

IRVING'S POSTERITY

BY MICHAEL WARNER

Like the narrators of all his major books—Geoffrey Crayon, Diedrich Knickerbocker, Jonathan Oldstyle, Fray Antonio Agapida—Washington Irving was a bachelor. In a sketch called “Bachelors” he wrote, “There is no character in the comedy of human life that is more difficult to play well, than that of an old Bachelor.”¹ Reinventing that role was the project he took on, more or less consciously, from an early age. As a young man, he belonged to an intimate circle of bachelors (“Cockloft,” they called it) with whom he wrote *Salmagundi*; when the others married, he wrote with unusual passion about his abandonment. He then came to regard his writing career as an alternative to marriage. As an old man, he maintained himself at Sunnyside, his estate on the Hudson, as a surrogate patriarch to his nieces, his bachelor brother, miscellaneous dependents, and American letters in general. It was a role he played with success; before his death he was almost universally credited as “Patriarch of American literature” and “literary father of his country,” a pseudo-paternity most famously illustrated in the so-called Sunnyside portrait. When he died, he would be eulogized as “the most fortunate old bachelor in all the world.”²

Yet bachelorhood was something he consistently regarded as anomalous, problematic, and probably immoral. Irving claimed as early as 1820 that his natural inclination was to be “an honest, domestic, uxorious man,” and that matrimony was indispensable to happiness.³ Over twenty years later, he wrote, “I have no great idea of bachelor hood and am not one by choice. . . . I have often repined at my single state and have looked forward with doubt and solicitude to the possibility of an old age solitary, uncherished, and unloved.”⁴ Yet he added that this was no longer the case, as he had so many dependents that he had begun to regard himself as “a *père de famille*.” “Had I only myself to take care of I should become as inert, querulous and good for nothing as other old bachelors who only live for themselves.”⁵

Irving's letter encapsulates a highly conflicted moral drama about the successful life. The terms of this moral ambivalence suggest why bachelor status was such a significant fact about Irving's career, and why it resonated in the early nineteenth century to an extent difficult to imagine two centuries later, when the very concept of bachelor status

has become archaic and trivial.⁶ Bad bachelors, as Irving understands things, live for themselves. Good fathers take care of others. Irving here appeals to a deep and resilient moral fantasy: that reproduction is essentially generous. He says nothing of the ways the patriarch lives for himself: neither of the gratifications of authority, nor of the narcissism of reproduction, nor of the dream of self-perpetuation, nor the public status of the *père de famille*. Instead, he sees the paternal role as a way to transcend the selfishness of individual existence. Given such a moral vision, bachelorhood would always be a nagging anomaly.

Irving makes no secret of the fact. The title page of *The Sketch Book* contains an epigraph from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*: "I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for. A mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they play their parts; which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene."⁷ The epigraph partly explains the metaphor of the book's title, and glosses the odd generic mixture of the book. But for this purpose, it would only have been necessary to present Crayon as a "spectator of other men's fortunes." Why underscore his lack of wife and children? Estranged from reproductive sexuality, he is alienated from life itself, and especially from the continuity of generations. The result, at least in *The Sketch Book*, is a kind of literary relation to the world, associated with the static genres of tableau or sketch.

The tension between Irving's patriarchal ambitions and the need to pursue them by surrogacy and by the asexual means of literary culture can be seen, as this epigraph suggests, as the defining theme of his career. And while it clearly made him feel anomalous, even a bit queer, given the strength of his idealization of patriarchy, I will argue that the surrogacy of his bachelor consciousness accounts for much of his cultural power. In particular, I will suggest that the bachelor's fall from reproductive continuity lies behind Irving's preoccupation with modes of historical time, with ways of being related to the ancestral past and to posterity, with the meaning of death and the experience of temporality.⁸ His bachelor narrators are not really stigmatized by identity, but by archaism. Jonathan Oldstyle bears it in his name; Diedrich Knickerbocker is the heirless remnant of bygone Dutch ancestors whom he chronicles in order to assert his immortality; Geoffrey Crayon's name evokes Chaucer, and although he associates his homeland with youth, the picturesque quaintness of his crayon sketches depends entirely on his experience of anachronism; Fray Antonio is an antiquary of a lost civilization. Sterility leads each to literature, and to literary posterity.

Even at its most successful, Irving's was no ordinary patriarchy. So thoroughly did he assemble the inventory of the patriarchal estate that its surrogacy might almost, at times, be overlooked—but not quite. In a letter of 1853 he describes coming home after a trip to Washington:

I saw female forms in the porch and I knew the spy glass was in hand. In a moment there was a waving of handkerchiefs and a hurrying hither and thither. Never did old bachelor come to such a loving home, so gladdened by blessed womankind. . . . After all the kissing and crying and laughing and rejoicing were over I sallied forth to inspect my domains, welcomed home by my prime minister Robert, and my master of the horse Thomas and my keeper of the poultry yard William. Everything was in good order—all had been faithful in the discharge of their duties; my fields had been manured, my trees trimmed; the fences repaired and painted. . . . Suffice it to say, everything was just as heart could wish, so having visited every part of my empire, I settled down for the evening in my elbow chair, and entertained the family circle with all the wonders I had seen at Washington.⁹

Servants, property, women (“my womankind,” he often calls them), a family circle—only two things distinguish this scene from patriarchy itself: its archaism and its lack of grounding in reproductive sexuality.¹⁰ Irving knows it is archaic. The letter works very hard to produce the effect of picturesque quaintness, which it does through Irving's characteristic tone, at once ironic and sentimental. Irving exaggerates the diction (“I sallied forth”), the patriarchal possessives (“my fields,” “my trees,” “my empire”), and the comically formal titles for his servants (“my prime minister,” “my master of the horse”). Through the ostentation of affect (“a waving of handkerchiefs,” “never did old bachelor . . .”) he both mocks and indulges his own need to be indulged. The style makes it understood that this mode of patriarchy is to be seen as obsolete. At the same time, the tone naturalizes some of the moral effects of the patriarchal estate, making them flow from sentiment (“all that heart could wish”) in the absence of both a normatively patriarchal authority and its reproductive sexuality. Irving represents himself not as feared and revered, but as loved and coddled. The servants maintain the estate without command. The property and its folk are his extension, though he is no sire. And the style mists the scene with an aura of antiquity, supplying reproductive continuity without hint of sexual necessity.

Irving's picture of himself in this letter is not just archaic: like so much else in his writing, it is made to be felt as archaic. One of the hallmarks of his style is the self-conscious production of quaintness, a trait that had been recognized—or misrecognized—from the beginning

of his career. Samuel Rogers, to whom he dedicated one of his books, famously described Irving's prose as "Addison and water."¹¹ And Hazlitt, in *The Spirit of the Age*, writes that "Mr. Irvine's [*sic*] writings are literary *anachronisms*." Hazlitt continues:

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. . . . Instead of tracing the changes that have taken place in society since Addison or Fielding wrote, he transcribes their account in a different hand-writing, and thus keeps us stationary.¹²

The problematic relation to history that Hazlitt describes here is, he thinks, Irving's failure, resulting from his provincial ignorance. Certainly Irving himself supplies the cues for this reading, both in "The Author's Account of Himself" in *The Sketch Book* ("My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age" [S, 744]) and in "The Author" in *Bracebridge Hall* ("Accustomed always to scenes where history was, in a manner, in anticipation . . . I for the first time beheld signs of national old age. . . . I traversed England, a grown-up child" [B, 8-9]). National allegory gives him a potent vocabulary for the ancestral reproduction he idealizes, and for the revolutionary rupture that estranges him from an unmarked sense of time that such idealization can only mourn.¹³ Anachronism is the contradictory apprehension of history through which Irving attempts to remediate modernity. But national difference (or provincialism, as Hazlitt sees it) is not the only source of Irving's antihistorical rhetoric of anachronism. He also attempts to remediate the discontinuities of post-patriarchal sexuality. In practice, these were often confused or overdetermined, as they are when the American Crayon describes himself, in England, as "a grown-up child."

