references and syllogisms meant to establish causality and historical lineage from the biblical

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<sup>19</sup> On the N-YHS’s claims to legitimacy, Jennifer Steenshorne notes that in explicitly declaring there to be no rivalry between them and the Massachusetts Historical Society, the N-YHS manifesto inadvertently highlights the inevitable expectation that the two would be natural rivals. (30-31)

creation to the Dutch settlement of Manhattan. As Jeffrey Insko has shown, Knickerbocker's *History* might be usefully read as a parody of the "state histories" that came to typify history-writing in the Early National period, and in which individual states' myopic histories are posed as essential to the overall narrative of the development of the United States (609). Insko points especially to Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire* and Benjamin Trumbull's *Complete History of Connecticut*, the latter of which is explicitly alluded to when Knickerbocker denounces Trumbull's historiography as an example of "the misrepresentations of the crafty historians of New England," against which he resolves to "be guided by a spirit of truth and impartiality, and a regard to [his] immortal fame..." (128). Terence Martin observes that Irving's satire mocks a habit of "fixing beginnings" seen throughout early American regional histories:

Taking dates of discovery and first settlement as logical points of departure, early American histories move from the known to the known with a faith in the divine ordering of events that sustains their narrative structure. Although the writers are aware that civilizations rise, flourish, and decay, the organizing principle of their work is primarily linear rather than cyclical. (6)

This is especially prevalent in New England histories, with both Belknap and Trumbull citing the influence of Thomas Prince, whose 1736 *A Chronological History of New England, in the Form of Annals* begins with the sixth day of the biblical Creation and ends in 1633, splitting the history of the world into three great periods—the Creation to the birth of Christ, the birth of Christ to the discovery of the New World, and the discovery of the New World to the discovery of New England—and arguing that history's progress moves toward the establishment of New England as its crowning achievement. This teleology, its strained causal narrative, and its consequent



exceptionalism are all emulated in subsequent histories, and the many identifiable parodies in Knickerbocker's *History* reveal Irving's exhaustive acquaintance with the genre and its various manifestations.

In the preface ("The Author's Apology") to the 1848 edition of Knickerbocker's *History*, Irving notes that his initial attempt to parody Mitchill's history was eventually abandoned in favor of a more general spoof of history writing, and, to be sure, the parallels between Mitchill's and Knickerbocker's histories either dissipate within the first few chapters or apply just as well to various other histories of the time. Much has been written about the targets of Irving's satire in his descriptions of the various New Amsterdam governors, and there are also several insightful articles which point out Knickerbocker's pervasive use of classical allusions,<sup>20</sup> but these tend to be treated as separate topics. By contrast, this chapter views Knickerbocker's constant name-dropping not as an arbitrary list of individual spoofs, but as a unified parody that sustains an ironic view of history and national identity through Irving's first two major works and a host of narrators. Throughout *A History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Irving performs a dialectical reading of national identity formation, by which he both critiques the contrivance of history, national tradition, and national identity, and promotes it as necessary. This does not unfold in a linear sequence, but rather simultaneously and cyclically, so that Irving is rarely not critiquing the very thing that his narrators perform. By setting up multilayered narrative frames that direct the reader's attention to the story *qua* story and thus giving the lie to the established history of "well authenticated traditions," Irving's expressions of national identity in the *History* and *Sketch-Book* constantly point to their own contrivance so as to dethrone history as objectively true narrative.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Joseph J. Walsh's "Washington Irving's Comic Aeneas and the Apotheosis of Santa Claus."

Irving's mythological playfulness is perhaps most obviously signaled when the fictional historian Diedrich Knickerbocker imagines his literary descendants and describes himself as "the progenitor, prototype and precursor of them all, posted at the head of this host of literary worthies, with my book under my arm, and *New York on my back*, pressing forward like a gallant commander, to honour and immortality" (9, italics mine). Thus it is that Knickerbocker fancies himself Aeneas to New York's Anchises, his father, whom he saves from the burning rubble of history; but in this analogy Knickerbocker is also Virgil writing himself into his own epic. This characterization of the historian as both epic hero and epic poet corresponds nicely with Knickerbocker's inflated sense of the historian's role as both chronicler of national history and creator of the nation through that chronicle; an attitude evinced when he proclaims, "For after all, gentle reader, cities of *themselves*, and in fact empires of *themselves*, are nothing without a historian... The world—the world, is nothing without the historian!" (8). Furthermore, his repeated emphasis on piety adds to the Aenean overtones of the entire *History* in its narrator's treatment of both New Amsterdam's historical luminaries and its heroic chronicler. Knickerbocker encourages just such a reading in the "Apology" when he explains his reaction to finding that so few New Yorkers knew anything about the Dutch period of their city:

This, then, broke upon me as the poetic age of our city; poetic from its very obscurity; and open, like the early and obscure days of ancient Rome, to the embellishments of heroic fiction. I hailed my native city as fortunate above all other American cities in having an antiquity thus extending back into the regions of doubt and fable; neither did I conceive I was committing any grievous historical sin in helping out the few facts I could collect in this remote and forgotten region with figments of my own brain, or in giving characteristic

attributes to the few names connected with it which I might dig up from oblivion.

(350)

Knickerbocker's narration flags his heroic fiction as having "a bearing wide from the sober aim of history," and states that his aim "was to embody the traditions of our city in an amusing form..." (350). Thus we see that Diedrich Knickerbocker's extensively researched history is Washington Irving's mock-epic burlesque.

Of course, formally speaking, the *History* is no mock-epic, and one might argue that—like Herodotus, Polybius, and any number of classical figures mentioned by Knickerbocker in his performance of erudition—these references to *The Aeneid* have little significance beyond an ironic jab at self-important name-checking by pompous historians. However, as mock-*history* taking aim at the neoclassical tradition in a specifically American context, the *History of New York* cannot help but partake of the influence of one of the American historical chronicle's most important (and popular) progenitors: Cotton Mather. Indeed, while Knickerbocker's *History* meticulously skewers several popular New England chronicles, its formal characteristics most closely mirror the 1702 *Magnalia Christi Americana* as its ironic treatment of Dutch colonial magistrates as exalted figures parodies the structure employed in Mather's hagiography of New England governors. Knickerbocker's account of New York mimics the *Magnalia* in being composed of multiple books with chapters structured around the reigns of various governors. Like Thomas Prince later, Mather prefigures Knickerbocker's tendency toward long-winded explanations of the biblical and classical lineage of his colony's people, of the creation and indigenous population of his region, and his classical allusions even share with Knickerbocker a particular reverence for Herodotus.

Additionally, there are the two works' consistent echoes of the *Aeneid*. As Sacvan Bercovitch has noted, Mather's prose *Magnalia*—in addition to explicitly quoting Virgil several times—makes use of such epic conventions as invoking the muse, starting *in media res*, and writing in elevated style about the founding and fate of a nation. He also argues that Mather uses the *Aeneid* in a complex typology by which “the founding of Rome prefigures that of New England and Virgil's poem finds its anti-type in his Church History” (340). In fact, as Bercovitch's reading shows, Mather depicts John Winthrop, first colonial governor of Massachusetts Bay, as an American Aeneas. Expanding on Bercovitch's reading, John C. Shields exposes some unsettling implications of Mather's classical typology, including his descriptions of Native Americans alternately as myrmidons or native Italian savages—in either case, representative of groups impeding Aeneas's fated establishment of Rome, which is of course representative of New England as center of Christ's empire on Earth. In Chapter 5 of Book 1 of the *History of New York*, Diedrich Knickerbocker also contrasts the natives with invading Christians while providing exposition regarding the population and repopulation of the island of Manhattan. “The question which has thus suddenly arisen,” he declares, “is, what right had the first discoverers of America to land, and take possession of a country, without asking the consent of its inhabitants, or yielding them an adequate compensation for their territory?” (40). Knickerbocker's answer to his own question spans several pages, and consists of a stream of syllogisms which—based on the premises that the natives lack a written language, agriculture, Christianity, the concept of property rights, and a bevy of other civilized trappings—all come to the conclusion that the Indians “deserve to be exterminated” by a population claiming its “right by discovery...right by extermination...[and] right by gunpowder” (47). The repetition of similar statements, all concluding with the term “extermination”, punctuate a remarkably bitter satire of

the centuries-old justifications for the eradication of native peoples in the Americas, ironically revealing the violence inherent in imperial storytelling paraded as objective history. The targets of this satire, as Irving himself notes in the “Apology,” are a number of authors—particularly the writers of a type of “pedantic lore displayed in certain American works”—including the myth-making works of Mitchill, Belknap, Trumbull, and Mather (349).

### **City, Country, and Nation in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon***

Irving’s concern—even fascination—with the tale as foundation for national historical, political, and artistic identity also finds expression throughout Irving’s second and best-known work, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, which I will read as a sustained rumination on—and exercise in—the proliferation and maintenance of national mythologies. Framed by the pseudonymous Geoffrey Crayon’s voyages to and from England, the *Sketchbook*’s chapters mainly consist of English travel sketches, journal entries on literary creation, sentimental tales (usually in a pastoral setting and—as the sentimental is wont to be—focused on marriage or death), and Romantic Gothic stories purported to have been either derived from Old World folklore (such as “The Spectre Bridegroom”) or (as in the case of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”) “Found among the Papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker”—himself allegedly a respected collector of Hudson River Valley lore. These categories inevitably overlap, especially since Crayon’s sentimental tales and thoughts on literature mainly spring from his meanderings.

One striking consistency in the *Sketchbook* is the fact that the collection’s sentimental and Romantic Gothic sketches are not only surrounded by the travel sketches and the thoughts on literature, but enact the themes established in those pieces, all of which explicitly promote the

aesthetic as a means of exploring questions of national identity and authenticity, and in so doing provide coherence to otherwise isolated pieces. For example, the first sketch after “The Author’s Account of Himself” is “The Voyage”, which chronicles the transatlantic voyage to England and ends with the sentence, “I stepped upon the land of my forefathers—but felt that I was a stranger in the land.” (19) The next chapter begins by stating that “One of the first places to which a stranger is taken in Liverpool is the Athenaeum”, and it is at the Athenaeum that Crayon meets English historian William Roscoe—the figure to whom the chapter is dedicated (and whose physical features are analogized with the Gothic architecture which—in the previous chapter—Crayon had judged “characteristic of England”) (20). Before closing the chapter with a sonnet written by Roscoe to his collection of books, Crayon declares Roscoe “the literary landmark of the place” (25). He thus establishes the author as a national treasure and his books as his true loves worthy of sonnets, followed two tales later by “Rip Van Winkle”, from the papers of that other author as national treasure, one Diedrich Knickerbocker.

