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Fairy Child
Mike’s Place
Knowledge and a Vital Piety
ABOUT THE COVER: “So what if they’re not the Cedars of Lebanon?” Oil painting by Rick Luth.
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For years, this was the season when I would play in the snow with my brother. Just last January, my brother and I made a snowman that stood seven feet tall, and our young golden retriever, Raleigh, was so scared of it that he didn’t dare go near it alone. Years ago, I would play outside until my fingers were numb, because I didn’t want to go inside to warm up. When I did go inside to warm fingers that could hardly bend, along with the warmth came pain. It’s the pain I remember most acutely; pain came even before movement.

Freezing my fingers was typical and not just a one-time occurrence. Now, of course, I regret it: one result of this practice can be Raynaud’s disease, an affliction in which the blood vessels have spasms in cold weather and collapse. My already sallow fingers turn yellow, cold, and numb, and I must force blood through the vessels until the skin turns bluish and then returns to its natural sallow tone. About four percent of the population has Raynaud’s disease.

I probably would not have frozen my fingers, had I not believed it necessary to keep up with my brother. I often wish that, while trudging after him, I had simply turned around and gone home.

A year ago, during a night of pneumonia-induced fever, I dreamed of the atomic composition of the universe. I am not a chemistry major, dedicated to orthodox atomic theory, so I do not hesitate to propose that matter is not made up of atoms of various elements. No. The universal atomic structure can be explained better by the fanciful Greek notion of atoms, which holds that matter receives its properties from the shape of its atoms. According to the Greeks, objects that bounce consist of spring-shaped atoms and flat objects consist of flat atoms. Absent from the Greeks’ simple theory is modern science’s ambiguity, exemplified in molecules of carbon and oxygen. Depending on how many atoms of oxygen are bonded with one carbon atom, a carbon-oxygen molecule can make up what is, for air-breathing organisms, either an innocuous exhalation or a toxic inhalation.

Although the Greeks could not peer as deeply into the composition of matter as we moderns can, perhaps our all-knowing eyes are blind to the mystery—and mysticism—of our mundane world. The spirit of their theory, if not its essence, should not be dismissed entirely by modern minds, or we will miss an opportunity to live in a spiritually charged cosmos. We need to infuse our observations with passion.

Sometimes a high temperature is necessary if a person is to see the world lucidly. In my fever-induced dream, matter consisted of nothing but a sole white thread, coiled and entwined in a serpentine manner. At first the thread appeared to be tangled and knotted, but as I studied it more closely, I could see that it followed a definite pattern. Rather than a tangled mess, it was an intricate web. When its intricacy was revealed, I knew by the knowledge one possesses only in dreams that the pattern was not mundane or man-made, but divinely knit.

The pattern was divinely ordained, this much was clear. But alas, here the dream turned bathetically tragic; the white thread seemed to bloat into spaghetti, which in turn hardened and cracked into minute pieces. The atomic composition of the universe, in short, changed from a divine white thread into elbow macaroni. Although material matter did not crumble into dust after the transformation, the unity of creation was gone. The macaroni, or “atoms,” as we should now call them, shifted slightly and lost their interconnectedness, so that if water were circulated through the macaroni, as through a curly tube, the water would spill through the leaks.

Not only was the material world addled. Also composed of the shattered thread were the breaths exhaled from living beings and the very spirit breathed into them. Amidst all this
discord and brokenness, however, was the certainty—the assuredness—that one divine act would unite the fragmented atoms and return coherence to the white thread. As the dreamer of the dream I knew this, because for a moment I saw a glimpse of the fabric, made up of the white thread, as it would appear when unity was restored; but then all was broken again.

The dream might be the most absurd illustration of the Fall and Recreation in print, but still it haunts me. Maybe the description, not the dream, is absurd. Using pasta imagery to describe the sacred thread now shattered is rather profane, perhaps, but the dream itself was not about spaghetti and macaroni. The dream was about our shattered world.

In his sermon “The Tiger,” Frederick Buechner uses a Hindu parable—about a tiger who believes himself to be a goat—to illustrate how we, as fallen men and fallen women, are not what we were created to be. Even though we think ourselves to be goats, we still are haunted by our true selves; we all of us have the memory of once having been capable of being tigers. “We bleat well enough, but deep down there is the suspicion that we were really made for roaring.”