Irving's ambivalence about bachelorhood says much about the transitional period between patriarchy and modern heterosexuality. By patriarchy I do not mean male domination in general, which of course is still with us, but rather a frankly avowed system of hierarchy in which the normative order of gender and sex is oriented to the succession of fathers. Modern heterosexuality, by contrast, presents itself as a relation between equals, and can be more easily distinguished from reproduction. Where patriarchy is grounded in estates, families, and their durability, modern heterosexuality is grounded in love and sexuality. Irving idealized patriarchy just at the moment when it was clearly being

displaced by modernity. His anomalous position in patriarchal stories of inheritance was therefore overdetermined by the new problem of modern sexuality's revolt against inheritance. (This broad resonance of the status may help to explain why the figure of the bachelor is put to significant use by so many of Irving's closest male contemporaries, including Lamb and Cooper; even the spinster could embody the modern individual's crisis of reproductive time, though in crucial ways the spinster and the bachelor are not parallel cases.)¹⁴ Modern culture contains an acute contradiction: sexuality no longer needs to be reproductive, but the norms of reproductive narrative continue to saturate the moral imagination of time, both in Irving's day and in our own. Neither quite inside nor quite outside the moral order of reproduction, Irving's writing demonstrates the long reach of reproductive narrative in the lives even of nonreproductive persons.

In the twenty-first century, bachelor status has lost much of its stigma, and much of its meaning, because reproductive sex no longer organizes the world as the explicit matrix of social structure. Until relatively recently, states tottered under heirless sovereigns; marriage was an institution of estate-building and childbearing rather than intimacy; children were needed either for labor or for the transmission of property; and sexual acts could only be legitimated in theory as attempts to breed. Modernity has been marked, at least since Locke, by the ebb of kinship and biological reproduction from the organization of social life.¹⁵

Yet in other ways reproductive sex has become an even more pervasive measure of value in modernity. Patrilineal succession may have ceased to be a self-evident gloss on the social order or its continuity from past to future, but the result is that everyone now has generational consciousness—not just fathers and eldest sons.¹⁶ More and more detached from kinship roles, modern individuals have had to develop styles of self-transcendence, of linking themselves to a posterity so as not to be barren and sterile.¹⁷ The forms of reproductive narrative have proliferated under this pressure. Perhaps the most salient example is the modern notion of race, which stamps people with ancestral continuity and reproductive identity regardless of their own reproductive activity, grounding identity in biology. When people speak about legacies and heritages they speak metaphorically; but these are now general concerns, not just a private interest of heirs. Aging requires narratives of career, life course, and succession into the future. Whether we bear children or not, our lives converge on a future that continues to be imagined not as the activity of other adults like ourselves, but as the inheritance of children—our donees, our surrogates, our redeemers, our alibi.¹⁸

The social meaning of the revolution in sexual time can be illustrated by a now notorious moment of confusion in Thomas Jefferson's thinking. In 1789, having completed the first bourgeois revolt against hereditary sovereignty in America, and witnessing the approach of a second in France, Jefferson wrote a letter to Madison declaring the "self evident" principle "that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living."¹⁹ No generation, he says, has the right to bind another. "Usufruct," a term from the feudal law of land tenure, anchors Jefferson's idea in the concrete issues of inheritance and entail, an area of law in which his revolutionary ardor was early put into practice. He had successfully campaigned to eliminate primogeniture and entail from the laws of Virginia.²⁰ Yet in the letter to Madison he quickly raises the argument to the national level. Jefferson indulges a thought experiment in which an entire nation is imagined to be born at once and to die at once: "Each successive generation would, in this way, come on and go off the stage at a fixed moment, as individuals do now." This fantasy exercise is instructive, he says, because the same consequences follow from a study of averages. Arguing by means of figures derived from Buffon that "half of the people 21 years and upwards at any one instant of time" will be dead in nineteen years, Jefferson reckons that this figure limits the contractual ability of any majority. No nation has a right to contract a debt beyond the term of nineteen years.

Undoubtedly this thought experiment had personal resonance for Jefferson. He had inherited large debts from his father-in-law that still weighed on him; and eliminating national debt was later to be his obsession as president. Here, however, he extends the point to the more general proposition that "no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law." Because "the earth belongs always to the living generation," Jefferson says, every constitution and law should expire after nineteen years.

Madison wrote a devastating reply, pointing out that Jefferson's model is profoundly counterfactual. Generations have no beginning and no end. Madison also pointed out that the ideal of explicit consent to all laws was impractical, requiring such absurdities as female suffrage.²¹ Yet the idea of national generations was so powerful that Jefferson repeated it, almost word for word, twenty-seven years later.²²

Historians have almost without exception regarded Madison's arguments as definitive. Jefferson's, on most accounts, reveal the impractical extremism to which he was sometimes pushed by theory.²³ Yet the underlying ideas were not unique to Jefferson. They derive from Locke's critique of Filmer in the first treatise, and Paine was to score a similar point against Burke in *The Rights of Man*, two years after Jefferson's

letter: “Man has no property in man,” wrote Paine; “neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow. . . . Every generation is, and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require.”²⁴ This is an argument for the right to revolution, and it shows the close relation between the modern democratic language of legitimacy and a new temporal consciousness.

Revolutionary time creates an unforeseen problem for the imagination of reproduction. Paine makes his claim not on behalf of citizens of varying ages, but on behalf of a generation. And while his narrative allows him to draw on the rich imaginative repertoire of Oedipal revolt, its relation to any context of reproductive succession is no longer direct. Generations in this usage are reckoned not from a common ancestor, as they are in Biblical genealogies, but from national demography in secular time.²⁵ Paine and Jefferson trumpet a break with patriarchy’s moral vision, its political, economic, and legal infrastructure, and its sense of time. Their fanfare is for abstract individuals rather than fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. Individuals, having ceased to be sons or fathers, now belong, by the abstracting magnetism of averages and nations, to a more grandly conceived succession, that of generations. Generational belonging is the essence of the modern. The dead are dead.

One consequence—and not simply of the revolutionary political theories, but equally of the changing social conditions that gave those theories plausibility—is that mortality transcendence must be increasingly historical rather than reproductive, achieved rather than naturalized in estates. The vigor of modernity has the notable problem of not lasting long for anyone. Thus Paine writes, “When a man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him; and having no longer any participation in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in directing who shall be its governors, or how its government shall be organized, or how administered.”²⁶

What is remarkable is that Paine writes this as a reason for optimism; it frees up political agency. The same sentence could just as easily be read as a note of crisis. Modern man, capable of throwing off the yoke of the ages but shockingly liable to cease altogether, might well console himself with his generational belonging, even if it has to be achieved through the abstractions of the average and the nation. He might well be inclined to forget, as Jefferson did both before and after Madison reminded him, that generations do not exist in nature. His own relation to futurity is a new kind of problem. His heirs can no longer be the vehicle of his imprint on the world, for they have been imagined as radically free. His will cannot shape posterity by entailing his descendants.