Whereas *A History of New York* is said to be the result of Diedrich Knickerbocker’s sifting through the New-York Historical Society’s archival materials and augmenting his historical findings with “well authenticated traditions” so as to compile the truest possible history, the *Sketch-book* is an exercise in Romantic storytelling and a search for the soul of young America through Geoffrey Crayon’s travels in England. Yet, though some critics derided Irving for what they considered an obsequious portrayal of Europe and England in particular, Crayon at various points in his literary observations attempts—if with some moderation—to declare American literary independence. This comes first in the sketch “English Writers on America,” a defense of America and American writers against English authors’ harsh criticisms in light of an increase in both stateside publication and emigration from England to the United

States. Criticizing English critics for works “intended to diffuse error rather than knowledge,” Crayon in this sketch focuses on the pervasive narrative of American progress, noting that “The national character is yet in a state of fermentation; it has already given proofs of powerful and generous qualities; and the whole promises to settle down into something substantially excellent” (50-51).

Having thus characterized American progress as a process of fermentation and maturation, Crayon proceeds to characterize England as suffering the process of fermentation’s negative counterpart, decay: “The present friendship of America may be of but little moment to her; but the future destinies of that country do not admit of a doubt; over those of England there lower some shadows of uncertainty” (54). Though he encourages American authors and readers to take as an example the best of English culture, Crayon repeatedly notes that the Old World is rife with national and cultural pathologies to be avoided:

What have we to do with national prejudices? They are inveterate diseases of old countries, contracted in rude and ignorant ages, when nations knew but little of each other, and looked beyond their own boundaries with distrust and hostility. We, on the contrary, have sprung into national existence in an enlightened and philosophic age, when the different parts of the habitable world, and the various branches of the human family, have been indefatigably studied and made known to each other; and we forego the advantages of our birth, if we do not shake off the national prejudices, as we would the local superstitions of the old world. (56-57)

This characterization of England as irreparably diseased and spiraling toward obsolescence persists even—perhaps especially—in those travel sketches which at first glance seem to have Crayon breathlessly reporting on awe-inspiring English historical artifacts.

One notable pattern in the *Sketch-book*'s preoccupation with historical artifacts is the frequency with which Geoffrey Crayon finds himself looking at and thinking about graves. Crayon's attitude toward the significance of these markers ranges from mining them for sentimental punch in the sketch "Rural Funerals" to several scenes in "Westminster Abbey" that essentially lead him to the conclusion that monuments to great Brits represent little more than romantic legend and mythmaking used to hubristic, foolish ends. "How idle a boast, after all," Crayon eventually exclaims as he exits the abbey, "is the immortality of a name!" (156). This growing impatience with the notion of posterity (which, with immortality, is the stated aim of Diedrich Knickerbocker and a major theme of the New-York Historical Society's efforts) is echoed throughout the *Sketch-book*, and is especially pronounced in all of the sketches set in Westminster Abbey.

Memory is shown to be a fickle thing in all of Geoffrey Crayon's sketches, and in "The Mutability of Literature" the posterity of the author—though perhaps, when earned, more authentic in Crayon's estimation than that of royals and military heroes—is by no means guaranteed or necessarily deserved. Driven by an instance of what he describes as "certain half-dreaming moods of mind" to escape the noise of travelers in the abbey, Geoffrey Crayon is conducted by a "ghostly verger" through "mouldering tombs" and "the crumbling sculpture of former ages" to a library in the abbey's cloisters. Foreshadowing his descriptions of the abbey's actual tombs and monuments, Crayon mocks the notion of authorial posterity, describing the abbey's library as "a kind of literary catacomb, where authors, like mummies, are piously



entombed, and left to blacken and moulder in dusty oblivion” (113). These authors and their books consist “principally of old polemical writers, and [are] much more worn by time than use” (113). With these books (and their authors) ignored, forgotten, and decaying in much the same way as Crayon describes England’s great landmarks suffering through the same process, Crayon posits a sort of telescoping analogy: the library is the figurative repository of mouldering tombs housed in an actual abbey full of mouldering tombs which is itself—literally and practically as well as figuratively—a symbol for the now decaying nation in which it is housed.

The metonymic relationship between literature, archives, and the nation is especially evident when, during his reverie, Crayon argues with an angrily neglected quarto about the absurdity of expecting any author’s works to survive into posterity given the fluidity and mongrelization of taste and language (English in particular) over time. In making his case for mutability, Crayon exempts Shakespeare, which actually proves the rule since the quarto considers Shakespeare a talentless dilettante, thus marking itself as obsolete due to the same Old World bigotry by which American writers might be judged inferior to their English contemporaries. Michelle Sizemore describes this play with mutability and cultural debts as a way of justifying Irving’s career by situating him within a tradition that is not just linear and progressive, but a constant borrowing and bouncing back and forth.

An American writer among the ranks accused of defiling the well, Crayon is obviously served by this principle of mutability. If Edmund Spenser’s English is as much a permutation of the language as, say, Noah Webster’s, then his place as the standard bearer is not really founded on the bedrock of authenticity but on the sands of convention and aesthetic taste. The problem for American letters, as Washington Irving well knew, was that the fiction of English cultural authenticity

was more powerful than the fiction that brought books to life, resurrected headless horsemen, and induced twenty-year sleeps. (157-58)

Even as Crayon admits his debts, he justifies a type of interplay between past and present that is not stadialist in its orientation but rather enacts narratives whereby “chronological time halts and the past flashes back to life. Crayon refers to this phenomenon as ‘enchantment,’ an experience involving the sudden convergence of past, present, and future that radically alters his sense of historical time” (Sizemore 158). As Sizemore shows, Crayon’s use of “enchantment” muddles time so as to tell stories that layer various pasts (Native, Dutch, English, etc.) which haunt locations and problematize the notion of progressive, stadialist historical narratives. In this way, Crayon’s sketches posit a perpetual juxtaposition of past and present, showing heterogeneous temporalities within the static space provided by the sketch form. In so doing, he highlights storytelling as the act of creation, the real location of culture, and proposes an alternative to teleological historical narratives whereby one (in this case, English via New England) story predominates and unfolds toward a unanimously agreed-upon endpoint. Through Knickerbocker and Crayon, Irving undermines the respectability of historiography and stadialist conceptions of history and culture. He presents history as a form of storytelling, thus simultaneously devaluing the notion of objective history and elevating the position of storytelling.<sup>21</sup>

As such, there is a pragmatism to Crayon’s self-characterization as “an arrant poacher” in “a kind of literary ‘preserve’” (74). Though this might be interpreted as reverence or humility for one’s artistic influences, it should also be read within the context provided by “English Writers

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<sup>21</sup> Sizemore’s argument here is consistent with a similar argument made in Patricia Jane Roylance’s *Eclipse of Empires*, which observes that Knickerbocker’s *History* “refuses the incorporation of New Netherland into a protonational narrative by emphasizing its temporal discontinuity with the history of British New York,” thus staging a “historical rupture [which] disallows an evolutionary national narrative.” (100)

on America.” For though Crayon pays tribute to his literary forebears and admits theft, he also implicates those forebears in theft as a crucial part of the act by which they became worthy of study. In so doing, he again recalls the trope of productive decay:

...I consider this mutability of language a wise precaution of Providence for the benefit of the world at large, and of authors in particular. To reason from analogy, we daily behold the varied and beautiful tribes of vegetable springing up, flourishing, adorning the fields for a short time, and then fading into dust, to make way for their successors. Were this not the case, the fecundity of nature would be a grievance instead of a blessing. The earth would groan with rank and excessive vegetation, and its surface become a tangled wilderness. In like manner the works of genius and learning decline, and make way for subsequent productions. (117)

Crayon’s admission of guilt to the charge of literary theft can only be read as humility if one ignores that “English Writers on America” has already established English culture as on the decline and American as on the ascendant. American literature in this context is not the artistic manifestation of the ultimate end of human progress, but one among many examples of the cyclical nature of identity formation and national culture, thus pointing to identity and culture not as the narrative process itself rather than its end.

Steven Petersheim argues that the dead past is appropriated in Irving’s sketches to primarily artistic effect. Contrasted with what he considers a more lived interaction with Westminster Abbey in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s travel writing, for example, Petersheim views Irving as portraying the past as a dead repository of symbols to be employed for aesthetic and symbolic effect in the present. “In Crayon’s reveries of the past,” he argues, “it is the reveries, not the past, which bear the greatest significance” (121). Petersheim shows that, by locating dead

history in London's monuments, Irving uses them for the aesthetic and emotional impact they provide, but also implies the decaying state of present-day England:

Interaction with the 'mother country' at this time, rather than constituting a threat to America's self-identity, represented an opportunity for rediscovering or reimagining an American sense of identity through spatial displacement: unity is to be found not in present day England nor in New England, but in what are conceived as the shared roots of 'Old England.' (119-20)

However, "Old England" may not be as stable a concept for Irving as Petersheim implies, and these "shared roots" are emphasized especially in those spaces which authorize Crayon to make a case for mutability as a boon to—rather than inhibitor of—literary posterity. As such, Petersheim aptly notes how Irving "Americanizes" Shakespeare by hinting at aesthetic, linguistic, and socioeconomic similarities between the Bard and Crayon. However, he seems to follow this logic too far in agreeing with Jane Eberwein's argument that "The most distinguished names [Crayon] calls to mind are those of the dead interred in Westminster Abbey and at Stratford. Living Britons in this book shrink in Shakespeare's shadow..." (qtd. in Petersheim, 121). Though correct in noting Shakespeare's preeminence compared to other figures with "distinguished names", this observation seems to ignore the persistence with which Irving toys with—indeed, mocks—the very notions of prestige and posterity as depicted in Westminster Abbey's library as well as its monuments.

To be sure, if any historical figures memorialized in the abbey stand even a remote chance of escaping an evaluation that "almost provokes a smile at the vanity of human ambition," it is those enshrined in Poets' Corner. It is no mistake, then, that the *Sketch-book's*

obvious critiques of the hubris of Westminster Abbey's monuments soften as Crayon explores that section of the abbey, and particularly the site of Shakespeare's memorial.

Other men are known to posterity only through the medium of history, which is continually growing faint and obscure: but the intercourse between the author and his fellow-men is ever new, active, and immediate...for it has been purchased, not by deeds of violence and blood, but by the diligent dispensation of pleasure.

(150-51)

The posterity of the author is presented by Crayon as a more authentic one because it does not rest on violence but rather transcends death through the granting of pleasure; and while the *Sketch-book's* title and its narrator's name both imply a multimedia approach to the appreciation of art, such observations by Crayon do tend toward the literary. They are not, however, confined to a particular genre; and in the spirit of just this blurring of boundaries, near the end of his Westminster Abbey reverie, Crayon provides an image to contrast with that of the tombs and memorials of famous authors when he writes about "the tomb of a crusader; one of those military enthusiasts, who so strangely mingled religion and romance, and whose exploits form the connecting link between fact and fiction; between the history and the fairy tale" (151).

Supporting his declaration of "How idle a boast, after all, is the immortality of a name!" (156).

Crayon essentially dismisses the anonymous Crusader's military accomplishments for an evaluation of posterity that both attributes it solely to writing and considers that writing inevitably comprised of a combination of history and myth, imagination and collective memory.