It is with some wistfulness that I recall the dream, because in describing it I have lost its urgent passion. In evoking pasta imagery, I have profaned what was for me the dream’s sacred intent. In proposing an atomic theory of macaroni, I have exposed its absurdity, bonding it to the bouncing atom theory of the Greeks.

Even as I regret losing proper circulation in my fingers, I regret losing the continuous white thread for shattered brittle remnants. I am haunted by the glimpse of the restored fabric. For one shimmering moment, if only in a dream, I saw the unity and perfection modern science searches for, infused with the mystery which the Greeks knew was there.

—HG
Love is Fire

Love is fire
Love is whirlwind.
Sartre says ... 
Shakespeare says ... 
Freud says ... 
But no one really can say.

And all the divorced fathers 
and all the divorced mothers 
take their share of the kids 
to McDonald’s for Sunday breakfast.

Substitution of normality. 
Got no home life 
so gimme a Big Mac 
and throw a whopper my way.

Boy meets girl 
girl meets boy. 
Old boyfriend shows up. 
Boy looks up and says, “oh well.”

No love in a new life style. 
Modern times, 
old problems. 
Philosophers tell us what’s happening. 
What happened.

John Bood
Knowledge and a Vital Piety

by Dale J Cooper

"O to unite the two so long disjoined—
knowledge and a vital piety."

Charles Wesley

The essential requirement of any writing, as rhetoricians remind us, is to speak from the heart. In this essay I wish to record some of my reflections on Calvin College, a place which has been a great gift of God to me and has been shaping me for the last thirty years. I present these thoughts candidly, but humbly, too, and in an openness to further dialogue. For I am eager to continue the discussion about who we as a Calvin community really are and where we are to proceed from here.

This year is a propitious time to examine our life together. It is, as you must have noticed by now, a year set aside to celebrate the completion of the move to the Knollcrest campus. The Master Plan for the physical development of the campus has been realized, and we can now devote our full energies to pursuing the goal of what we claim to be—a Reformed Christian college. What is more, after the winds of success were at our backs for so many years, I suspect we shall be heading into more difficult winds. But when the going gets tougher and the road ahead seems less clear, our spiritual ears can more readily and keenly listen to our Lord and His will for our life together.

The motto chosen for this year of celebration is "A Firm Footing, a New Song." The occasion gives good opportunity to look both backward and forward. People need to do that, but so do colleges, for without memory and a tradition in which to stand, as Bruce Birch writes in a recent issue of Weavings, people and institutions tend to fall prey to every whim and fad that comes along. That is the steep price of rootlessness.

But memory is not enough. Without vision a people tends to stagnate and fossilize. It tends to repeat tired ways of doing things. It becomes bored with the common project which ought to unite the community, ignite its wonder and spark its enthusiasm.

My comments, therefore, are directed toward renewal. Colleges, like people, tend to tire. No institution, no matter how excellent, may ever be satisfied with its achievements; it must continually be reminded of its original vision and press on toward articulating afresh its duty for the present and the future. I hope to spur us along as we continue to establish both our memory and our vision. My hope is to remind you what we owe our institutional ancestors and to project what we owe our heirs. My concern is as follows: how do we relate the pursuit of knowledge to the cultivation of piety within an academic setting?

A sense of wonder

A Calvin junior returning from her semester of study abroad was vividly recalling some of her
experiences for me. She had met fellow students from sister Christian colleges whose lives and confessions showed that they were committed disciples of Jesus. To continue the conversation, I asked her whether any students from Reformed Christian colleges were part of the team—colleges such as Trinity, Dordt, Redeemer, Kings, Calvin. Her spontaneous and unaffected reply was, “Oh yes, there was one student from N—College, but he was a Calvinist and so he had never been involved in spiritual things before.”

Let’s concede that this woman’s acquaintance with Reformed students may be limited and, furthermore, that her definition of “spiritual things” may be different from yours or mine. Her definition may even be deficient. The fact remains that she did not immediately associate Calvinists with godliness, with “spiritual things.” That’s immensely sad, precisely because, for a genuine Calvinist who is faithful to the original vision of the Reformer, God and “spiritual things” command nothing less than the center of everything in one’s life.

The young man whom my student described was fairly typical of a certain strain of later Calvinists, however, the type for whom ideal and reality do not always fully agree. Their walk does not fit their talk. Their copious language (about God) does not match their life.

Charles Wesley’s epitaph reads: “O to unite the two so long disjoined—knowledge and a vital piety.” In some respects Wesley’s longing could have been voiced for Calvin College.