In a rather different context, Alexis de Tocqueville gives a similar explanation of family values:

What is called family pride is often founded upon an illusion of self-love. A man wishes to perpetuate and immortalize himself, as it were, in his great-grandchildren. Where family pride ceases to act, individual selfishness comes into play. When the idea of family becomes vague, indeterminate, and uncertain, a man thinks of his present convenience; he provides for the establishment of his next succeeding generation and no more. Either a man gives up the idea of perpetuating his family, or at any rate he seeks to accomplish it by other means than a landed estate.²⁷

According to Tocqueville, Americans cannot realize those desires in families for a simple material reason: partible inheritance, which he sees as extended in novel and radical ways by the Americans. As he goes on to note, “the English laws concerning the transmission of property were abolished in almost all the states at the time of the Revolution. The law of entail was so modified as not materially to interrupt the free circulation of property” (*D*, 1:53). For this reason, he says elsewhere, “In America the family, in the roman and aristocratic signification of the word, does not exist” (*D*, 2:202). Tocqueville offers cultural as well as material accounts of this depatriarchalization of the family form, which he describes rather optimistically as post-Oedipal (*D*, 2:202-4) and voluntary. In the famous chapter “Of Individualism in Democratic Countries,” Tocqueville discusses the problem of individualism almost entirely in terms of generational relations:

Among aristocratic nations, as families remain for centuries in the same condition, often on the same spot, all generations become, as it were, contemporaneous. A man almost always knows his forefathers and respects them; he thinks he already sees his remote descendants and he loves them . . . Among democratic nations new families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition; the woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after, no one has any idea. . . . Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart. (*D*, 2:104-5, 106)²⁸

Tocqueville sees a family form no longer based on entail, increasingly in competition with other contexts for the accumulation of capital, increasingly organized by a contractarian eros that does not narrate across

generations, less based in generational deferral despite the continuing importance of a male head of household, less integrated with work, and increasingly displaced by the culture of individualism. One of the most brilliant elements in his account is his emphasis on the experience of time. As family forms change, temporality changes. “The woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced.” Empty modernity creates a moral dilemma of self-transcendence for the individual. “It throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.” It guarantees that this moral dilemma will be felt as a problem of time: a broken relation to ancestors and descendants, the reproductive metonyms for the past and posterity.

We need not share Tocqueville’s belief that partible inheritance was the principal motor behind these changes. Partible inheritance itself takes on greater significance given natural rights theory, the historical time of modernity, the social imaginary of democratic legitimacy, and the decline of kinship systems generally. These and similar overdetermined changes are rendered by Irving as the contradictory temporality of nostalgia. The immemorial continuity that he so obsessively depicted—in *Bracebridge Hall*, in the sleepy Dutch villages of New York, in the Alhambra—was no longer available as a habitable time.

In response to the language of democratic modernity Irving develops a peculiarly American redaction of Burkean conservatism. In *Bracebridge Hall*, for example, in a sketch called “Forest Trees,” Irving writes a passage that might well have been on Tocqueville’s mind a decade later. He reminds us that the Burkean view continues to have power, even for one “brought up as I have been in republican principles and habits”:

It is one of the effects of hereditary rank, when it falls thus happily, that it multiplies the duties, and, as it were, extends the existence of the possessor. He does not feel himself a mere individual link in creation, responsible only for his own brief term of being. He carries back his existence in proud recollection, and he extends it forward in honourable anticipation. He lives with his ancestry, and he lives with his posterity. To both does he consider himself involved in deep responsibilities. As he has received much from those that have gone before, so he feels bound to transmit much to those who are to come after him. His domestic undertakings seem to imply a longer existence than those of ordinary men; none are so apt to build and plant for future centuries, as noble-spirited men, who have received their heritages from foregone ages. (*B*, 74-75)

The context for this lullaby is a sketch of the trees “that have grown old and great with the family” on the Bracebridge Hall estate, trees that “are haunted by the recollections of great spirits of past ages” (*B*, 74).²⁹ What makes this passage nostalgic, rather than a direct celebration of an ideal drawn from the past, is that Irving sees it as conflicting with his own allegiance to democratic modernity. The passage marks an ambivalence or contradiction in regard to the future. Irving cannot inhabit the customary temporality of the estate-building patriarch in a system of “hereditary rank.” He must pursue mortality-transcendence through other means. (Anxiety attends this project at every step. Irving’s biographer remarks that Irving “counted the years of his age like a woman.”)³⁰

In October of 1817, Irving wrote to Henry Brevoort, one of his best friends, about Brevoort’s upcoming marriage:

I am almost ashamed to say that at first the news had rather the effect of making me feel melancholy than glad. It seemed in a manner to divorce us forever; for marriage is the grave of Bachelors intimacy and after having lived & grown together for many years, so that our habits thoughts & feelings were quite blended & intertwined, a seperation of this kind is a serious matter—not so much to you, who are transplanted into the garden of matrimony, to flourish & fructify and be caressed into prosperity—but for poor me, left lonely & forlorn, and blasted by every wind of heaven.³¹

This letter’s bachelor consciousness about unaffiliated individuals who face the grave, and families who fructify, dominates *The Sketch Book*, which Irving was just beginning to write while living in Birmingham with his sister, his brother-in-law, and their many children. He was also attempting to rescue the family business from a looming bankruptcy. As a younger son whose independence could no longer be secured by the family, and who had already cited financial worry as his reason for remaining unmarried, he seems to have registered the vicissitudes of capital through a confused mixture of class shame, troubled masculinity, socio-sexual isolation, and fear of mortality. “This was vile,” he wrote, “and sordid and humiliated me to the dust. . . . I underwent ruin in all its bitterness & humiliation—in a strange land—among strangers.”³²

Irving made this confession in the same small notebook that contained jottings for *The Sketch Book*, and which he later titled “Notes while preparing Sketch Book.” In it he goes on to say, “How the truth presses home upon us as we advance in life that everything around us is transient and uncertain—It is one of those common truths that sleep in our ears—never heed it until we feel it withering at our hearts—until it

is tolled in the funeral of our friends and written on the wrecks of our hopes and affections.”³³ The echoes of this sentiment can be heard throughout *The Sketch Book*, not least in “Rip van Winkle,” where the truth that all is transient at last ceases to “sleep in our ears.”

Just after the volume was published, Irving returned to the crisis of bachelorhood in another letter to a literary friend, this time James Kirke Paulding:

Your picture of domestic enjoyment indeed raises my envy. With all my wandering habits, which are the result of circumstances rather than of disposition, I think I was formed for an honest, domestic, uxorious man, and I cannot hear of my old cronies snugly nestled down with good wives and fine children round them, but I feel for the moment desolate and forlorn. Heavens! what a haphazard, schemeless life mine has been, that here I should be, at this time of life, youth slipping away, and scribbling month after month and year after year, far from home, without any means or prospect of entering into matrimony, which I absolutely believe indispensable to the happiness and even comfort of the after part of existence. When I fell into misfortunes and saw all the means of domestic establishment pass away like a dream, I used to comfort myself with the idea that if I was indeed doomed to remain single, you and Brevoort and Gouv. Kemble would also do the same, and that we should form a knot of queer, rum old bachelors, at some future day to meet at the corner of Wall street or walk the sunny side of Broadway and kill time together. But you and Brevoort have given me the slip . . .³⁴

It is difficult to credit entirely Irving’s claim that he remained single, despite his “uxorious” constitution, because of lack of means. The success of *The Sketch Book* soon removed that obstacle, yet Irving retained his bachelorhood for another forty years, resisting repeated encouragements to matrimony.³⁵ This apparent contradiction was observed by Irving’s heirs, and in the words of one scholar, “To supply a plausible story that might account for this persistent bachelorhood became the sacred duty of Pierre M. Irving,” who elaborated a legend out of the death of Irving’s youthful sweetheart Matilda Hoffman.³⁶ In Pierre Irving’s romantic tale, it was lifelong grief, not insolvency, that kept his uncle avuncular, queer, and rum. Irving scholarship has never resolved the biographical problem to anyone’s satisfaction.