The conversation between Crayon and the old quarto, then, serves as support for mutability, adaptation, and evolution over dogma when it comes to the transmission of tradition. So while Petersheim's reading of the analogy between the new American author and

Shakespeare is an apt one, the metaphor of nature's fecundity—with the implication of mixed, layered stimuli decaying and growing simultaneously yet at varying rates—even more strongly supports Sizemore's reading of a convergence of spatial and temporal influences in Irving's work. Furthermore, what "Mutability" describes—from the American viewpoint—is the evolution of the vernacular and the link between publishing and the development (or fermentation, as Crayon would have it) of the modern nation as described by Benedict Anderson. That which prevails into posterity is not the purest, the most authentically local, or the most erudite, but that which transcends those qualities, as Crayon describes Shakespeare:

His writings, therefore, contain the spirit, the aroma, if I may use the phrase, of the age in which he lives. They are caskets which inclose within a small compass the wealth of the language—its family jewels, which are thus transmitted in a portable form to posterity." (120)

Crayon's treatment of Shakespeare (or anyone memorialized in Poets' Corner) differs markedly from his observations on the rest of Westminster Abbey, the descriptions of which leave little doubt as to Irving's verdict regarding the abbey's ability to preserve the memories of England's august old names. By questioning the abbey's proficiency at maintaining the posterity of national heroes, Crayon dismantles mocks the enterprise of historians whose narrative strategies rest on establishing those heroes' reputations.

As befitting an ancient abbey and its catacombs, the place's descriptions constantly imply a haunting, with Crayon observing that stepping into the abbey "seemed like stepping back into the regions of antiquity, and losing myself among the shades of former ages" (148). While those shades appear most strongly when Crayon is in a dreaming state, his waking observations are also seemingly haunted by such ghostly associations, as he describes seeing "an old verger, in his

black gown, moving along their shadowy vaults, and seeming like a spectre from one of the neighboring tombs” (148). Whereas ghosts and heroic memories haunt Crayon’s dreams and imagination, though, his physical observations of the abbey point to nothing so much as physical erasure:

The gray walls are discolored by damp, and crumbling with age; a coat of hoary moss has gathered over the inscriptions of the mural monuments, and obscured the death’s heads, and other funereal emblems. The sharp touches of the chisel are gone from the rich trajectory of arches; the roses which adorned the keystones have lost their leafy beauty; every thing bears marks of the gradual dilapidations of time, which yet has something touching and pleasing in its very decay. (149)

These might be rather predictable remarks about a location ravaged by the inevitable effects of the elements over time, but Crayon belabors the point while “contemplating this mingled picture of glory and decay,” making sure to point out that the effigies of three early abbots are

...nearly worn away by the footsteps of many generations...the epitaphs entirely effaced...telling no tale but that such beings had been and had perished; teaching no moral but the futility of that pride which hopes still to exact an homage in its ashes, and to live in an inscription. A little longer, and even these faint records will be obliterated, and the monument will cease to be a memorial.” (149)

Notably, though individual objects within the abbey (as well as a number of other historical structures) may be described as crumbling, effaced, or otherwise damaged, Crayon never describes the structures themselves as destroyed. What Crayon continues to describe is not a series of ruins, but monuments that—though they yet stand—ultimately fail to memorialize as they were built to do. Nowhere is this more evident than in Westminster Abbey, which is almost

constantly described with a deflating irony that denotes a keen sense of the performativity of tradition, fleeting nature of historical renown, and morbidity of the resulting aesthetic. For example, upon viewing the shrine of Edward the Confessor, Crayon muses:

The scene seemed almost as if contrived, with theatrical artifice, to produce an effect upon the beholder. Here was a type of the beginning and the end of human pomp and power; here it was literally but a step from the throne to the sepulchre. Would not one think that these incongruous mementos had been gathered together as a lesson to living greatness?—to show it, even in the moment of its proudest exaltation, the neglect and dishonor to which it must soon arrive... (155-56)

As if to bolster this point by putting its implications into written practice, Crayon concludes the sketch with three notes which gradually move away from Romantic reverie and into rather banal historical detail. “NOTES CONCERNING WESTMINSTER ABBEY” goes into great but not terribly exciting detail about the history of the abbey’s founding and subsequent renovations; “RELICS OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR” returns to Edward’s shrine by relating a 1688 account of the desecration of Edward’s tomb, noting almost as an afterthought that “the shrine is full of moral”; and “inscriptions on a monument alluded to in the sketch” quotes an inscription above the grave of Margaret Lucas, Dutchess of Newcastle, before giving a brief description of the abbey’s wintertime services and ending by noting that “The cloisters are well worth visiting by moonlight, when the moon is in the full” (157-61). In this way, “Westminster Abbey” appears to wake from its own reverie and the moralizing of its narrator and end as a simple, straightforward tourist guide.

Heroic or Romantic posterity, then, is revealed as no more than the result of narrativizing by the people who visit and just as easily deflated by the same—Crayon’s sketches essentially



point out that this form of posterity is doomed to failure, thus turning his travel sketches into a normative reading with a prescriptive edge by rejecting the monument and trappings of aristocracy as illegitimate forms of memorializing.

But why should we thus seek to clothe death with unnecessary terrors, and to spread horrors round the tomb of those we love? The grave should be surrounded by every thing that might inspire tenderness and veneration for the dead; or that might win the living to virtue. It is the place, not of disgust and dismay, but of sorrow and meditation.” (152)

The Ozymandias-like thrust of the Westminster Abbey sketches portrays death as the great leveler and the very notion of posterity through the achievement of nationalistic goals (military, political, or artistic) an absurdity—“Thus man passes away; his name perishes from record and recollection; his history is as a tale that is told, and his very monument becomes a ruin” (157). Irving pokes holes in posterity by having his narrators obsess over it. Discussing Crayon’s concerns in “Westminster Abbey,” Petersheim describes “The brevity of his flirtation with immortality” to note that “in [Crayon’s] perspective as an active nineteenth-century American, human achievements are marked more by their passing than by their longevity” (127). Yet the ironies of Crayon’s stroll through the abbey seem to suggest much more strongly that human achievement memorialized after death is a vain enterprise regardless of one’s achievements, his devotion to Shakespeare being the exception that proves the rule. What persists for Crayon are not all writings by all authors, but rather those very select few that touch on some deeply held Romantic truth which binds emotional resonance to regional or national identity. Thus it is that, though the monuments in the abbey are shown to be vain relics, Crayon’s typically pastoral depiction of rural funerary rites reads as normative. All indications point to the countryside as the

seat of English authenticity, in large part due to a focus on feudal social organization, which is depicted as conferring on its participants a traditional and unchanging place in the nation and its historical narrative.

Within this feudal-nostalgic schema the English countryside acts as symbol, location, and guardian of cultural authenticity and historical continuity. This is, of course, not unique to Irving; and the rural as marker of perceived continuity has been covered extensively starting with such canonical studies as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, through which we see Irving as part of a line of Anglophone authors stretching back to (at least) the seventeenth century whose writing always codes the rural as more authentically English than the urban. Examples of this tendency abound in *The Sketch-Book*, such as when Crayon declares that "The stranger who would form a correct opinion of the English character must not confine his observations to the metropolis. He must go forth into the country..." (58). Crayon situates true English character in the countryside because "It is in the country that the Englishman gives scope to his natural feelings" (59). Furthermore, one can count on the purity of such natural feelings as found in the country precisely because "In rural occupation there is nothing mean and debasing" (61). Should we doubt that what Crayon refers to here is the rural as host of uncorrupted Englishness, he makes the connection to national cultural purity explicit when describing the rural English landscape as one that evinces "a calm and settled security, and hereditary transmission of homebred virtues and local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation" (63).

Crayon's descriptions match nicely with Leo Marx's description of a pastoral scene whose "tone, characteristic of Virgilian pastoral, is a way of saying that the episode belongs to a timeless, recurrent pattern of human affairs. It falls easily into a conventional design because it

has occurred often before” (31). Continuity is key to the pastoral and that which it authenticates, and, as such, the figures treated as most authentically and admirably English are those with perceived roots in traditional antiquity: peasants and nobles. Observing a noble family of congregants in “The Country Church”, Crayon notes that “...there was the least pretension where there was the most acknowledged title to respect”, and then, upon seeing their interaction with the lower orders, remarks that “There is a healthful hardiness about real dignity, that never dreads contact and communion with others, however humble” (89). Crayon stresses the harmonious and unassuming humility of these peasants and nobles by then noting the presence of their antithesis: the vulgar bourgeois merchant’s family:

In contrast to these was the family of a wealthy citizen, who had amassed a vast fortune; and, having purchased the estate and mansion of a ruined nobleman in the neighborhood, was endeavoring to assume all the style and dignity of an hereditary lord of the soil... Art had done every thing to accomplish them as men of fashion, but nature had denied them the nameless grace. They were vulgarly shaped, like men formed for the common purposes of life, and had that air of supercilious assumption which is never seen in the true gentleman... I have no respect for titled rank, unless it be accompanied with true nobility of soul; but I have remarked in all countries where artificial distinctions exist, that the very highest classes are always the most courteous and unassuming. Those who are well assured of their own standing are least apt to trespass on that of others: whereas nothing is so offensive as the aspirings of vulgarity, which thinks to elevate itself by humiliating its neighbor. (89-90)

The “real dignity” and unassuming nature of hereditary nobles is thus described as universally English, at ease in both country and city, among higher and lower orders, binding and bound by the all-encompassing national culture. By contrast, the merchant—who has taken over the estate of a ruined nobleman—uses urban luxury in poor taste and is thus vulgarly ostentatious while in the country church: though a citizen, he is portrayed as an interloper. This is not the authentic Englishness described in “Rural Life in England”, but rather a “debased and mean” corruption of it. The merchant and his family—representatives of the cultural changes wrought by modernity and shifting socioeconomic realities—are not “naturally” blessed with those graces which have allegedly persisted since antiquity and by which ideal Englishness is measured. Thus we see that, regardless of whether the gentry actually live in the country, it is in the country that their Englishness is either authenticated or discredited. Whereas the American pastoral as described by Marx is both progressive and atavistic—the “return” to some golden ideal is paradoxically the key to America’s future utopia, a notion drawn from the European colonial view of the Americas—Irving in his treatment of the English countryside attempts to reconcile these apparent contradictions by segregating their components. Rural England is a site of continuity and tradition, of “true” Englishness, albeit a threatened one, and Crayon’s travel sketches pull pastoral England out of time even as his depictions of monuments and urban environments reveal a decadence that encroaches on the countryside and thus threatens English traditionalism. By keeping tradition and decadence relegated to their respective realms in the country and city, Crayon ensures a reading of the countryside as a cultural crucible whereby Englishness is created, maintained, and verified.