When they are at their best, Reformed Christians are faithful to their heritage, of course, and do join their knowledge about God and his world to a deep love for him. They work hard at forging daily a tough bond between their love for learning and their longing for God, for these Christians are awestruck by God’s goodness at having created them in the first place. They thrill to the excitement of being human, the rapture of being alive. Life to them is a sheer and undeserved gift, and they daily praise God for that gift. Add to that—again sheerly without their deserving it—that they know by faith that this God has saved them. Hence, because of the experience of these two realities within their lives, the twin gifts of creation and salvation, it is impossible for these Calvinists, as one of their guiding confessions of faith puts it so aptly, “not to produce fruits of gratitude.”

This knowledge of their good and gracious God is cerebral, to be sure. But it is so much more. It elicits and the rest, for to him they owe their very lives. They are aware of it. And accordingly, they live before his face with a sense of extravagant wonder.

Several years before his death in 1972, Rabbi Abraham Heschel suffered a near fatal heart attack, a malady from which he never fully recovered. He did, however, regain consciousness for a time. Weak and pale, he spoke haltingly to his friend, Samuel Dresner:

Sam, when I regained consciousness, my first feelings were not of despair or anger. I felt only gratitude to God for my life, for every moment I had lived. I was ready to depart. “Take me, O Lord,” I thought, “for I have seen so many miracles in my lifetime... I did not ask for success; I asked for wonder. And you gave it to me.” (I asked for Wonder, preface)

The words could have come from the lips of a committed Calvinist. Calvinists, too, have a deep, mystical sense of wonder about God and his magnificent gift of life. John Calvin himself calls piety that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him. (Institutes, I.2.1)

Christians in the Calvinist tradition are anything but dull and boring people precisely because their

How do we relate the pursuit of knowledge to the cultivation of piety within an academic setting?

God is vibrant and dramatic. They engage this world wide-eyed and full of wonder. They’re eager to check on this, to explore that, to uncover, to inquire, to probe. And they discover that wherever they turn, the whole creation is already singing its—and their—Maker’s praise. The whole creation has already set the meter; they now are eager to join the full-throated chorus of praise and adoration.

It is for these reasons that Calvinists are quick to check with the Psalmist: “May, O Lord, my God


are the wonders you have done. The things you have planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare” (Psalm 40:5). They chant this not only when life is going smoothly and well and when singing the doxology comes naturally and easily, but also when caught red-handed in sin. After moments of rebellion and wrongdoing, they plead honestly for forgiveness and discover that God is willing to give them a fresh start. Then, too, they exclaim with jubilant voices and hearts set free: “But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared!” (Psalm 130:4). His very goodness in forgiving evokes their reverent awe.

Even in moments of longing, when life really hurts and the road ahead seems so forbiddingly uncertain, Calvinist Christians faithful to their heritage cry out with the Psalmist in genuine passion: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (Psalm 13:1). They plead for help: “Give ear to my words, O God; consider my sighing!” (Psalm 5:1). Their questions and pleas are stark and honest, as candid as their circumstances are painful. But they are not lost in those circumstances, for they call out: “But I trust in your unfailing love; my spirit rejoices in your salvation” (Psalm 13:5).

Amid all the varied and discordant circumstances of their lives, therefore—the exhilarating and the excruciating, the fearful and the accepting, the tear-filled and the smile-filled, the celebrations of life as well as the ceremonies of death—Calvinists have learned what joy is all about. By tradition and temperament they may tend to restrain the affective side of their personality. But they know joy for what it really is: the acceptance of life as a gift from their Creator-Redeemer in the constantly increasing awareness of how inestimably valuable it really is. In their heart of hearts they know they belong to God and not to themselves. This knowledge brings them deep comfort. And profound joy.

**Overemphasis on intellect, underemphasis on passion**

In my more depressing moments I fear that we at Calvin may have unduly suppressed our ancestors’ deep spiritual passion. We today talk much about God, but at times with less than that charged excitement and wonder appropriate to our reflection on God and his works. Judging by our inflection, the Good News about our Creator-Redeemer seems to be neither “news” any more nor, for that matter, is it all that radically “good.” We do so much of our study about God in the cool and distant third-person singular and less in the second-person singular of doxology. We call God “He” and make him into a distant object fit for our cool analysis and reflection, when in fact we should be addressing him as “You” and seeing him for who he really is—our Covenantal Partner with whom we’re in a daily adventuresome romance. We talk less in intimacy with him than we do in objectivity about him.