More interesting, perhaps, is the letter’s contrast between matrimony, which secures “the after part of existence,” and the life of bachelors, who “kill time.” Irving alludes here to an urban subculture of bachelor life, with an infrastructure of taverns, boarding houses, and street life—a subculture that makes an alternative to patriarchal house-

holds imaginable, even if temporarily. He is also partly narrating here a change in his own writing: its mutation from genteel diversion into literary career. Brevoort and Paulding were among the bachelor collaborators with whom Irving had written *Salmagundi*. The authors of that work had assured its readers that they wrote neither for fame nor for money; “so soon as we get tired of reading our own works, we shall discontinue them without the least remorse. . . . While we continue to go on, we will go on merrily.”³⁷ If Irving began writing out of the bachelor practice of killing time merrily, by the time he wrote *The Sketch Book* he had begun to see his writing as “literary property.” In a letter to his brother Ebenezer in 1819, he says he is trying to write “articles . . . sufficient for my present support, and form a stock of copyright property, that may be a little capital for me hereafter.”³⁸ Literature will have to provide for “the after part of existence,” both by providing material support through intellectual property and by securing a relation to posterity through fame. It plays the role that Irving otherwise associates with marriage: it provides not just a social platform of status, but the life-orienting horizon of futurity.³⁹

In *The Sketch Book*, Irving notes that transiency and death give a kind of rationale for the family. In one of the first sketches, “The Wife,” he declares that “a married man falling into misfortune, is more apt to retrieve his situation in the world than a single one . . . a single man is apt to run to waste and self neglect; to fancy himself lonely and abandoned, and his heart to fall to ruin like some deserted mansion for want of an inhabitant” (S, 759-60). “Rip van Winkle”—a tale about a *married* man who runs to waste and self-neglect, who fancies himself lonely and abandoned, and whose mansion is literally deserted—immediately follows “The Wife,” and the two stories imagine contrasting images of the family. In “The Wife,” bachelor Crayon visits his bosom buddy, lately fallen into ruin. The friend’s perky wife has not only accepted ruin with grace but now sustains her husband in a pastoral retreat, to Crayon’s envy. In “Rip,” this affirmative vision gives way both to frank misogyny and to a general resistance against the economic function of the family. Rip has “an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labour” (S, 771). Not that he is lazy. He does odd jobs all over town. The only work he resists is “family duty” (S, 771). His fences collapse, his cows go astray. “His patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre” (S, 771). Rip, we’re told, doesn’t mind losing his inherited property, “but his wife kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness and the ruin he was bringing on his family” (S, 771). Both stories regard family property as an environment of shame and repression for men. Women are adored

or despised depending on whether they are seen as shaming or consolatory toward their economically endangered husbands.

So although Irving sees marriage as a buffer against male ruin, it isn't much of one, and the deeper desire at any rate is to escape from the struggle. ("Commerce," he wrote in his notebook in 1818, "is a game where the merchant is one party & ruin the other.")⁴⁰ Irving also sees, like Tocqueville after him, that material conditions in the United States make the family less capable of narrating beyond the individual life. Irving contrasts his American tales with a long description of a landed patriarchy in the "Christmas" section of *The Sketch Book*. There, feudally guaranteed continuity of a family, conceived as a web of property and class relations, works to provide a framework of temporality for the bachelor uncle as well as the young heir. (As usual, Irving is less interested in women.) These narratives of lineage and primogeniture might seem to be an odd aspect of feudalism for Washington Irving—youngest of eleven children in a mercantile family, bachelor, expatriate—to embrace. And perhaps it is just because of Irving's persistent unease with his own relation to such structures that he kept narrating them with obsessively alienated longing.

"Rip Van Winkle" does not tell the story of reproduction's incoherence for someone left out of it or dominated by it. This is the story of someone who by the end will be called "one of the patriarchs." But it narrates at every point the incoherence and sacrifice in Rip's drift through the life course by which reproduction makes his place in the world intelligible. In the literary-critical tradition, "Rip van Winkle" has been the pretext for a continuous din about family values. "The figure of Rip Van Winkle presides over the birth of the American imagination," Leslie Fiedler famously claims in *Love and Death in the American Novel*. "Ever since, the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility."⁴¹ As we have seen, Fiedler's implication—that you couldn't have sex, or sexual difference, or ethics, without the marriage form and reproduction—was to some extent shared by Irving. That's why the bachelor's life could only be queer, rum, and inconsequential. But what Irving seems to long for, in "Rip van Winkle," is not an escape from the moral life of heterosexuality; it is a generational continuity that would be social and public rather than merely private and familial.

"Rip van Winkle," it would be fair to say, is obsessed with generationality. But not with reproductive sexuality. Judith Fetterley

notes that the Van Winkle children are “difficult to account for; it would seem more likely that he sprung them magically from some part of himself in order to have playmates.” She attributes this to Irving’s “evasion of sexuality.”⁴² Although the Van Winkle children figure importantly both at the beginning of the story and at the end, in each instance they appear no thanks to Rip. “His children too,” we are told near the beginning, “were as ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody” (S, 771). At the end, Rip doesn’t recognize the children; they are incomprehensibly autonomous adults. Rip’s playmates, both at the beginning of the story and at the end, are children. But in both cases they are everybody else’s children. “The children of the village too would shout with joy whenever he approached,” we learn at the beginning (S, 770). After his return Rip prefers “making friends among the rising generation” (S, 783). His own children are not part of his entourage. “His son Rip, an urchin begotten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits with the old clothes of the father. He was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother’s heels, equipped in a pair of his father’s cast off galligaskins, which he had much ado to hold up with one hand, as a fine lady does her train in bad weather” (S, 771).

Rip’s children parody inheritance. Except for the junior Rip they have no names, at least in this part of the story. (Irving’s father William, by the way, named each of his first three sons William, until the third one finally survived infancy; Irving’s biographer notes that he was “persistent” on this point.)⁴³ With only the remnants of a patrimonial estate, and only castoff galligaskins in the way of family property, the second Rip inherits mainly the “habits” and the “likeness” of his father. He represents the empty heritage of reproductivity. Is it to be through this child that Rip will immortalize himself, giving himself over to posterity?

Repronarrative reduced this dramatically will begin to resemble either the mindless law of the species or a naked avowal of narcissistic will to self-perpetuation. At the beginning of the story, none of this is a problem; Rip seems content to ignore both family and property as modes of self-perpetuation or self-transcendence, contenting himself with the alternative styles of identity, sociality, and pleasure whose investment the story clearly shares in. By the end of the story, Rip has been confronted with the problem of mortality and generational time.