Crayon’s focus on hereditary nobility and peasantry to the exclusion of the bourgeoisie is consistent with descriptions of the countryside that carefully associate authentic Englishness

with rural stasis, preserving ancient traditions against the pressures of modernity. More than anything, this is the pervading mood of “Rural Funerals,” one of many instances of Crayon standing over or near English gravesites and musing on their significance.<sup>22</sup> Whereas *The Sketch-Book* describes such locations as Westminster Abbey so as to ironically identify them as symbols of hubris and decay, the rural funeral as observed by Crayon links the present to a desirable past and authenticates country traditions by insisting upon their persistence since antiquity, not to mention their spontaneous origins in a bygone golden age:

These, it is said, are the remains of some of the rites of the primitive church; but they are of still higher antiquity, having been observed among the Greeks and Romans, and frequently mentioned by their writers, and were, no doubt, the spontaneous tributes of unlettered affection, originating long before art had tasked itself to modulate sorrow into song, or story it on the monument. (121)

This passage makes explicit what all of Crayon’s descriptions of rural traditions at least imply: a contrast with the urban monument, the coldness of the abbey, the unenduring and hubristic contrivances of power. Though the rituals described in “Rural Funerals” have admittedly fallen out of use in most of the nation (enabling a lament of their disappearance analogous to typical laments of the disappearance of the countryside), those remote towns in which they are practiced are described as preserving remnants of an ideal English past, one which is not merely a local or regional anomaly but a purportedly shared element of the national character (123). Crayon alludes to this shared culture in noting that “The poets, too, who always breathe the feeling of a nation, continually advert to this fond solicitude about the grave” (122). Going on to quote Herrick, Beaumont and Fletcher, and others to bolster this point, Crayon portrays the rural

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<sup>22</sup> In a possible precursor to Melville’s Ishmael “involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral [he meets],” Crayon’s sketches quite often arise from a predilection for staring at graves or joining funeral processions. (18)

funeral as a mainstay of English national culture; and its power to represent English sentimentality and national character as derived from its being located in the static countryside: “The fixed and unchanging features of the country also perpetuate the memory of the friend with whom we once enjoyed them; who was the companion of our most retired walks, and gave animation to every lovely scene” (127). Haunted both by the stories of national poets and (at least according to Crayon) the memories of its inhabitants, the unchanging countryside preserves the traditions by which national character is formed and performed.

The enduring nature of the rural funeral is presented in stark contrast to Crayon’s aforementioned Ozymandias-like observations of monuments such as Westminster Abbey, which—though built for precisely these memorializing and identity-forming purposes—fail to achieve their goals. Whereas monuments and cloisters represent for Crayon a tendency toward hubris and an opportunity for musing about the inevitability of oblivion and decay, country funerals and gravesites recall local communities and national character. Whereas the monument seeks to memorialize through words and images, but fails, the country funeral works with natural symbols and succeeds. As such, it achieves authentic Englishness by doing what Crayon describes as the primary achievement of those precious few authors who endure: tapping into natural sentiment. The authentic is that which is unchanging, immutable, and linked to the past. It is the purity that nationalism seeks, though vulgar nationalism so often falls into the patterns of national prejudice and superstition by seeking authenticity in such notions as racial or ideological purity.

Irving’s satire does not necessarily discard the notion of *a* national identity, but seeks to root it in something other than historical violence and other forms that his sketches portray as dangerous. Thus it is that Crayon’s observations highlight the contrivance but also the cultural

endurance of those traditions (be they literary, historical, political, or religious) that transcend death through enjoyment. Despite Petersheim's claim that Irving only makes fleeting reference to immortality, his narrators—in their constant ruminations on posterity—are most concerned about exactly that. If, as Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, nationalism is a way of combatting death through a cultural legacy and identification with a large, binding group ideal, then Knickerbocker and Crayon employ national histories, landmarks, and traditions primarily because they see in them the materials for authorial immortality. Regional tales and superstitions are the raw materials on which national tradition is based, and Irving repeatedly portrays the national mythos as local traditions appropriated and applied to the nation, which is then bound by that tradition in a cyclical, dialectical relationship: the regional story cannot be recognized as national without the nation, but the nation cannot exist without the regional story. Every story, then, is what Steenshorne calls a “usable history,” even as every bit of historical scholarship is reduced to mere storytelling.

### **Geoffrey Crayon and the Meaning of Christmas**

Applying the lens provided by Crayon's depictions of the English countryside allows us to more carefully consider one section that serves as an important hermeneutic tool for interpreting the irony of the *Sketch-Book*'s historiographic and nationalistic enterprise: the collection of Christmas sketches. In these five essays, Crayon illustrates celebration of “old Christmas” as observed by the wealthy family of a former traveling companion named Frank Bracebridge. Crayon's narration and evaluation of the festivities orchestrated by Bracebridge's father—known as “the squire”—oscillates between admiration and skepticism. One might read Crayon's description of the Bracebridge family's Christmas celebrations simultaneously as

critique of the traditions' purported antiquity and as endorsement of the suggestive power of those invented traditions, whereby, as Hobsbawm and Ranger write,

The element of invention is particularly clear...since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so." (Hobsbawm 13)

From the very first sentence of "Christmas", Crayon uses the holiday to register identification with themes that persist throughout the *Sketch-Book*, declaring, "Nothing in England exercises a more delightful spell over my imagination, than the lingerings of the holiday customs and rural games of former times" (162). An apparently simple instance of romantic musing, this opening statement immediately marks the Christmas section as one that will carry the key motif of the English countryside on which so much of the text's thematic weight hangs. If one accepts that Crayon's observations play on the notion of an authenticity closely associated throughout English and American literary history with rural life, then we see that Crayon identifies Christmas tradition early on as an important ceremonial aspect of the preservation of English authenticity. "The English," Crayon observes,

from the great prevalence of rural habit throughout every class of society, have always been fond of those festivals and holidays which agreeably interrupt the stillness of country life; and they were, in former days, particularly observant of the religious and social rites of Christmas. (164)

The rural here both marks the location of authentic Englishness and permeates "every class of [English] society." Much as the "unchanging" countryside facilitates a form of mourning



authenticated by its undistracted connection to the past, Christmas here is authentically English precisely because it is observed in the country and away from agents of change. As such, Christmas as rural tradition binds the totality of English society in one rurally authenticated national identity.

Crayon's lament over the loss of a quaint Old World authenticity through the onslaught of modernity maintains his take on the theme as manifested in all of the *Sketch-Book's* descriptions of the countryside when he notes that "Society has acquired a more enlightened and elegant tone; but it has lost many of its strong local peculiarities, its home-bred feelings, its honest fireside delights" (165). Similarly nostalgic observations carry negative connotations throughout "The Mutability of Literature," wherein Crayon describes the "unpolished" quarto's language as "rather quaint and obsolete," its pronunciation "barbarous," and its remarks "couched in...intolerably antiquated terms" (114, 116). This seeming contradiction highlights a split in Crayon's attitude toward the symbols of the past and in what ways he considers them useful. The ancient quarto's antiquated diction marks it as of another time, redolent of social decay and the atavistic prejudices of old nations. Its explicit prejudices oppose it to literary progress and growth, to creation, and to the inclusion of American authors. By contrast, the quaintness of the countryside as described by Crayon has the opposite effect, acting as an inspiration, precursor, and palimpsest on which the American author establishes his own writing as part of—but not limited to—the illustrious literary tradition of an otherwise ailing society. In the Romantic mode, technological, economic, and political progress might be seen as anathema to the production of literature; but the progress of said production is itself a challenge to those who would exalt now obsolete examples of the tradition into which new works aim to insert themselves.

In his description of the disappearance of “strong local peculiarities,” Crayon details a clear example of the sort of homogeneity described as binding modern national cultures in *Imagined Communities*. Anderson’s study views urbanization and urbanity as indications of a standardization of culture that binds cultures nationally by paving over regional differences—a process clearly outlined here as Crayon continues to describe “society” in universal terms. Yet the perceived homogeneity of the nation is not an ontological reality, and much of Crayon’s understanding of English Christmas exemplifies Homi K. Bhabha’s description of unified national character as “primarily defined through a process of negation—of regionalism, occupation, faculty...” (207). While bemoaning modernity’s lamentable destruction of regional particularities, Crayon also celebrates this modern national cohesion through delighted accounts of the tradition by which the national character is both bound and authenticated: “Shorn, however, as it is, of its ancient and festive honors, Christmas is still a period of delightful excitement in England. It is gratifying to that home feeling completely aroused which holds so powerful a place in every English bosom” (165). The terms in which enjoyment of *rural* Christmas tradition is described constantly strike all-encompassing *national* notes. Evacuated, perhaps, of ancient content and strictly local charm, the joy of Christmas persists on a national scale. “Delightful excitement” thus belongs not to the countryside but to England, and the quaint localness of the phrase “home feeling” describes a universal sentiment found “in every English bosom.” As such, the *Sketch-Book* highlights a paradox: even as the aesthetic demands aristocratic nostalgia, the consumption on which its creation is predicated necessitates a decidedly more democratic distribution via the newspapers and popular book sales on which Irving’s career depends. Far from simple hypocrisy, the *Sketch-Book* suggests a constant awareness and employment of this paradox, and nowhere is this more evident than in the

Christmas sketches, which both critique and celebrate the contrived nature of “ancient” traditions by applying the regional specificity of local color scenes to an account of a universally applicable national identity. This rhetorical strategy pervades Irving’s early works, with one of its most pronounced manifestations being found in Geoffrey Crayon’s observations on traditional English Christmas.

Framed from the start as describing an already-corrupted tradition, the sketch titled “Christmas” yet describes the feeling excited by Christmas as authentically *and universally* English, its merit as the locus of national character not only unquestioned, but celebrated. Though he has Crayon apparently contradict himself, Irving’s utilitarian storytelling mode reconciles the regional and national (ie, particular and universal) by using regionalism metonymically and viewing particularity as a trope employed to produce a unifying, identity-producing myth. Nostalgia for regional identities is itself posed as a type of tradition, one that the emergent nation appropriates and employs as its national mythos—not to regain the lost regional particularity but to use as a basis for cultural creation.

If the importance of Christmas as nationally cohesive agent goes unquestioned, however, the presumed antiquity on which so much of its purported historical authenticity relies comes under unrelenting attack through subversively ironic representation. Among other indicators of the irony permeating Crayon’s account of “ancient” Christmas traditions, Crayon’s friend Frank Bracebridge describes his father’s traditional Christmas observance in terms that cannot but arouse suspicion regarding the antiquity of the traditions being observed. In “Christmas Eve,” Bracebridge repeatedly qualifies descriptions of his father’s observance of ancient traditions and makes heavy use of terms that hearken back to notions seemingly drawn from antiquity and associated with feudalism:

My father, you must know, is a bigoted devotee of the old school, and prides himself upon keeping up something of old English hospitality. He is a tolerable specimen of what you will rarely meet with now-a-days in its purity, the old English country gentleman; for our men of fortune spend so much of their time in town, and fashion is carried so much into the country, that the strong rich peculiarities of ancient rural life are almost polished away. (172)

Described by his son also as “a strenuous advocate for the revival of the old rural games and holiday observances,” the elder Bracebridge—referred to as “the squire”—steeps himself in centuries-old works by authors (including Crayon’s beloved Herrick) who “wrote and thought more like true Englishmen than any of their successors,” and whose works reflect an age “when England was itself, and had its peculiar manners and customs” (173).