As for his universe, well, there too our speech often betrays us. Too little do we consider it that “dazzling theater,” as Calvin says, in which God is ever and again displaying his splendor. Too seldom do we explore his world coram Deo, that is, squarely before our Lord’s face and in his presence. Instead it has all too often become an object for dispassionate analysis, for cool scrutiny, for objective study.

For years, which by now have stretched into decades, our tradition has been long on intellect, short on passion. We have majored in loving God with our minds. Now, as secularization with its closed-mindedness to mystery, to wonder, and to God bulldozes slowly but inexorably ahead, there is danger that its heavy tracks will grind under whatever sprouts of passion still exist.

Commenting on Abraham Kuyper and the movement for reform he began in the late nineteenth century, church historian Richard Lovelace writes:

> While Kuyper himself incorporated a powerful experiential core in his theological outlook, the later Amsterdam School has sometimes been hampered by an incipient aversion to Christian experience, the effect of the reaction in Dutch Christianity against the excesses of Dutch Puritanism. This may explain why the movement has so far failed to have the impact and the growth associated with intellectual leaders in the awakening tradition such as Comenius, Francke, Edwards, and Dwight. But where something approaching this emphasis has been reinforced with dynamics of renewal such as prayer and community... a remarkable moving of the Holy Spirit has been visible. It is not hard to imagine what a powerful intellectual force would be released in Western culture if the Reformed orthodox community and other confessional parties among the churches would recover the
dynamics of renewal which characterized the earlier awakenings.

Longingly he comments further:

Such a recovery [of intellect strongly wedded to passion and feeling] would also renew the church in its internal theological integration and thus unite its divided sectors and parties in the mind of Christ. . . . (Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, 181-2; my italics, DJC)

The vital spiritual nourishing of our vision and pursuit

If the Calvin community wishes to become more effectively something of that “city set on a hill,” as Jesus said; if it wishes more vigorously to set about that task of which it so often speaks, namely, the monumental task of transforming culture, then we as members of that college shall have to understand that the nature of this task is essentially spiritual and not only intellectual. If we hope to be able to discharge our demanding task as a Reformed Christian college, it is imperative that we nourish our spiritual life. For it is central to discharging our mission.

When I speak of nourishing the spiritual life, I mean not so much the saving of souls but the shaping of minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. For, as distinguished scholar Charles Malik says,

If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover you have not won the world. . . . No Christian conversion is ever complete until a Christian mind is formed within. . . . [For] to bring our every thought into captivity to Christ, to think Christianly. . . . is at the very heart of what it means to be Christian.

Our human tendency is to rest content with an intellectual mastery of the doctrinal truths about the Christian faith, and thereby to turn Christianity into an intellectual set of beliefs. Alternatively, we may succumb to an unballasted, sentimental relationship to Jesus Christ. Neither approach will equip us well for our task, for Christianity is a life which requires the dedication of all our resources.

But the conversion of which Malik speaks requires cultivation. Cultivation is a process, not an event. And it is a process that requires discipline. For God’s grace, though free, is a disciplined grace.

What we need and what I am challenging each of subduing of our inner selves in obedience to Jesus Christ. Pietists of another age called it cultura animi, the training of the soul.

Of course, as the late German theologian Helmut Thielecke points out, such a phrase can express a sick spiritual arrogance. Conceding that danger, however, is not the other danger equally real that our faith, a gift once freely given in Jesus Christ, be lost again through our neglecting to cultivate it? This loss of faith, then, happens not so much because of an obvious and conscious choice; rather, faith gets relegated to an “obscure cranny of our minds,” as Thielecke puts it. A malaise sets in. The heart becomes spiritually atrophied.

The difficulties I have described are not to be construed as a warning cry for us to undertake all kinds of ascetic disciplines. But let me suggest a careful and patterned reading of Ephesians 5:15-21 for each of us who is a member of the Calvin community. Practicing these commands would be good training for our souls this year. I shall highlight only two of Paul’s several encouragements.

First of all, Paul commands “giving thanks” as good training for our souls. Saying thanks is to be a daily discipline and routine, not a once-in-awhile, occasional response. To give thanks is good for a person, because he or she who practices gratitude is seeing life for what it really is—a gift. As Cicero put it, “The thankful heart is the parent of all other virtues.”