Rip van Winkle suffers from undernarrated aging. He is old before his time, off his generational track. The life he remembers and lives does not ground the national history that claims to express his citizenly belonging. His cohort has died, seemingly in the wink of an eye, as he slept. He walks through irrelevant archives of ruins, climbing vines,

rotted tombstones, outdated newspapers, unfamiliar fashions, and repainted signs. Suddenly, with nothing in his experience to prepare him for it, he must reimagine a relation to futurity in order to invest the remainder of his life. He begins to do this not just when he returns, twenty years older, but when he is in the mountains with Hudson's men. The uncanny bowlers are both Rip's homosocial playmates and dead men who infect him with anachrony. They're a page right out of history. Their costumes are quaint, and after sharing their pleasures Rip will find that his clothes have gone out of fashion, too.

Immediately upon "finding himself thus alone in the world," he exclaims, "Does nobody here know Rip van Winkle?" (S, 781). When Rip asks this question he is suffering from the loss of a cohort and a context. What follows can be properly described as his identity crisis. It is one of the most vivid moments of the story, and it transfixed readers, painters, and performers in the nineteenth century:

"Oh. Rip van Winkle?" exclaimed two or three—"oh to be sure!—that's Rip Van Winkle—yonder—leaning against the tree."

Rip looked and beheld a precise counterpart of himself, as he went up the mountain: apparently as lazy and certainly as ragged! The poor fellow was now completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man. In the midst of his bewilderment the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was,—what was his name?

"God knows," exclaimed he, at his wit's end, "I'm not myself.—I'm somebody else—that's me yonder—no—that's somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night; but I fell asleep on the mountain—and they've changed my gun—and everything's changed—and I'm changed—and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (S, 781)

Why does the story take this turn? The crisis consists of a narcissistic mirroring where there ought to be generational narrative. It presents Rip with his reproduction, his "precise counterpart," "the ditto of himself" (S, 783). But this is reproduction without temporality. It has nothing to do with the production of identity in a context of decay and forgetting. The uncanniness of the result suggests that it isn't exactly reproduction that people want from what is called reproduction; what they want is a narrative to organize a life course up to and beyond mortality. Irving's inspiration in "Rip Van Winkle" was to see that the narrative device of the twenty-year sleep, which he borrowed from his much shorter German source, would in effect foreground all the ways that reproduction as reproduction fails to narrate a life course.⁴⁴

Rip reproduces Rip. The result closely resembles a narcissistic scene, a pure dilemma of self and other. The narcissistic function of parenting,

which led Tocqueville to say that “What is called family pride is often founded upon an illusion of self-love,” comes to the foreground without the ideological moral language that usually mediates it. Unlike Narcissus, Rip does not take pleasure in the otherness of the self-image. He panics. And this is the moment at which “Rip Van Winkle” loses its nerve. Irving decides to narrate Rip back into propriety, generational narrativity, and the family form. As the Rip/Rip relation still reverberates too uncannily for this purpose, he has to invoke a family narrative of gender difference.

At this critical moment a fresh likely looking woman pressed through the throng to get a peep at the greybearded man. She had a chubby child in her arms, which frightened at his looks began to cry. “Hush Rip,” cried she, “hush you little fool, the old man won’t hurt you.” The name of the child, the air of the mother, the tone of her voice all awakened a train of recollections in his mind. “What is your name my good woman?” asked he.

“Judith Gardenier.”

“And your father’s name?” (S, 781)

From this point the resolution looms.

But what just happened? Why did his daughter jar Rip back into narrative when his son could not? The gendered identification of Rip and Rip was so strong that Rip prime could not recognize the other Rip as other, even to the degree that Narcissus did. Yet with Judith he has no such difficulty. Her name, of course, tells him nothing. She is the only Van Winkle who is neither a Rip nor a Van Winkle. And although it is possible to take “Hush you little fool” as an echo of her mother, Irving’s explanation requires a different logic. Rip’s recollection is jarred by “the name of the child, the air of the mother, the tone of her voice.” The name of the child is of course Rip, and we have seen that this name alone is powerless to place his identity, since it names reproduction without narrative; we have been shown that he simply identifies with the name. The maternal air and reassuring tone, however, have a different effect. The implied train of recollections seems to be that Rip prime, identifying with the child addressed as “Rip,” hears the voice as a mother’s voice, and thus as generational difference. The address in “Hush, Rip” involves four generations: Rip’s mother, whom he hears in imagination; Rip himself; his daughter, not named in patrilineal succession and heard only as its relay; and a grandson Rip with whom Rip prime identifies as instinctively as he had done with his son. By conjuring Rip into narrative, generational succession enables the trium-

phant speech of self-identification: “I am your father!” cried he—“Young Rip Van Winkle once—old Rip Van Winkle now!—does nobody know poor Rip Van Winkle!” This last question is the same one he asked before. But now he knows himself because he can place himself in a patriarchal succession.

Until this point the story has worked very hard to imagine Rip’s extrafamilial life, his other contexts for identity and for life-course narrative. It has done so partly through homosociality, in the mock public of the Dutch inn; through a general infantile public of leisure and play; and through a language of the sublime that carries the interiority and eroticism that would otherwise be the claim of the marriage. The episode with Hudson’s men, half gothic and half pastoral, condenses these homosocial, infantile, and sublime imaginings of extrafamilial space at once.

All this proves to be too much for Irving to give up. He refuses to end the story with the recognition scene. Instead he ends with a complex meditation on different modes of historical, popular, and personal narrative. The folk legend of Hudson’s men, for example, authenticates Rip’s story; we learn of it through one Peter Vanderdonk, “descendant of the historian of that name, who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province” (S, 782). This reference to Adriaen Van Der Donck—yet another reiterated ancestral name—puts archival record, ancestral heritage, folklore, and personal memory into an uneasy agreement. Soon, Rip is installed and “reverenced as one of the patriarchs of the village and a chronicle of the old times ‘before the war’” (S, 783). But he is still out of the track of gossip, and entirely unimpressed by the modern political history that has made him “a free citizen of the United States” (S, 783)—not that he can tell the difference anyway. He does not know how to live historically.

Why is political historical narrative merely parodic in “Rip Van Winkle?” Wouldn’t public contexts of activity, identity, and memory provide the kind of nonfamilial arena that the story seems to desire? Clearly they do not. From the beginning, the newspapers in the village have been out of date. Irving famously ironizes the narrative of Revolutionary rupture, of course, when Rip, returning from the mountains on what turns out to be the first national election day, discovers that the painting of King George outside the inn has merely been relabeled “General Washington”—as though the Revolution doesn’t make much difference either as a rupture with one’s ancestors or as the point at which founding fathers begin. The repainting of the sign has been a simple change of caption. The face of one George will do for

another, and the paternal image reproduces itself under a new name. For Irving, the superficial naming of the portrait is an intimate self-reference; he was born just five days before George III officially acknowledged the cessation of arms that Yorktown had made inevitable, and his christening commemorated the event. In a story Irving frequently told, and encouraged others to retell, his Scottish nanny carried him into a shop to present General Washington with particular Washington, saying, "Your Excellency, here's a bairn that's called after ye."⁴⁵ That so nationalist a writer, who capped his career with a five-volume biography of Washington, should ironize the narrative of Revolution at all is odd enough; all the more so since the "General Washington" in question is Irving's own namesake, in a story that dwells extensively on the succession of namesakes. Emphasizing the continuities of reproduction in immemorial time, he is led to cast the historical ruptures of modernity only as disruptions. In the process Washington, who for Irving himself represents the historicity of the namesake, becomes only another old George.