Mitigating qualifiers notwithstanding, Frank Bracebridge’s description of his apparently “absurd” father may not necessarily strike one as undermining the sense of antiquity and authenticity to which the squire dedicates his holiday festivities (174). However, as so often in the *Sketch-Book*, Crayon suggests the ironies inherent in such nationalist traditionalism through a look at architecture, describing Bracebridge Hall as “an irregular building” composed “of the architecture of different periods” (175). Though one wing of the mansion is “evidently very ancient” and markedly English, the rest is constructed “in the French taste of Charles the Second’s time, having been repaired and altered, as my friend told me, by one of his ancestors, who returned with the monarch at the Restoration” (175). Despite the mansion’s mixed lineage and history of renovations, the squire is said to preserve the “obsolete finery” of the grounds “in all its original state” (175). This juxtaposition of a renovated, mongrelized architecture with its owner’s obsession with originality and purity reveals the unmistakable absurdity inherent in the

squire's stubborn adherence to tradition and dogged pursuit of "true" Englishness, drawing a parallel with the *Sketch-Book's* treatment of nationalistic purity and the mongrelization of culture in "Mutability of Literature."

While Bracebridge Hall's construction highlights the problematic nature of concerns with historical accuracy and nationalistic purity, its symbolic resonance also makes it consistent with Crayon's use of the architecture motif throughout the *Sketch-Book*. Following his first declaration of delight with English holiday traditions, Crayon's lament at their fading away is expressed thusly: "They resemble those picturesque morsels of gothic architecture, which we see crumbling in various parts of the country, partly dilapidated by the waste of ages, and partly lost in the additions and alterations of latter days" (163). Holiday traditions are here portrayed as having important parallels with other gothic architectural images used throughout the book. For example, one of the earliest images associated with moldering gothic architecture is the description of historian William Roscoe, who is described metaphorically as such a "morsel" and literally as an inhabitant of one. In both cases, Roscoe, like Westminster Abbey, Bracebridge Hall, and several other buildings in the text, is shown to be a part of the nation's august but fading heritage. Throughout Crayon's travel sketches, moldering architecture—analagized with its moldering inhabitants—serves to slyly point out the decay of England while remarking on the beauty of its landmarks. In mentioning these alterations and additions, Crayon describes English holiday traditions in virtually the same terms with which he will describe the Bracebridge estate, marking it as of a piece with his descriptions of Westminster Abbey, Roscoe's home in Liverpool, and several other locales.

Further undermining the squire's nostalgia is the logical conclusion of its politics, steeped as they are in feudalism and anti-democratic sentiment. One particularly amusing moment in

“Christmas Eve” occurs when, extolling the virtues of his own garden, the squire opines that “The boasted imitation of nature in gardening had sprung up with modern republican notions, but did not suit a monarchical government; it smacked of the leveling system” (176). Though Frank Bracebridge assures Crayon that “it was almost the only instance in which he had ever heard his father meddle with politics...”, the attitude is consistent with the squire’s strict observance of tradition as applied to the peasants on his estate (176). For example, in the very next paragraph, Crayon describes the following scene:

As we approached the house, we heard the sound of music, and now and then a burst of laughter, from one end of the building. This, Bracebridge said, must proceed from the servants’ hall, where a great deal of revelry was *permitted*, and even encouraged, by the squire, throughout the twelve days of Christmas, *provided every thing was done conformably to ancient usage.* (176, italics mine)

Regardless of what his son says about the squire’s actual political inclinations, this passage clearly links cultural and political nostalgia, registering the squire’s attempts to adhere to ancient holiday traditions as inextricably bound to his attempts to revive outmoded socioeconomic hierarchies. This is emphasized when the squire complains that “the nation...is altered” and that the “simple true-hearted peasantry...have broken asunder from the higher classes, and seem to think their interests are separate. They have become too knowing, and begin to read newspapers, listen to ale-house politicians, and talk of reform” (192). Such talk has sinister undertones derived from an eighteenth century English context in which, as EP Thompson argues, the gentry “clung to the image of the laborer as an unfree man, a ‘servant:’ a servant in husbandry, in the workshop, in the house” (383).<sup>23</sup> The squire’s proposed remedy is for the nobility and gentry to

spend more time in the country and mingle with the peasantry in a sort of Bakhtinian carnival<sup>24</sup>, by which the feudal social norms are temporarily overturned so as to maintain them. He is, however, not willing to indulge the carnivalesque in its entirety, as we find out when a past incident is related:

...indeed, he had once attempted to put his doctrine in practice, and a few years before had kept open house during the holidays in the old style. The country people, however, did not understand how to play their parts in the scene of hospitality; many uncouth circumstances occurred; the manor was overrun by all the vagrants of the country, and more beggars drawn into the neighborhood in one week than the parish officers could get rid of in a year. Since then, he had contented himself with inviting the decent part of the neighboring peasantry to call at the hall on Christmas day, and with distributing beef, and bread, and ale, among the poor, that they might make merry in their own dwellings. (192)

Despite his stated desire to mingle among the peasantry and maintain tradition, then, the squire's practices actually modify the carnivalesque tradition and reinforce separation of classes, thus performing an "ancient" tradition that serves only his own purposes and attempts to ensure the safety of the gentry without allowing for the safety valve provided by the carnival atmosphere as found in feudal society.

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<sup>23</sup> "... (They clung simultaneously to the image of the free or masterless man as a vagabond, to be disciplined, whipped and compelled to work.) But crops could not be harvested, cloth could not be manufactured, goods could not be transported, houses could not be built and parks enlarged, without labor readily available and mobile, for whom it would be inconvenient or impossible to accept the reciprocities of the master-servant relationship. The masters disclaimed their paternal responsibilities; but they did not cease, for many decades, to complain at the breach of the 'great law of subordination,' the diminution of deference, that ensued upon their disclaimer:

The Lab'ring Poor, in spight of double Pay,  
Are saucy, mutinous, and Beggarly." (383)

<sup>24</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

Nissenbaum describes exactly this contrast between the feudal and later versions of “misrule” as having changed because “paternalism itself came to wither away as a dominant form of social relations,” creating a situation in which “holiday rituals...now became purely ‘plebeian’ cultural expressions” (51). This segregation of holiday customs coincided with heightened segregation of socioeconomic classes and the gradual enclosure of common grounds in both England and the United States, leading to often violent confrontations between members of socioeconomic classes, with the now “plebeian” Christmas traditions holding a special place in the imaginary of both young working class men and the wealthier urbanites they threatened. It is exactly this threat that Irving’s readers on both sides of the Atlantic (particularly, as Nissenbaum shows, in fast-growing and diversifying Manhattan) feared throughout the period of the *Sketch-book*’s publication and revisions, and that the squire in his Christmas observance tries to avert while maintaining some semblance of tradition and authentic Englishness. Thus we see irremediable contradictions not only in questions of the true antiquity of the squire’s traditions, but in how he attempts to engage those traditions: by meticulously selecting from the peasantry and then cracking down on the inversion of social relations that existed in pre-industrial Christmas celebrations, the squire eliminates the very safety valve by which feudal society maintained smooth relations between plebeians and patricians.

At the level of explicit commentary, Crayon mostly accepts the revelry without questioning its motives—and even celebrates it—but his narrative counteracts this uncritical acceptance with moments of irony that raise questions about the harmony of the squire’s Christmas performance. Following the recollection of the squire’s past failure at “put[ting] his doctrine into practice”, authenticity seemingly breaks through as Crayon describes an apparent moment of spontaneity and rustic charm, when “A band of country lads, without coats, their shirt



sleeves fancifully tied with ribands, their hats decorated with greens, and clubs in their hands, was seen advancing up the avenue, followed by a large number of villagers and peasantry” (193). These wandering musicians then proceed to perform a dance ritual in which they keep time by striking their clubs together, which the squire tells Crayon that “he traced to the times when the Romans held possession of the island; plainly proving that this was a lineal descendant of the sword dance of the ancients” (193). The reader will by now recognize two persistent patterns: the first is the appeal to classical antiquity as legitimating current ceremonial practices; the second, conflicting, pattern is that any such certainty as claiming that some vestige of ancient tradition has been “plainly proven” should be eyed with suspicion; and the very next sentence confirms as much:

‘It was now,’ he said, ‘nearly extinct, but he had accidentally met with traces of it in the neighborhood, and had encouraged its revival; though, to tell the truth, it was too apt to be followed up by the rough cudgel play, and broken heads in the evening.’ (193)

Here again, a seemingly straightforward and simple enjoyment and preservation of tradition is fraught with clues pointing to construction, contrivance, and purposeful modification. Given what has already been recounted with regards to the squire’s holiday practices and lessons learned, we may presume that these young men and their retinue are members of the “decent part” of the village’s lower orders, which somewhat mitigates the sense of spontaneity and universal cheer expressed in Crayon’s admiration. Furthermore, historiographically speaking, the link to Roman colonial history can only be tenuous at best. That the squire happened upon young men beating sticks together and linked them to ancient sword dances says less about his research methods than about the rhetorical power of classical allusion. It matters little whether the “sword

dance” represents a holdover from Roman, Celtic Pagan, or Christian tradition; what counts is that it is generally “of old”. This link to Roman colonial Britain thus authenticates the tradition and establishes continuity even as its most obvious modification is crucial to its inclusion in the much-tamed festivities: a stick is, after all, less dangerous than a sword.

If the swords-to-sticks evolution renders the “sword dance” more palatable to modern holiday celebrants, its reference to “cudgel play” reveals both an ominous possibility and its suppression by the squire’s take on the Christmas rituals. As Nissenbaum shows, the “misrule” of Christmas often had a radically egalitarian component, with the lower orders expected to make demands of their betters, often under threat of violence:

...the modern notion of charity does not really convey a picture of how this transaction worked. For it was usually the poor themselves who initiated the exchange, and it was enacted face-to-face, in rituals that would strike many of us today as an intolerable invasion of privacy...Christmas was a time when peasants, servants, and apprentices exercised the right to demand that their wealthier neighbors and patrons treat them as if *they* were wealthy and powerful. (9)

Describing the wassailing tradition, Nissenbaum goes on to note, “The wassail usually possessed an aggressive edge—often an explicit threat—concerning the unpleasant consequences to follow if the beggars’ demands were not met” (10). Although the quoted passages refer specifically to 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century English celebrations, similar practices remained an ongoing issue in nineteenth century America, as Nissenbaum notes later in his perceptive reading of Clement Clark Moore’s “A Visit from St. Nicholas”:

The working-class visitor feared by the patrician would come in a different way, for a different purpose. Such a visitor would have inhabited that murky ground

between old-style village wassailing and the new urban political violence. He would have been youthful and full-sized, not a tiny “old elf.” He would very likely have been part of a roving gang (perhaps a callithumpian band), not a single individual... And, if he had finally departed in a genial spirit... it would have been because he had *received* satisfaction, not because he had *offered* it. (82)

Within such a context, contemporary readers would have registered the very real threat of danger when “A band of country lads, without coats, their shirt sleeves fancifully tied with ribands, their hats decorated with greens, and clubs in their hands, was seen advancing up the avenue, followed by a large number of villagers and peasantry” (193). This image establishes some doubt as to whether the approaching revelers are the “right” kind of peasant, with reassurance ultimately coming not only in the form of the squire’s approval, but in his explanation of his own role in “reviving” the stick dancing tradition. An unruly holiday mob is thus transformed into nothing but ritual and performance, deliberately assembled by a wealthy landowner in imitation of some mythic tradition. Though there remains the vague shadow of a threat of violence, it is tellingly only a threat of peasant-on-peasant violence, and then only after they’ve served their purpose in the squire’s rituals. Another apparent form of traditional continuity allegedly derived from Roman origins—the threat of violence—is thus established, appropriated, and sanitized, with the audience enjoying the spectacle and reveling in its “authenticity” without risking any of its danger.