When one says thanks, he says it to someone and for something. Thankgivers, Thielecke writes in Faith the Great Adventure, don’t get bogged down in the temporal and the everyday but are able to rise above today. “[Such] a one [too] fixes his or her mind on life’s goal and what it is the Lord wants with us.”

For years our tradition has been long on intellect, short on passion.
We have majored in loving God with our minds.

To say thanks daily to God for the wonderful gift of being fully human and fully alive—to practice the discipline of construing life as a gift and thanking the Giver for it—is a crucial spiritual discipline.

And while we’re at it, let’s not fail to say thanks as well to one another. As a rule, Calvinists historically have not been altogether generous in giving compliments and thanks. Why, they reckon, should one be thanked for doing what is, after all, his duty?
which, by virtue of its academic nature, is in many respects clawing and competitive. In such an atmosphere it is neither natural nor easy to delight in another’s successes and celebrate her accomplishments. When I fail where my colleague succeeds; when she scores higher than I; when she gets the promotion, the accolade, the honor, the position, but I do not; when one of my colleagues publishes a book; when she gets the job for which I too applied—then it’s not easy to be generous and glad. Martin Marty, professor at the University of Chicago, once admitted to breathing too much the choking air of academic rivalry and envy. He confessed, “When my best colleague succeeds and I don’t, I die a little death.”

Encouraging another and honestly saying thanks to one another are powerful antidotes against the
demon of envy which attacks us all and murders so much of our joy. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a picture of silver,” the writer of Proverbs reminds us. Saying genuine thanks to another and giving her or him a deserved compliment would go a long way to making us “kinder and gentler” Christians. And a kinder, more gentle community.

Paul calls, too, for “addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” In other words, he is telling us to open our mouths and say to one another—and before the Lord’s face—what the Lord has done and is presently doing in our lives. Never let anything—fear or embarrassment or self-consciousness or any other insufficient excuse—prevent you, he says, from testifying and being an authentic witness to your Lord.

In this connection, I challenge older members of this academic community to be models of disciplined spiritual training for the students and younger faculty. Faculty, administrators, and staff: the wisdom of the ages has taught us that modelling is one of the most effective teaching tools. Whether we choose to be in this position or not, our pupils look to us as models as they chart the course of their own life of faith. We have learned, too, that nothing commends the Gospel more powerfully to the next generation than well-lived lives of a previous generation to match their “talk” about their life of faith are most certain to give the Lord Jesus a bad name among the young.

We at Calvin shall never achieve our academic mission unless the hearts of students are fully dedicated to God and his coming kingdom in Jesus Christ. Students’ hearts need continual converting; their allegiance to Jesus must be firm if we are to achieve our mission. How imperative, then, that faculty, administrators, and staff give their every ounce of energy to being good models of faithful discipleship to our Lord.

Some students—let us hope most—have surrendered their lives to Jesus by the time they arrive at Calvin. But clearly some have not. These latter students are examining life’s loyalties and are still in the process of determining their ultimate allegiances. But at whatever point one has arrived on his or her spiritual journey, every student deserves to see senior members of this community in vital and growing relationship with Jesus. As leaders their daily work must be enveloped by prayer, and their lives must be in harmony with Jesus’s promises and commands. People who teach do so by their lives as well as by their lectures.

Most of us faculty know well and take seriously our responsibility to spend time with our students, to talk with them, to have fellowship with them. But fellowship, Biblically understood, is more than an occasional intramural game or two with our students; it is more than an office chat, more than the sharing of lunch to chat about the events of the week, the news in sports, in college, and in the church.

Biblical fellowship lies deeper. It means to pray with one another, to speak God’s promises and commands from Scripture to one another, and to say how God has been working and leading in one another’s lives.

“And now, my sisters and brothers...”

When I dream of a closer marriage of knowledge to piety at Calvin, I see people of every sort—students, staff, administrators, and faculty—giving their best wherever they are toward making their faith and their lives, their confession and their action, harmonize as closely as possible.

Above the door to the old Calvin chapel on Franklin Street was this confession: “In your light shall we see light.” It was a glad and joyous claim, for Jesus is indeed the vital life and light of any Christian academic community which is trying to live up to its
What do I see and hear when I begin to dream of what a Reformed Christian academic community called Calvin can eventually become with our Lord's blessing? In my eager longing I see the contours of a vast and enthusiastic multitude taking shape. It is a multitude of diverse persons who join in chorus to exclaim: "It is in the Lord's light that we do see light!" Captured by wonder, they make this confession both among themselves and to their Lord, for gladly they acknowledge him as the nourishing center of their entire community.