More than any other American writer except Henry Adams, Washington Irving was fascinated with history, and especially with political history. From *The History of New York* at the beginning of his career to the *Life of Washington* at its very end, historical writing dominates his output. Even his most belletristic works lean heavily on the vogue for historical fiction. And no other American writer after Franklin and Jefferson was as caught up in political history as Irving was. As a young man he covered the Burr trial. In later years he served in the embassy at London and as Minister to Spain. He advised Jackson, Van Buren, Tyler, and Polk—not to mention local politicians in New York such as Philip Hone.

Yet the dominant impulse in his writing—even the historical writing—is to write the past as a continuous immersion in which generational transmission will be not so much achieved as accomplished in advance. Rupture avails nothing. Irving writes history as though his aim were to have historical consciousness without inhabiting time. His tone doubtless owes much to the judicious distance of genteel historiography, and to the skeptical irony of such historians as Gibbon. But historical narration in his hands produces the very different result of nostalgic time.

The prefaces to *The Sketch Book* and *Bracebridge Hall* both depict America as a land without history, a nation of pure revolutionary modernity, from which Crayon lurches to Europe as a "grown-up child." "Rip Van Winkle" seems to tell a different story. America here looks if anything too historical. The story refers to at least three cultures and four polities occupying the same ground in rapid and confused succes-

sion: Indians, Dutch colonials, English colonials, and an abrupt national present. What the story longs for is not more history but antiquity, a folk temporality that would sublimate both the violence of political history and the microcoercion of the family form. The problem with America seems to be not the mere extent of time, but the normative character of modernity.

The main body of the story concludes by resolving national history and personal memory into folk temporality. “Rip Van Winkle” silently translates the scene of political history into an antihistorical (rather than ahistorical) image of the folk.⁴⁶ Borrowing the localism of an Indian legend, the story—whose very title contains an English pun in a Dutch name—grounds its antiquity in a German folk tale transplanted to a Dutch village where unmarked people speak English and become Americans. “Rip Van Winkle” produces the narrative being of a folk people, the whiteness of which results from its being drawn, in the different temporality of a common antiquity, from the very European colonial and national lineages that, as politics, had made the New York scene too historical. The personal histories of individual people founder in broken memory, bad records, and generational crisis; yet the popular continuum belongs to a national people that is also a race.

This temporality, as the Bracebridge Hall section of *The Sketch Book* takes pains to make clear, is a reproductive continuum, alien to such progressive forms as capital, politics, and the written record. In the last paragraph of Knickerbocker’s text, Rip’s story reenters folklore: “not a man woman or child in the neighbourhood but knew it by heart.” He is not at ease in any other narrative temporality: we learn that Rip’s story varies in the telling, only gradually settling down to the version we have read, which at this point we might remember to be, as the subtitle tells us, “a posthumous writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker.” Two postscripts follow, as though to mimic Rip’s aversion to closure: one notes in passing the German legend the story resembles, but gives Knickerbocker’s word that the tale is true; the second produces Knickerbocker’s notes of a closely related Indian legend of the Catskills.⁴⁷

The Sketch Book from beginning to end dwells on the poverty of narrative forms by which men might imagine interacting with generations to come. Among social forms, its preference is for the patriarchal estate culture of Bracebridge Hall, with its purely customary temporality, though Irving also contemplates a romanticized memorial heroism of American Indians, chased by history to racial extermination. But the principal model of cultural transmission in the book is literary culture itself, and it is for this reason that the resolution of “Rip Van Winkle” by a nonarchival folk narration, undermining even the possibility of textual

closure, seems to be the sign of contradiction for a writer otherwise so closely identified with archival national historiography.⁴⁸

The closest intertext with “Rip Van Winkle” is the central episode in “The Mutability of Literature,” in which Geoffrey Crayon visits a rare book room at the British Museum. An ancient quarto suddenly comes to life, yawns, shakes off its sleep, and begins to speak in its antiquated idiom, holding just the kind of disoriented conversation with Crayon that Rip has with the villagers. “The Mutability of Literature” is also one of the sketches that is most skeptical about the claims of culture to perpetuity. Crayon begins the piece by describing the library room as a “literary catacomb, where authors, like mummies, are piously entombed.” Soon, he says, all these books will be “lost, even to remembrance. Such is the amount of this boasted immortality—A mere temporary rumour, a local sound . . .” (S, 855).

In another piece, “The Art of Book Making,” Irving takes up the same issue, as he will again in “Westminster Abbey” and “London Antiquities”:

Let us not then lament over the decay and oblivion into which ancient writers descend; they do but submit to the great law of nature, which declares that all sublunary shapes of matter shall be limited in their duration, but which decrees also that their elements shall never perish. Generation after generation, both in animal and vegetable life, passes away, but the vital principle is transmitted to posterity, and the species continues to flourish. Thus also do authors beget authors, and having produced a numerous progeny, in a good old age they sleep with their fathers; that is to say, with the authors who preceded them—and from whom they had stolen. (S, 811)

Literary culture allows a species being, apparently male and parthenogenetic. It would be very easy to be misled by the metaphors here. Authors’ begetting can be metaphorized as species reproduction in part because it represents a realm of culture-building that, outside of metaphor, is fairly independent from the family form and reproductive sexuality. Literary reproduction is, for Irving, the ultimate form of surrogacy: a mode of cultural reproduction in which bachelors are, at last, fully at home. The reproductive metaphor still functions for a rival form because there is no rival metanarrative. The cultural archive has to be thought of as surrogate reproduction. In “The Mutability of Literature” it finds its most extreme form, in a Malthusian fantasy about the invention of print and unchecked population growth: “Unless some unforeseen mortality should break out among the progeny of the muse, now that she has become so prolific, I tremble for posterity” (S, 852). This genetic fantasy about print is another intertext with “Rip,” and in

fact the subject of a joke buried in the title: the American publisher of *The Sketch Book* was Cornelius Van Winkle.⁴⁹

There are many such self-references in Irving, and most of them exhibit the same yearning to merge with the folk temporality of his tales rather than with that of the modern author. Sunnyside itself is an example. Irving first conceived the attempt to buy the cottage at a time when it was hopelessly small for his needs; it seems to have attracted him because the Van Tassels still lived there, at a time when Irving was beginning to imagine that he had immortalized *Sleepy Hollow* and the Van Tassels in the mode of national legend. He had been told, on a tour of Kaaterskill Falls earlier that same summer, that he was witnessing the authentic haunts of Rip Van Winkle.⁵⁰ Not long before, while receiving an honorary degree from Oxford in 1830, he had been met by cheers of “Rip van Winkle!” from the undergraduates. It made him feel, he said, as old as his graybeard from the Catskills.⁵¹ So it was not quite with obliviousness that he repeatedly put himself, for the remainder of his career, in situations that could seem to echo those of his fiction.

The most striking example is the “Author’s Introduction” to the 1835 American edition of *A Tour on the Prairies*.

I would fancy myself arrived in my native city, but the place would be so changed that I would not recognise it. I would wander through strange streets, meet with strange faces, and find every thing strange around me: or, what was worse, I would meet with those I loved, with my kindred, and the companions of my youth, but they no longer knew me, or passed me by with neglect. . . . [H]ow was the wanderer to be received, after such an absence? Was he to be taken, as a favoured child, to its bosom; or repulsed as a stranger, and a changeling?

My old doubts recurred as I stepped upon land. I could scarcely realize that I was indeed in my native city, among the haunts of my childhood. Might not this be another of those dreams that had so often beguiled me? There were circumstances enough to warrant such a surmise. I passed through places that ought to be familiar to me, but all were changed. Huge edifices and lofty piles had sprung up in the place of lowly tenements; the old landmarks of the city were gone; the very streets were altered.