Insofar as “misrule” in the traditional sense arises at all in the squire’s Christmas celebrations, it is through the character of Master Simon, an elderly man who delights the squire’s assembled company with bawdy jokes, dancing, gluttony, and questionable comportment around the young women of the group. Through Crayon’s Romantic lens, Master

Simon (a moniker tellingly employed only by the squire and Crayon) appears to bring a form of revelry that encompasses both the squire's traditional ideal and the peasants' subversive sensibilities, and explicitly contrasts his reception among the peasants with the squire's:

The squire himself mingled among the rustics, and was received with awkward demonstrations of deference and regard. It is true I perceived two or three of the younger peasants, when the squire's back was turned, making something of a grimace, and giving each other the wink; but the moment they caught my eye they pulled grave faces, and were exceedingly demure. With Master Simon, however, they all seemed more at their ease. His varied occupations and amusements had made him well known throughout the neighborhood. (193)

When the squire finally retires for the night, the festivities not only continue without him, they increase in vigor as Master Simon and an old farmer regale the remaining celebrants with jokes and tales.

Though Master Simon's presence allows for a semblance of rebellion and apparent authenticity lacking in the squire's ironically atavistic traditionalism, he ultimately serves the squire's purposes, in part by inverting the inversion of traditional Christmas misrule: where young drunken peasant men would have made demands of their betters, here an old man of higher social standing delights in the presence of the lower orders but is not beholden to their desires, and is in fact the one to overturn propriety. By appropriating misrule, Master Simon does not so much undermine the squire's authority as reinforce his framing of the holiday and his narrative authority over the rural Christmas traditions. That this is a primarily narrative authority is especially shown in the emphasis on Master Simon's (and others') crucial contribution being

the ability to remember family history and tell amusing stories.<sup>25</sup> Even here, Master Simon—to whom Crayon refers as the squire’s “factotum”—actually does the squire’s bidding, as Frank Bracebridge reveals that his status among the servants as “a prodigy of book knowledge” derives from “some half a dozen old authors, which the squire had put into his hands...” (186). Master Simon’s seemingly subversive presence is exposed as a mere proxy for the squire, exercising his control over the proceedings, and the joy people take in his presence is—especially when we consider that they’ve already been curated by the squire—mainly in the service of maintaining his preferred social order.

Given that Irving dedicates so much space in the Christmas sketches to revealing the ironies inherent in Crayon’s observations of English Christmas, “Christmas Day” ends with a surprisingly earnest moment of perceived rural authenticity when Crayon hears music upon returning to his room to dress for dinner. “I perceived a band of wandering musicians,” he writes,

...with pandean pipes and tambourine; a pretty coquettish housemaid was dancing a jig with a smart country lad, while several of the other servants were looking on. In the midst of her sport the girl caught a glimpse of my face at the window, and, coloring up, ran off with an air of roguish affected confusion. (194)

Fleeting as it is, this moment is notably free of any of the other sketches’ many narrative authorities: in the absence of the squire, the old storyteller, the pastor, the young Oxonian, and Master Simon, Crayon catches no more than a glimpse of spontaneous celebration which ends abruptly upon discovery of his presence. By including this moment, Crayon’s narration exposes

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<sup>25</sup> We see this throughout sketches that include Master Simon, who is described as “the wit of the family, dealing very much in sly jokes and innuendoes with the ladies, and making infinite merriment by harping upon old themes...He was a veritable family chronicle.” (178-79) Master Simon is not the only such figure, though, and several lesser characters also earn their inclusion in the festivities primarily through storytelling or historical knowledge; most notably an unnamed old man, about whom it is said that “they could not do without him, as he was the best hand at a song and story in the household.” (174)

the largest rupture in the “authentic” English Christmas he has hitherto portrayed, acknowledging not only the existence of a peasantry which he does not touch in his depiction of the countryside, but his own inability to access it. A part of the nation’s actual heterogeneity is thus closed off, reflective of the contrivance orchestrated in the Christmas sketches. Rather than presume to ventriloquize subaltern voices, Irving has Crayon naively gloss over his inability to understand them, thus highlighting the heterogeneity inherent in the nation even as he promotes the construction of an ostensibly homogeneous identity. In this way, the Christmas sketches reveal the limits of national narrative and tradition while continuing to make the case for the establishment (or maintenance) of socially binding traditions that bring joy to their celebrants.

The readerly orientation with which Crayon encourages his audience to approach the text insists on a sort of Romantic levity, if not necessarily ironic detachment, in reception of the Christmas sketches. This enables him to both celebrate the tradition and reveal its contrivance, and this interplay between critique of authenticity and promotion of ceremony can be seen in action throughout “The Christmas Dinner.” Crayon’s own observation that “The squire [kept] up old customs in kitchen as well as hall...” is undermined almost immediately by his own now quite explicit expression of doubt regarding key signifiers of Bracebridge antiquity (195).

Having described a crusader’s suit of armor and a painting of the same crusader located in Bracebridge Hall, Crayon now comments:

I must own, by the by, I had strong doubts about the authenticity of the painting and armor as having belonged to the crusader, they certainly having the stamp of more recent days; but I was told that the painting had been so considered time out of mind; and that, as to the armor, it had been found in a lumber-room, and elevated to its present situation by the squire, who at once determined it to be the

armor of the family hero; and as he was absolute authority on all such subjects in his own household, the matter had passed into current acceptance. (196)

Still, Crayon finds Bracebridge Hall and its “old English family as well worth studying as a collection of Holbein’s portraits or Albert Durer’s prints. There is much antiquarian lore to be acquired, much knowledge of the physiognomies of former times” (196). In so doing, Crayon again makes note of the inevitably mixed lineage present in an old English family, tracing family noses through picture galleries and noting facial features taken from ancient Rome and the court of Henry VIII (196-97). In fact, if anything persists throughout “The Christmas Dinner,” it is the frequency with which objects, actions, and people are described as advanced in age and then either directly challenged by Crayon or another character in the sketch or undermined by some ironic observation. In one scene alone, an “old carol” offered up by a “young Oxonian” “with an air of the most comic gravity” is said to “represent the bringing in of the boar’s head; a dish formerly served up with much ceremony,” thus satisfying the squire’s taste for “the old custom” and bringing to mind the “noble old college hall” whenever he hears “the old song chanted” (197). The squire’s nostalgia is followed immediately, however, by the observation that the parson, “whose mind was not haunted by such associations, and who was always more taken up with the text than the sentiment, objected to the Oxonian’s version of the carol...” (197). He directs his correction to the assembled company but is ignored in favor of the mounting festivities, which include an “ancient sirloin” in keeping with “the standard of old English hospitality” (197).

Ultimately, the proposed “mere” readerly orientation to Crayon’s transatlantic study frames the Christmas sketches as Crayon describes his own understanding of his experiences as

both drawn from and limited by the literature he has read and the text he is writing. Speaking still of Christmas traditions, Crayon writes:

They recall the pictures my fancy used to draw in the May morning of life, when as yet I only knew the world through books, and believed it to be all that poets had painted it; and they bring with them the flavor of those honest days of yore, in which, *perhaps with equal fallacy*, I am apt to think the world was more homebred, social, and joyous than at present. (162, italics mine)

His mythopoetic understanding of England and Christmas goes from an admission of possible ignorance in the first Christmas sketch to a declaration of intent in the last (“The Christmas Dinner”):

Methinks I hear the questions asked by my graver readers, ‘To what purpose is all this—how is the world to be made wiser by this talk?’ Alas! is there not wisdom enough extant for the instruction of the world? And if not, are there not abler pens laboring for its improvement!—It is so much pleasanter to please than to instruct—to play the companion rather than the preceptor. (206)

In thus speaking of the “honest and genuine enjoyment” derived from English Christmas, Crayon bolsters the utilitarian, pragmatic approach to tradition (200). Though the squire’s literal take on antiquity is exposed time and again as absurd, the text gives no reason to doubt the joy to which it gives rise, and makes a strong case for Christmas tradition as a constructible means toward social cohesion and national identity. This utilitarianism reconciles Crayon’s critique of authenticity with his delight in tradition, no matter how contrived.

It is true that the squire’s authoritarian tendencies reveal a sinister undercurrent which bolsters the case Crayon has already made throughout the *Sketch-Book* regarding the bigotry of



English traditionalism and the decadence of its politics. As in those sketches, the benighted, patrician traditionalist is contrasted with both the English peasantry and with more progressive bourgeois American ideals. Yet, though the squire's absurdity may have been apparent to readers in Irving's own time—who would not miss the ironies of the relationship between the squire and the “well-behaved” peasants—we would be mistaken in reading this critique of the squire's authenticity and antiquity as a wholesale dismissal of the tradition that purportedly emerges from them. In fact, Crayon might be read as positing the notion that contrived tradition and mythical antiquity are, in fact, as real as it gets. Just such a willful lack of historiographical seriousness is signaled in “The Stage Coach,” when Crayon advises his reader to “lay aside the austerity of wisdom, and to put on that genuine holiday spirit which is tolerant of folly, and anxious only for amusement” (167). In a note he strikes repeatedly, Crayon invites the reader to approach the text primarily *as reader*—one who reads solely for enjoyment. Christmas tradition, in this sense, might be said not to prevail *despite* modernity, but because the characteristics of the modern nation and construction of national identity necessitate just such a mythos and attendant ceremonial apparatus. Throughout the *Sketch-book*, but especially in the Christmas sketches, Crayon's misty-eyed love for the English countryside reveals Irving's awareness that authenticating continuity is always a myth, albeit an important one worth propagating.

While rurality is shown time and again to authenticate national culture, it is also itself constructed and authenticated by tradition. By illuminating tradition as simultaneously the foundation of culture and the story that culture tells, Crayon's sketches are able to employ the notion of pure enjoyment in storytelling as a manifesto while also repeatedly referring to those same acts of storytelling as the key to understanding and maintaining national cultures. To carry a thread drawn from Knickerbocker's *History* through the *Sketch-Book* and Irving's corpus in

general: the world is nothing without the historian and the historian is nothing but a storyteller, so the world is nothing without the storyteller. As such, figures like Master Simon operate as symbols within the larger metonymic project of the *Sketch-Book*'s engagement with the invention of tradition and national myth-making. Much like Rip Van Winkle's reintegration into Hudson River Valley society, Diedrich Knickerbocker's striving for immortality, and any number of storytellers who provide Irving's endless narrative frames, Master Simon's storytelling—despite being strictly for enjoyment—provides the foundation for a tradition which is itself composed of enjoyable stories and yet constitutive of a larger and more important tradition: England draws its identity from rural nostalgia, which is performed through an invented “ancient” Christmas tradition, which is entirely dependent on storytellers like Master Simon (and, by symbolic extension, Geoffrey Crayon and Washington Irving). This emphasis on the storyteller as creator, purveyor, and guardian of national culture is as much about imagination and creativity as about the relating of traditions, and so it is worth recalling that the opening of the Christmas sketches credits rural English holiday traditions with exercising a “delightful spell over [Crayon's] imagination...” (162). Though the sketches purport to simply relate travel experiences and observations about English culture, from its very beginning the Christmas section of the *Sketch-Book* establishes itself as an inspired creative endeavor, imbued with both a sense of the storyteller's agency and the implication of bewitching content. This “bewitching” of Crayon's imagination echoes hauntings throughout the *Sketch-Book*, typically in rural or natural settings, always mediated through several narrators, and usually constitutive of a local identity from which Crayon extrapolates wider-reaching national implications.