In his intriguing book on the spirituality of education, *To Know as we are Known*, Parker Palmer from the University of California observes:

... The original and authentic meaning of the word "professor" is "one who professes a faith." The true professor is not one who controls facts and theories and techniques. The true professor is one who affirms a transcendent center of truth, a center that lies beyond our contriving, that enters history through the lives of those who profess it and brings us into community with each other and the world. If professors are to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced, we must become "professors" again. To do so, we must cultivate personal experience of that which we need to profess.

Each one of us in this academic community faces the challenge to be a professor, to tell with excited wonder who God is and what he has done for each of us. Doing this, each of us shall be playing her or his part to fulfill the mission of this college, a mission which is bigger than any one of us and commands the best energies of all of us, namely, the shaping of Christian minds—and of a Christian mind.

Dale J Cooper is Chaplain at Calvin College.
Mike's Place: Four Profiles

by John Worst

Big Bud

Big Bud—Tiny to his friends—,
sits on a lawn mower in summer,
rides a snow-blower in winter,
and fixes things at the apartments up the street.
He wears a buffalo-plaid jacket,
walks like a duck,
and smokes big cigars.
(Puts away a little beer on occasion, too.)

He comes in every morning and sits by the serving window.
Breakfast is usually coffee, eggs, toast,
and a round of conversation with the other regulars.
Bud likes to tell stories about the younger generation
and how they don't know the value of money
or the importance of hard work
and their lack of respect for parents and elders.
But he really isn't a complainer;
he just likes to take pot shots at his rich neighbors' kids
and enjoys a chuckle or two at life's little absurdities.

After an hour or so, Bud gets up, pays his bill,
and goes back to his lawn-rake or screwdriver,
taking along his funny grin and big cigar.

The Frosted Flakes Lady

She came by about 8:30 every morning white hair neatly done,
walking with a calm, slow dignity,
carrying a black patent-leather purse
and wearing a light brown cloth coat.

And she always headed for the table by the back door.
Frosted Flakes, coffee, a cigarette; that was her breakfast.
She ate alone though once in a while
she shared her solitude with a newspaper.

She never talked to anyone except to mumble an occasional “hello”;
and I never saw her smile:
the skin on her rather pretty face was unlined
and her mouth was firm—no creases at the corners.

She carried about her an aura of sad aloofness;
and in her dark, misty eyes I caught a glimpse of a happier past—
of coffee klatches and romantic novels,
of cut flowers and quiet, unhurried conversations.

But then she stopped coming,
this solitary figure in the crowded restaurant.
And no one knew why.

Louise

Old school teachers never stop giving advice.
Louise continues to hold forth every morning
with her "pupils" seated around her—
Dean, Florence, Willie, George—
a seminar of sorts with topics like baseball scores,
football quarterbacks, lousy weather, high taxes;
all good naturedly digested with generous rounds of coffee.

But Louise's voice is losing its sharpness—
it is growing kind of cackley,
although you can still hear it quiver
above the general restaurant hubbub.
Her once trim, erect figure is now stooped,
her walk slow and halting, her face wrinkled and sagging.
But there's still a merry lilt to her chuckle
and a faint gleam in her rheumy eyes.

Margaret

Margaret slowly hobbles through the doorway,
her withered right arm and hand dangling to one side.
Her gimpy right leg with its heavy brace drags along behind
while her good left hand holds walking cane and purse.
She shuffles over to the table by the coat rack,
beams a smile around the room, and orders her usual oatmeal and coffee.

Margaret loves to talk, but the problem is,
she has a ready vocabulary of only twenty words,
most of them painfully ill-formed.
The easiest ones for her are "and-uh," "yeahh," and "cold,
although "hello" comes through quite clearly.
The rest are grunts and moans and sighs.
To carry on any but the most banal conversation is trying indeed:
the listener must figure out what the woman means
by such an odd assortment of vocal sounds,
and Margaret herself has to exert a supreme effort
to communicate any ideas in her head.
She often gets frustrated and then tries putting things down on paper
with her good hand; but her writing is nearly illegible.
Margaret lives in a prison with restricting visiting hours.