As I passed on, I looked wistfully in every face: not one was known to me—not one! Yet I was in haunts where every visage was once familiar to me. I read the names over the doors: all were new. They were unassociated with any early recollection. The saddening conviction stole over my heart that I was a stranger in my own home! Alas! thought I, what had I to expect after such an absence!⁵²

Like Geoffrey Crayon at the beginning of *The Sketch Book*, Irving in this scene is a grown-up child. Like Rip after his sleep in the mountains,

he is an infantile old man. He is rescued from his crisis not by a daughter and grandson, as is Rip, but by a different kind of posterity: his literary fame. “Never did wanderer, after such an absence, experience such a greeting. . . . I look round with delightful exultation upon my native land, and feel that, after all my ramblings about the world, I can be happiest at home.”⁵³ As in the homecoming scene in the letter with which I began, Irving has achieved through surrogate means the status of the patriarch, at home in a “native land.”

Both from the standpoint of the family’s moral vision for adults and from the standpoint of what Marx called “the poetics of the future,” Irving can only imagine life outside of the intense patriarchalism of Bracebridge Hall by imagining the development of intimate cultures outside the family, mediations that he is nevertheless tempted to depict as surrogacies. Irving’s writings show how reproductive narrative exerts itself, often successfully, against a lot of half-articulate discontent. But it also shows that some half-articulate discontent has been audible for a long time. The conditions that have put the culture of reproduction on the defensive have a long history, as does reproductive ideology itself. In our own day, with more and more forms of surrogacy challenging the forms of reproductive ideology—from public schooling, to the social movement form, to lesbian parenting, to queer culture—the strenuous attack in the name of family values has targeted an extrafamilial intimate culture that we are still learning how to have. Perhaps we will learn to think of it as something other than surrogacy, to see in these conditions a future in which reproductive narrative will appear as an archaism.

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NOTES

This essay has benefited from the comments of many friends and colleagues. I cannot thank them all by name. But it gives me special satisfaction to pay tribute here to Larzer Ziff, from whom I have learned so much—as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a writer.

¹ Washington Irving, “Bachelors,” in *Bracebridge Hall, Tales of a Traveller, The Alhambra* (1822; New York: Library of America, 1991), 51. *Bracebridge Hall* is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated *B*.

² Quoted in *Washington Irving: Representative Selections*, ed. Henry A. Pochmann (New York: American Book Company, 1934), xv. For a different interpretation of the theme of bachelorhood, see Jenifer S. Banks, “Washington Irving, the Nineteenth-Century Bachelor,” in *Critical Essays on Washington Irving*, ed. Ralph Aderman (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990), 235-60. On biographical information the indispensable source is Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935).

³ Irving to James Kirke Paulding, 27 May 1820, in Irving, *Letters*, ed. Aderman, Herbert L. Kleinfield, and S. Banks, 4 vols. (Boston: Twayne, 1978-82), 1:585.

⁴ Irving to Sarah Storrow, 12 December 1842, in *Letters*, 3:437.

⁵ Irving to Sarah Storrow, in *Letters*, 3:437.

⁶ The history and context of bachelor culture is explored in Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), though Chudacoff focuses on a later period. A fuller discussion of the antebellum literary preoccupation with bachelorhood can be found in Vincent J. Bertolini, "Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s," *American Literature* 68.4 (1996): 707-37. Because he, too, focuses on a later period, Bertolini does not discuss Irving. The phenomenon of early national bachelor culture seems to be broader in scope than any critical treatment to date, though I have benefited from unpublished papers by Christopher Looby on Samuel Lorenzo Knapp and on Donald Mitchell. Bertolini and Looby, following Eve Sedgwick (in *Epistemology of the Closet* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990], 188-212), both suggest that the figure and role of the bachelor was a predecessor to the figure and role of the homosexual. I do not disagree with this contention, but it is not my argument here. Because my concern is with the bachelor's relation to reproductive time as it discloses stresses in heteronormative ideology, it is important to note that this problem is independent of the association of bachelors with homosociality, or the emergence of a stereotype of the bachelor that could presage the personal deviance of the invert. Bachelorhood is a category that only makes sense against a narrative background of life expectations, and it is this background, rather than categorical stigma, that seems most compelling in the case of Irving, though of course the two are linked. See also Philip Lopate, *Bachelorhood: Tales of the Metropolis* (New York: Poseidon, 1989).

⁷ Irving, *The Sketch Book* (1819-20), in *History, Tales, and Sketches* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 735. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated S.

⁸ A very interesting point of comparison for this argument is James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), especially 441-82.

⁹ Irving to Mrs. John Pendleton Kennedy, 11 March 1853, in *Letters*, 4:381-83.

¹⁰ See for example, Irving to Sarah Paris, 10 December 1836, in *Letters*, 2:881-83, and to Mrs. John P. Kennedy, 8 February 1855, in *Letters*, 4:525-27.

¹¹ Quoted in Williams, 2:206.

¹² William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (London, 1825), 421.

¹³ This dimension of national narrative is best introduced by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), especially 22-36, and the chapter "Memory and Forgetting," 187-206.

¹⁴ See, for example, Charles Lamb, "A Bachelor's Complaint of Married People," in *Elia* (London, 1823); or James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans; Picked up by a Traveling Bachelor* (New York, 1828). Bachelor and spinster are different in part because bachelors remain eligible and sexualized, even when "confirmed bachelors," while spinsterhood can never be a merely transitional status; but more importantly gender always introduces an asymmetrical relation to reproduction, as Nancy Chodorow demonstrates so powerfully in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).

¹⁵ Although the problem of time in modern sexuality remains little understood, a very large literature on the social context might be cited here. Useful introductions include Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Stephanie Coontz, *The*

Social Origins of Private Life (London: Verso, 1988); Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982); and Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989).

¹⁶ See Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989); Thomas Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992); and Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture, 1630-1860* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

¹⁷ See Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

¹⁸ The best critical analysis of this ideological investment in children is Lauren Berlant, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship," in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 6 September 1789, in Jefferson, *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 959-64; the letter is discussed at length in Herbert E. Sloan, *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995).

²⁰ Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 54.2 (1997): 307-46.

²¹ James Madison to Jefferson, 4 February 1790.

²² Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816.

²³ See for example Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 110-13. The most significant exception is Daniel Scott Smith, "Population and Political Ethics: Thomas Jefferson's Demography of Generations," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 56.3 (1999): 591-612.

²⁴ Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, in *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 2 vols. (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 1:251.

²⁵ See Karl Mannheim's classic essay, "The Problem of Generations," in *From Karl Mannheim*, ed. Kurt Wolff (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971); and Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁶ Paine, 1:251.

²⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, rev. Francis Bowen and Phillips Bradley, 2 vols. (1948; rpt. New York: Vintage, n.d.), 1:52. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page numbers and abbreviated *D*. The original of the passage reads: "Ce qu'on appelle l'esprit de famille est souvent fondé sur une illusion de l'égoïsme individuel. On cherche à se perpétuer et à s'immortaliser en quelque sorte dans ses arrière-neveux. Là où finit l'esprit de famille, l'égoïsme individuel rentre dans la réalité de ses penchants. Comme la famille ne se présente plus à l'esprit que comme une chose vague, indéterminée, incertaine, chacun se concentre dans la commodité du présent; on songe à l'établissement de la génération qui va suivre, et rien de plus.

"On ne cherche donc pas à perpétuer sa famille, ou du moins on cherche à la perpétuer par d'autres moyens que par la propriété foncière" (*La Démocratie en Amérique*, in *Œuvres*, 2 vols. [Paris: Gallimard (Pleiade), 1992], 1:54).