## **Yankees, Indians, and the Barbarism of Connecticut**

Portrayed always as the product of a haunting wrought by storytellers, the *Sketch-Book's* concept of national identity conjures Renee Bergland's description of nationalism, whereby "the interior logic of the modern nation requires that citizens be haunted..." (4). Specifically, Bergland argues "that American nationalism is sustained by writings that conjure forth spectral Native Americans"—fitting here since, as exercises in storytelling through national history, two of the most notable sketches are "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket", perhaps the most purely historical of the *Sketch-Book's* chapters (4). The Indian sketches take an uncharacteristically political tack, laying out a revisionist history of Native Americans and King Philip's War (which is also covered in the histories parodied in the *History of New York*) with no aim seemingly taking precedence over the effort to revise the image of America's indigenous peoples, denounce the atrocities they've suffered, and—in no uncertain terms—place the blame for those atrocities squarely on colonial Americans. In fact, it is quite possible to read Crayon's version of events as a direct rebuttal to Knickerbocker's justifications for the treatment of the natives:

It has been the lot of the unfortunate aborigines of America, in the early periods of colonization, to be doubly wronged by the white men. They have been dispossessed of their hereditary possessions by mercenary and frequently wanton warfare: and their characters have been traduced by bigoted and interested writers. The colonist often treated them like beasts of the forest; and the author has endeavored to justify him in his outrages. The former found it easier to exterminate than to civilize; the latter to vilify than to discriminate. The appellations of savage and pagan were deemed sufficient to sanction the hostilities of both; and thus the

poor wanderers of the forest were persecuted and defamed, not because they were guilty, but because they were ignorant. (240)

Irving might be said to construct a self-enclosed intertextual exchange between separate works by his own pseudonyms, having Crayon question Knickerbocker's proclaimed "right by extermination" and, perhaps more importantly, the historical narratives by which such exterminations were justified to posterity. To be sure, the language here is still problematic, but the sympathy Crayon expresses for the natives is another layer in Irving's strategy of narrative frames and national analogies. The libel suffered by Native Americans at the hands of European settlers and their descendants is strikingly similar to that suffered by Dutch settlers at the hands of English settlers in the colonial era (as in Knickerbocker's *History*), and Americans at the hands of British authors in the nineteenth century (as noted in "English Writers on America"). While performing an aesthetic exercise in romanticizing the noble savage, "Traits of Indian Character" is also entirely consistent with Irving's project as carried out through Knickerbocker's *History* and Crayon's *Sketch-Book*.

Though earnest where other sketches register as ironic, the Indian sketches do not detract from a Knickerbocker/Crayon ethos that ultimately reflects harshly on New England history. The consistencies are such, in fact, that natives are described much like English rustics are described in the countryside sketches. Communal and superstitious, with simple wants and unpolished manners but strong moral character, the natives of New England—like the peasants of Old England—stand in stark contrast to the corrupting urbanity of decadent societies. Repeatedly throughout both "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket," Crayon derides the unfair depiction of Native Americans in New England histories and emphasizes the heroic character of King Philip and his "band of native untaught heroes," whom he deems "Worthy of

an age of poetry, and fit subjects for local and romantic fiction...” (251). Referring to the rare moments of fact in William Hubbard’s *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England* (1677), Crayon argues that truth is the exception to the rule in “the rude annals of the eastern provinces” (247). Should the historian’s power be forgotten, Crayon does not neglect to make clear the link between narrative and physical violence, warning that the remaining northeastern natives “will vanish like a vapor from the face of the earth; their very history will be lost in forgetfulness; and ‘the places that now know them will know them no more for ever’” (249). Though again problematic in its all-too-typical foregone conclusion about native extinction, Crayon’s lament here offers a compelling criticism not only of individual histories but of their role in shaping the predominant narrative of progress and the subsequent ethos of American nationalism. Crayon’s criticism reveals not just a simple forgetting, but a narrative program of extermination mirroring that by which the colonies were won. Irving’s satire in the *Sketch-Book*’s Indian sketches is not effective positive activism on behalf of indigenous peoples, but a critique of the impacts of history and a strong case for the importance—and dangers—of narrative control. “Informers abounded where talebearing met with countenance and reward,” Crayon says when discussing colonists’ willful escalation of King Philip’s War, “and the sword was readily unsheathed when its success was certain, and it carved out empire” (254). The “talebearing” mentioned here not only describes embellishments contemporaneous with the deadly spread of empire, but the histories that would be written in its defense.

Crayon’s unsparing depiction of the New England colonists’ remarkable cruelty and insatiable hunger for land—as well as their justification by regional histories and the subsequent New England mythos—invites a reading that recalls the Aenean undertones of Knickerbocker’s *History*, especially since his account of one massacre of Indians explicitly references classical

history. “When the Gauls laid waste the city of Rome,” he writes, “they found senators clothed in their robes, and seated with stern tranquility in their curule chairs; in this manner they suffered death without resistance or even supplication” (248). Since Knickerbocker’s *History* ends when colonists of English descent take New Amsterdam from its “pious” Dutch founders, we might use this moment in the *Sketch-Book* to unravel another aspect of the Roman analogy used in the *History*: if Knickerbocker’s Dutch are the Aeneas-led founders of Rome, and the Indians are the maligned native Italians, then the English must be the Barbarians. The analogy implied throughout the *History* is made explicit in the *Sketch-Book*’s brief allusion, denouncing New England’s settlers for barbarous colonial practices and hypocritical decadence in its adoption of English nationalist—rather than pastoral—virtues. More salient for Irving’s purposes, though, is the criticism of colonial histories and their cultural heritage, denounced for its complicity in genocide. Using classical iconography employed in popular New England histories such as Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, *The History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon* launch and sustain an assault on the Early National period’s project of amassing chronicles of national history and symbols of national identity, aligning them with mythological traditions—deliberate or not—throughout western history and revealing the violence inherent in the prevailing New England mythos.

In contrast to the joy of Old English Christmas, New England’s mythology-cum-national-tradition is portrayed as a deadly ruse used to cynical imperial ends. It is telling, then, that at one point Crayon describes Puritan New England similarly to how he describes his own era in “The Christmas Dinner,” which he defends by expressing the hope of bringing readers joy “in these days of evil” (206). Echoing both “The Christmas Dinner” and, as Bergland points out, the ideology of Puritan authors themselves, in “Philip of Pokanoket” Crayon observes,

In the early chronicles of these dark and melancholy times we meet with many indications of the diseased state of the public mind. The gloom of religious abstraction, and the wildness of their situation, among trackless forests and savage tribes, had disposed the colonists to superstitious fancies, and had filled their imaginations with the frightful chimeras of witchcraft and spectrology. (255)

Despite their disparate contexts, the parallels drawn between these two statements are more than just semantic, as both express Crayon's preoccupation with storytelling as a powerful source of tradition. Furthermore, conjuring the "diseased state of the public mind" in Puritan New England (and linking it semantically to the nineteenth century) works to undermine the teleological narrative mode that shows history progressing toward New England. Rather, Irving challenges the typical American narrative of progress to draw parallels between various times and peoples. New England Puritans are shown perpetrating atrocities for holding superstitions akin to those described as quaint in various rustics throughout the *Sketch-Book*; their ignorance and its violent results challenge any notion of their civilized superiority over "savages" or other "pagans"; and the history of persecution of Indians and fellow Christians alike gives the lie to New England's storied legacy of religious tolerance and liberty. The parallels between Crayon's narratives enact simultaneous alternative histories as described by Michelle Sizemore, rendering history cyclical and placing various historical figures on equal moral and intellectual footing so as to debunk New England's "City on a Hill" mythos.

The nexus of literary allusions that makes apparent Irving's attitude toward American myth-making clearly constitutes a challenge to New England's cultural supremacy, but is often more specifically centered around figures from Connecticut. This tendency manifests in the *History* with Knickerbocker's denunciation of Trumbull's history, but also in the narrative itself.

Structured as it is around the tenures of New Amsterdam's governors, *A History of New York* ends with the defeat of Peter Stuyvesant and takeover of New Amsterdam (subsequently renamed New York) by none other than John Winthrop the Younger (son of John Winthrop, Cotton Mather's American Aeneas), who was the governor of Connecticut.

Most notable among Irving's Connecticut characters, however, is that of the itinerant schoolmaster, Ichabod Crane. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is rife with hints at its satirical treatment of regional myth-as-history-writing, beginning with its narrative frame: though included in Geoffrey Crayon's *Sketch-Book*, this tale is purported to be one of the "well authenticated traditions" "Found among the Papers of the Late Diedrich Knickerbocker," who, the reader will recall, admitted such rumors and tales into the official, "scientific" record back in his *History of New York* (291). The town of Sleepy Hollow is described as inhabited by descendants of the original Dutch settlers and said to be "under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie" (292). The "witching power" is purported by some to be the result of a spell cast by a German doctor, and by others to be the result of a spell cast by an old Indian chief who predated the arrival of Dutch colonists. Much as with the squire's allegedly Roman "sword dance," the actual origins matter less than the resulting tale.

Regardless of the spell's source, the main ghost of the region is that of a Hessian mercenary from the American revolution: "The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, and seems to be commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air, is the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head" (292). Having given the account of the headless horseman as received from "the most authentic historians of those parts," Knickerbocker makes sure to note that Sleepy Hollow is of a particularly backwards type: "...it



is in such little retired Dutch valleys, found here and there embosomed in the great state of New-York, that population, manners, and customs, remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved” (293). These inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow, then, are, like Rip Van Winkle before them, vestiges of the Old World residing in—but also sheltered from—the new. Insofar as they resist the ills of rapid urbanization and the excesses of capitalism, their valence is a positive one and aligned with those idealized rustics Crayon depicts as representatives of “authentic” Englishness. On the other hand, they are described as foolish, lazy, and prone to those very superstitions against which Crayon has warned his American audience in both “English Writers on America” and the Indian sketches.