The other day she fell and scraped her leg and her nose;
and some time ago she was mugged and robbed.
But she's a plucky lady.
Her speech locked up and her body at quarter strength,
she's an easy prey for thugs. Yet she simply hangs in there,
struggling through doorways, and wobbling slowly up the street.
ONCE UPON A TIME in a small island kingdom lived a handsome young man, whom everyone called King Gerald, and his beautiful young queen, whose real name was Lucinda Evangeline Christina, but whom everyone called Queen Lucy, as her real name simply took too long for anyone to say. King Gerald had curly dark-brown hair (which he kept rather too short to be perfectly stylish), the beginnings of a small dark beard, and size eleven-and-one-half feet. Queen Lucy, who was a painter and tended to be rather absent-minded while she worked, had a mass of frizzy, bright red hair pulled back into a braid that reached almost to the backs of her knees, so as to keep it out of the paint jars while she was working. She was one half inch taller than the King, and the freckles on her nose always made her look as if she had forgotten to wash her face after spattering it with paint.

The two had been married just one year, and their kingdom, though a proper kingdom with a palace and gardens and servants and subjects, was not really very large. In fact, if the King and Queen started after lunch, they could walk around its edges and be back by coffee-lunch time, because the kingdom, though not a desert island, and certainly not a deserted one, was a just-the-right-size island set in the middle of a clear, cold mountain lake. King Gerald’s parents, the King and Queen of Bantiok, lived on one side of the lake, and Fairy Child of Puncit, lived on the other, and the island had been a wedding gift from both of them. It was a perfect kingdom for a young royal couple in every way but one. The only way to get off it was over the lake.

During the winter months, the lake froze solid and smooth, and the King and Queen would lace on their skates or call for the sleigh and glide over the ice to visit Queen Lucy’s parents or King Gerald’s. But the King, who turned green if his bath was filled too full, couldn’t make himself climb into a boat to row across during the warmer months. And since Queen Lucy couldn’t bear the thought of leaving King Gerald on the island by himself, they both stayed home when the ice was gone and invited people to visit them instead.

One particular late September morning, Queen Lucy shivered in her bare feet when she got up to open the bedroom window. “Look,” she said to the King, who was still in bed, “I can see my breath when I lean out.”

“Really, my dear?” said the King, interested, and hurriedly scuffled on his size eleven-and-one-half slippers before coming to join her. He leaned out, too. “So you the lake freezes over. Dear me, I do hope the tomatoes—”

He broke off, looking worried. “I really must find the gardener,” he murmured and went striding down the hall in his night-shirt.

“Don’t forget that we have Court this morning, dear!” the Queen called after him, and decided that she had better not put on her painting smock until that afternoon.

After lunch, when King Gerald had finished the last of his favorite raspberry sherbet, he sighed with satisfaction, put down his spoon and said to the Queen, “Well, what shall it be this afternoon?”

“Painting for me,” Queen Lucy said decidedly and gazed at the pool of melted sherbet left over in her own bowl. “That really is an interesting shade of purple, don’t you think?” she said to the King, and forgetting to wait for an answer, she took the bowl along with her and went to find her smock and paints, leaving the King, who had already decided to work in the garden, to ring for his work shoes.

On the palace grounds, fall leaves were already splashing the trees and ground with color, and the gardeners were busy raking them into piles. Queen Lucy set up an easel or two and wandered dreamily about, dabbing color on her canvases and absent-mindedly getting her braid in the paint pots, while King Gerald clomped around in his heavy shoes, inspecting the...
calling for a shovel to turn up a bed himself. The sun had started to sink over the lake and it was turning chillly before the King handed his shovel to the head gardener and went to find his wife. “Come, my dear, shall we walk to the shore and watch the sun set before supper?” he said. The Queen smiled at him, handed the crystal sherbet bowl to the person who happened to be nearest (it was the head gardener, who looked at it perplexed and finally used it to put the tulip bulbs he was digging up in) and took his hand. “What a lovely idea,” she said, and off they went, the Queen’s purple-dipped braid swinging back and forth and spattering the King’s knees with paint.

On the beach, the shores of Queen Lucy’s parents’ kingdom were melting away in the fading light. Queen Lucy stood on tip-toe and shaded her eyes against the glare. “That red there reminds me of the leaves I painted this afternoon,” she said, but before she could go on, the King started waving his arms around.