²⁸ "Chez les peuples aristocratiques, les familles restent pendant des siècles dans le même état, et souvent dans le même lieu. Cela rend, pour ainsi dire, toutes le

générations contemporaines. Un homme connaît presque toujours ses aïeux et les respecte; il croit déjà apercevoir ses arrière-petits-fils, et il les aime. Il se fait volontier . . .

Chez les peuples démocratiques, de nouvelles familles sortent sans cesse du néant, d'autres y retombent sans cesse, et toutes celles qui demeurent changent de face; la trame des temps se rompt à tout moment, et le vestige des générations s'efface. On oublie aisément ceux qui vous ont précédé, et l'on n'a aucune idée de ceux qui vous suivront. Les plus proches seuls intéressent. . . .

Ainsi, non seulement la démocratie fait oublier à chaque homme ses aïeux, mais elle lui cache ses descendants et le sépare de ses contemporains; elle le ramène sans cesse vers lui seul et menace de le renfermer enfin tout entier dans la solitude de son propre cœur" (*La Démocratie en Amérique*, 614).

²⁹ Unfortunately space does not permit a discussion of the importance of the theme of ghosts and hauntings in Irving, a topic to which he would return for the rest of his life, becoming increasingly interested in literal versions of spiritualism in later years.

³⁰ Williams, 1:294. Irving once declined the secretaryship of the navy because it would "hurry me prematurely into old age" (Williams, 2:68).

³¹ Irving to Henry Brevoort, 10 October 1817, in *Letters* 1:508-9.

³² Irving, "Notes while preparing Sketch Book," in *Journals and Notebooks: Volume 1: 1807-1822*, ed. Walter A. Reichart and Lillian Schlissel (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 153.

³³ Irving, "Notes while preparing Sketch Book," 153.

³⁴ Irving to James Kirke Paulding, 27 May 1820, in *Letters* 1:585.

³⁵ While at Sunnyside, he maintained a large and expensive estate with the earnings from his writings, yet remained unmarried. He once wrote that "A pretty country retreat is like a pretty wife—one is always throwing away money in decorating it" (Irving to Mrs. John P. Kennedy, 11 November 1853, in *Letters*, 4:452). On Irving's life at Sunnyside, see Harold Dean Cater, *Washington Irving and Sunnyside* (Tarrytown: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1957).

³⁶ Pochmann, xxiv. See also Williams, vol. 1, chap. 4. The legend was well established in Irving's lifetime, and we find Edward Everett summarizing it in his obituary for Irving: "Irving, who would as soon have married Hecate as a woman like the Countess of Warwick [Addison's wife], buried a blighted hope, never to be rekindled, in the grave of a youthful sorrow" ("The Death of Washington Irving," in *The Pulpit and Rostrum* 10 [New York, 1860]: 237).

³⁷ Irving, *Salmagundi*; quoted in Kendall B. Taft, *Minor Knickerbockers* (New York: American Book Co., 1947), xc.

³⁸ Irving to Ebenezer Irving, 3 March 1819, in *Letters*, 1:540. The letter continues: "I have been for some time past nursing my mind up for literary operations, and collecting materials for the purpose. I shall be able, I trust, now to produce articles from time to time that will be sufficient for my present support, and form a stock of copyright property, that may be a little capital for me hereafter. . . . I feel myself completely committed in literary reputation by what I have already written; and I feel by no means satisfied to rest my reputation on my preceding writings. I have suffered several precious years of youth and lively imagination to pass by unimproved, and it behooves me to make the most of what is left. If I indeed have the means within me of establishing a legitimate literary reputation, this is the very period of life most auspicious for it, and I am resolved to devote a few years exclusively to the attempt. Should I succeed, besides the literary property I shall amass in copyright, I trust it will not be difficult to obtain some official situation of a moderate, unpretending kind, in which I may make my bread. But as to reputation I can only look for it through the exertions of my pen."

³⁹ On Irving's industrious cultivation of literary capital, see Ben McClary, *Washington Irving and the House of Murray* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1969).

⁴⁰ Quoted in Williams, 1:66.

⁴¹ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), xx-xxi.

⁴² Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), 13.

⁴³ Williams, 1:3.

⁴⁴ See Pochmann, "Irving's German Sources in The Sketch Book," *Studies in Philology* 27 (1930): 489-94. Less well known is the possibility that Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* might also be a source for Irving: the main character awakens from a sesquimillennial sleep into the postrevolutionary utopia of the future—the first time, according to Robert Darnton, that futurity had been so imagined. See Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995), 115-36.

⁴⁵ Williams, 1:10.

⁴⁶ The distinction is crucial. Irving does not seek to escape history into timeless truth or objectivity. He does not depict a static or classicized world. The temporality of "Rip van Winkle" is full of markers of historical time: chronicled persons such as Henry Hudson; period fashions such as those of Hudson's men; a ceaseless flow of change, decay, and survival. But these markers of historicity do not move in progressive secular time. Remnants of the past surface as uncanny interruptions, decay happens at uneven rates, and whole eras seem embalmed in parallel temporalities. In "Rip van Winkle," Irving invents what I like to think of as pirate time, later perfected by Stevenson and Barrie: pirates in their fictional modality are permanently Jacobean, hoarding doubloons that never seem to circulate, in a temporality so alien to history that it eventually had to be declared a separate place: Never-Never Land.

⁴⁷ Because of the nesting of prefatory notes and postscripts with different personae, the tale has in fact two beginnings, three endings, and at least three authors (Knickerbocker, Crayon, Irving, and arguably Van Winkle himself, since we are told that the version given in the text is the one he settled down to). This blurring of narrative entextualization takes on resonance because of the story's own yearning for folk temporality, but could also be read against the static generic conception of the "sketch."

⁴⁸ Irving's relation to historiography is another rich subject that will have to be deferred by this essay. It is the subject of extensive and fascinating meditation in *The History of New York*, and continued to preoccupy Irving to his last hours, as he grew more and more to think of his career in relation to the rising generation of Bancroft, Prescott, and Parkman.

⁴⁹ Oddly, critics have consistently ignored the significance of the printer's name. According to Carey S. Bliss, family legend had it that Cornelius Van Winkle broke relations with Irving, angered at having been made the namesake of Irving's clown (introduction to Cornelius Van Winkle, *The Printers Guide* [1828; rpt. New York: Garland Press, 1981], z-xi). Information seems to be limited about Van Winkle, but what I have learned demonstrates that this family legend must be false. Van Winkle sought Irving's business; remained Irving's major American publisher through the 1820s, until Irving began working more with Carey and Lea in Philadelphia; and actively defended and promoted Irving in the pages of *St. Tammany's Magazine*, the journal he published under the editorship of Robert C. Sands and with the involvement of Irving's New York circle. For more on Van Winkle see William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America*,

1790-1850 (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1993); and Michael Warner with Sonia Di Loreto, Luis Iglesias, Jeffrey Scraba, and Sandra Young, "A Soliloquy 'Lately Spoken at the African Theatre': Race and the Public Sphere in New York City, 1821," in *American Literature* (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ See Cater, 5, 8.

⁵¹ Williams, 2:143.

⁵² Irving, "Author's Introduction" to *A Tour on the Prairies*, vol. 1 of *The Crayon Miscellanies* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1835), x-xii. This preface, it should be noted, was omitted from the English edition.

⁵³ Irving, "Author's Introduction," xii-xiii.