Ichabod Crane, then, stands as archetypal New England foil to the Sleepy Hollow Dutch. He is spindly, migratory, urbane, educated, and ambitious. The story’s entire plot, in fact, hinges on Crane’s ambitious greed. Though his beloved Katrina Van Tassel is described as quite beautiful, what the schoolmaster really wants is her father’s fortune. As the familiar plot goes, though, Ichabod must vie for Katrina’s attention against his rival, the strapping young prankster Brom Bones. When the entire neighborhood is gathered at the palatial country home of the Van Tassels, the two suitors compete by (what else?) telling stories. Brom tells of the Headless Horseman, while Ichabod—not to be outdone—recounts entirely from memory large extracts from Cotton Mather’s histories of New England witchcraft, of which he is both a devoted reader and firm believer. As the party ends, Ichabod lingers to speak with Katrina, and, although Knickerbocker’s narrative is unable to furnish details of the conversation, we are told that the schoolmaster leaves the meeting a forlorn, defeated man. It is then that the tale turns to Ichabod’s harrowing ride and eventual climactic run-in with the Hessian’s headless ghost. The next

morning, all that is left is a shattered pumpkin and Gunpowder, the ragged horse lent to Ichabod by local farmer Hans Van Ripper, clues to a disaster suffered at the hands of the region's "dominant spirit."

Although Knickerbocker's narration in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" never fails to mention a ghost or bewitching without also alluding to the superstition that prevails among Sleepy Hollow's benighted country Dutch, the story itself furnishes no reason to suppose that anybody other than Ichabod Crane honestly believes in the Headless Horseman. The story's denouement consists of Van Ripper pulling his children from school due to the schoolmaster's stupidity and Brom Bones flashing a knowing grin at every subsequent mention of the incident; and its postscript ends with Diedrich Knickerbocker reporting that his source of the story, upon being asked about its veracity, replies, "Faith, sir...as to that matter, I don't believe one-half of it myself" (320). In this entire bewitched region inhabited by superstitious inhabitants, the only character actually haunted is the urbane and educated interloper, and this because he harbors beliefs gleaned from an account of the Salem Witch Trials which, when written, was published as a true and authentic account of important events in New England history. If anything actually haunts Sleepy Hollow, it is not the galloping Hessian, the German wizard, or the long-gone Indian chief, but the influence of Cotton Mather and the mythos derived from his New England histories. Though narrated humorously, the irony of this haunting and its connection with similar hauntings throughout the *Sketch-Book* hints at the serious implications of Irving's satire in *A History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. The humor in Ichabod Crane's foolishness is belied by his belief in a pernicious, hypocritical, deadly imperialist tradition. In this way, Irving skewers the New England historical tradition—itsself the predominant American mythos—as a danger even in the secluded Hudson River Valley. Capping two full-length works

dedicated to ironically undermining the project of nationalistic myth making, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’s” haunting comes as a result of the same histories that paradoxically both justified religious persecution and genocide and became the bedrock for a nationalistic mythology whose teleology points toward religious tolerance and personal liberty.

New England histories are shown repeatedly throughout Irving’s first two major works to be part of a dangerous mythology that perpetuates violence, and even in its moments of humor, the *Sketch-Book* depicts adherents of that mythology as perilously deluded. Such adherence would not, however, have been restricted to hyperbolic regional archetypes such as Ichabod Crane: by lampooning those who take histories like Mather’s at their word, the *Sketch-Book* implicates the prevailing American mythos and its nationalistic teleology in perpetuating the “inveterate diseases of old countries.” The deadly, intolerant falsehoods of New England’s Puritans become not the endpoint of historical progress, but a mere echo of old England’s Crusaders, to be contrasted with the “authentic” and socially cohesive natural sentiment of rural traditions and Christmas celebrations. Throughout Irving’s playful treatment of national mythologies in *A History of New York* and *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, binding national traditions are constantly critiqued and promoted, parodied and de/reconstructed. Yet, while “scientific” histories such as Mather’s and Mitchill’s are mercilessly skewered, traditions such as Christmas and literature are celebrated and the required political imaginary valued and developed through further historical storytelling. By constructing an interplay of stories that seek to simultaneously and seamlessly debunk nationalist mythologies and construct national traditions, Irving’s early works constitute an unparalleled study of the nation as narrative and an exercise in its creation

## Afterword: Against “Sheikh McScrooge”

On January 16, 2015, the film *American Sniper* debuted in the United States. Directed by Clint Eastwood and based on the autobiography of Chris Kyle, a sniper during the Iraq war who became legendary for amassing higher kill numbers than any marksman in history, it was an instant hit worldwide and quickly became the highest grossing war film of all time. A largely unoriginal action film that relied heavily on tension-building cuts and stereotypical depictions of Arab antagonists and American protagonists alike, it garnered nominations for several Academy Awards, including Best Picture. When the film failed to capture any Oscar but that for sound editing, online forums and commentators on several major media outlets erupted with disdain for such offenders as Hollywood, liberals, and academics—all classified as “elites” in opposition to “real” Americans.

Indeed, more than anything else, conversations about *American Sniper* revolved around evaluations of—and mostly praise for—its authenticity.<sup>26</sup> Whether debating how real the depiction of Kyle was, how real the representation of war and posttraumatic stress, or how real was the patriotism of its fans and detractors, the virtue of authenticity ruled the discourse around the film.

Notably, authenticity barely entered into discussions of one major historical problem with the film: it strongly suggests support for the notion that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 justified the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As divided as the United States currently is along political partisan lines, the argument that Saddam Hussein’s regime possessed weapons of mass destruction has been soundly discredited across the political spectrum; and yet critics of the film

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, David Denby’s review of the film in *The New Yorker*, A.O. Scott’s in *The New York Times*, and Justin Craig’s for Fox News. Geared toward widely differing audiences across the political spectrum, each of these reviews briefly notes that the film takes liberties with Kyle’s biography but goes on to lavish praise on its realistic depictions of battle and posttraumatic stress among veterans. None mention the film’s linking of Iraq and the September 11 attacks.

who raised this objection found themselves accused of lacking patriotism, sympathizing with terrorists, and disrespecting veterans.

What we see at work here is a series of tropes—the terroristic Arab and the heroic American soldier to be sure, but also the war film itself as an item that reinforces patriotic sentiment—employed in such a way as to reveal quite clearly the flexibility of history and society’s engagement with empirical facts. The one concept with any solidity here is the idea of nationalism as an end unto itself, and so all other parts of the discourse shape themselves so as to be conducive to that end. Within this discursive schema, the “authentic” is the national identity, thus authorizing an empirically false engagement with history.

Ernest Gellner would likely point to the furor around *American Sniper* as an example of the fundamental dishonesty of the modern nation and the violence inherent in its heroic, adversarial outlook. While I do not disagree with the notion that there is much danger in the ways in which modern nationalism manifests and reinforces itself, I am—as I’ve already noted elsewhere—less interested in seeking “authenticity” than in considering how such inevitable communal discursive constructs might be better employed. To that end, I offer a counterexample that also deals in communal myth and the flexibility of history, and that might be said to reverse the gaze with which *American Sniper* makes its rather horrifying statement.

On December 20, 2013 at the Islamic Center of Southern California, a Friday prayer service was held that provides a compelling thought experiment for considerations of irony, myth, and national identity as developed in this dissertation. In a sermon titled “What Would Jesus Do? A Muslim Conceptualization of Christmas,” scholar Ahmed Younis addressed anxieties about American Muslim identity and assimilation by discussing the controversial topic of American Muslims celebrating Christmas alongside their Christian neighbors.

In the sermon, Younis bases a forceful pro-Christmas argument on grounds secular and sacred, starting with a call for unity founded on verse 59:14 of the Qur'an: "Their hearts are in chaotic disunity. This is because they are a people who do not think." The unity evoked here is threefold: that of Muslims *as Muslims* with fellow Muslims, that of Muslims *as Muslims* with non-Muslims (specifically, in this case, Christians), and that of American Muslims *as Americans* with other Americans.

From the perspective of a study that seeks clusters of meaning and widely proliferated discourses as hermeneutics for understanding the contexts in which they unfold and the texts/discourses that they produce, Younis's evocation of scripture provides much to chew on: one quotation on social unity from an ancient religious text is brought to bear on a matter typically considered out of its adherents' purview, and thus traverses modern questions of intra- and-inter-faith engagement as well as individual, communal, and national identities. On the sacred front, Younis cites the Quranic account of the nativity and notes Islam's reverence for Jesus as a prophet; as to interfaith relations, he argues that a diversity of faiths is an important and beautiful component of the world God created.

But most relevant here is obviously the national-communal focus, which abounds with historical and popular culture references that make for a most interesting look at the ways in which complex tropes navigate fraught intersections of cultural identity. For example, the imaginary adversary with whom Younis purports to engage in Socratic dialogue is dubbed "Sheikh McScrooge," a playful modification of Scrooge McDuck, the animated miserly anthropomorphic duck that Disney based on Dickens's Ebenezer Scrooge. As a rhetorical figure, Sheikh McScrooge allows for traditional, historical, and contemporary identification between Younis's audience and American Christians. Reviewing the history of Christmas in America,

Younis discusses the prohibition on Christmas celebration in Puritan New England and jokingly equates the Puritans with Salafis, saying that they considered Christmas *haram*. He acknowledges the criticism of Christmas as having begun as an appropriation of pagan traditions and ended up as a celebration of consumerism only to point out that the *hajj* also appropriated pagan traditions and eventually resulted in luxury hotels and shopping malls surrounding the Great Mosque at Mecca.

There is, however, much more to Sheikh McScrooge. A simple enough quip that drew audible chuckles from the congregation, Younis's Disney reference illuminates a dense and complex network of allusions that provide a subtle but powerful basis for his overarching argument. At the most explicit level, the imaginary adversary clearly represents an orthodoxy that isolates American Muslims by declaring the practices of non-Muslims taboo. Implicitly, though, the joke's very resonance with the assembled audience has already deconstructed the presumed divisions that the sermon seeks to combat. To put it simply, the Sheikh McScrooge joke only works because the crowd is familiar with Scrooge McDuck. That is, the crowd is already steeped in—as well as unified by and connected with the outside world through—the culture that produced an animated talking duck who plays the most prominent role in an adaptation one of the world's most beloved Christmas stories. They are, the joke suggests, always already participating, always already of the American cultural landscape.

All of this is to the same purpose: an evocation of religious, cultural, and national communities as a means to peace and harmony amongst people sharing a place in the world and a moment in history. Though it engages many of the same ideas, this is not the troublingly aggressive expression of nationalistic and religious sentiment that fetishizes the imagined community as an end unto itself, viewing changes or challenges to its mythos as an existential

threat. Rather, Younis's sermon understands the community, its traditions, and its ever-shifting historical mythos as means to the goal of social cohesion and goodwill, whose end is "to find places where we are of value, to find places where we can become those pieces of fabric that keep all of the fabric together" (Younis).

This is only one of endless examples, but one that effectively highlights the more positive and hopeful aspects of the phenomena that this dissertation has sought to evaluate. For if, as Benedict Anderson argues, all communities larger than a certain size are discursive constructs, then it would behoove us as members of these imagined-yet-all-too-real communities to be cognizant of how we shape and employ the discourses that build and maintain those communities. Understanding the constructedness of history, the efficacy of national myth, and the power of communal identity are compelling enough as means for deconstructing the discourses that comprise our communal identities; but perhaps it would be still more useful if we also employed our understanding of these discourses to construct communities whereby inclusion takes precedence over assimilation and collective identities are celebrated as a patchwork that brings together rather than a wedge that divides.



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