“Halloo, there!” he cried, and Queen Lucy strained to see a small rowboat gliding towards them. Dipping the oars was a diminutive figure whose head seemed to be a peculiar pointed shape until you noticed that the man (you could see that it was a man) was wearing a tall, red fool’s cap and a man’s suit. Bowing with a flourish, the jester acknowledged the applause and proceeded to empty his tall red fool’s cap of all the magic that it contained. He pulled paint-brushes out of the Queen’s ear and a three-yard shoelace out of the King’s shoe. He cut the second under-gardener in half and stuck him back together again and made the head kitchen helper disappear. He filled the room with twenty pigeons, two tame lions that jumped through flaming hoops, a grape vine that in thirty-five seconds bore enough grapes to distribute to all the members of the audience, and a storm which snowed powdered sugar, all of which he made disappear when he snapped his fingers. And finally, when the third and youngest chambermaid’s eyes were beginning to grow heavy and the Queen was just about to signal to the King that the company had had enough for one evening, the jester paused.

“Your honored Majesties, Ladies and Gentlmen,” he proclaimed, “What you have just seen is but a small sample of the marvels that I, as a recently certified Wizard of the Third Degree—” he paused to listen to the murmur go rippling through the room, for Third Degree Wizards were not to be seen every day—“am able to produce at will. My last, ultimate, and most marvelous—nay, the most marvelous—nay, the most remarkable magical talent this kingdom has beheld since my last visit.”

Everyone clapped enthusiastically and the jester doubled over and whispered from the pocket of his baggy pants, tapped it three times on the edge of his cap. The billows of purple smoke revealed, as they cleared, the magician himself clad in a magnificent red and purple striped satin suit. Bowing with a flourish, the jester acknowledged the applause and proceeded to empty his tall red fool’s cap of all the magic that it contained. He pulled paint-brushes out of the Queen’s ear and a three-yard shoelace out of the King’s shoe. He cut the second under-gardener in half and stuck him back together again and made the head kitchen helper disappear. He filled the room with twenty pigeons, two tame lions that jumped through flaming hoops, a grape vine that in thirty-five seconds bore enough grapes to distribute to all the members of the audience, and a storm which snowed powdered sugar, all of which he made disappear when he snapped his fingers. And finally, when the third and youngest chambermaid’s eyes were beginning to grow heavy and the Queen was just about to signal to the King that the company had had enough for one evening, the jester paused.

“Your majesty,” said the jester squeakingly, and taking off his cap, he stood and made a sweeping bow before stepping out of the boat.

“Sir—Jester, my man!” said the King heartily, who could not remember the jester’s name. “What have you got in your bag of tricks for tonight?”

“Oh,” said the jester in a vague and mysterious voice, peering into his cap before replacing it on his head, “you shall see, you shall see.”

“Ahem, yes, yes—I’m sure we shall,” said the King, who could not think of anything else to say, and led the way back to the palace. Queen Lucy had changed out of her smock and rinsed the paint out of the end of her braid before meeting them on the lawn.

“Cook is having dinner served in the pavilion,” she said, taking the King’s arm. The jester drew off his cap with a flourish.

“You majesty,” he announced in as deep a voice as he could manage, “Your gracious mother sends greetings, this bouquet of roses—and he pulled the flowers out of his cap—and my humble self to her lovely and most honorable daughter the Queen Lucinda Evangeline Christina.”

The jester made a deep bow and took a long time in coming up, since he needed to catch his breath after delivering his message all at once. Queen Lucy laughed and returned with proper solemnity, “Thank her for me, please” before she drew the King into the pavilion, where the first course was already waiting on the table.

After dinner, when the last ices were eaten and the tables were cleared, the King called for torches and the Queen sent for the cooks and kitchen helpers, gardeners and under-gardeners, chambermaids, for, as she said, “If there’s magic to be done, the bigger the audience, the better.” And when everyone from Cook to the third chambermaid had squeezed companionably into the pavilion, the little jester stepped onto the small platform and surveyed the respectful crowd.

“Your Majesty the Queen, Your Majesty the King; ladies and gentlemen; young men and women; dogs, cats, and grasshoppers—and he had to stop, being rather red in the face and quite out of breath, “I welcome you to a display of the most wonderful—nay, the most marvelous—nay, the most remarkable magical talent this kingdom has beheld since my last visit.”

Everyone clapped enthusiastically and the jester pulled on his cap and shuffled out of the pavilion, the little platform and the room, for Third Degree Wizards were not to be seen every day—“am able to produce at will. My last, ultimate, and notwithstanding final act will be to bring before you, if only for an instant, a member of the fairy race, a young member, who in fact is not very old—” the jester was searching frantically through his cap and, finally finding the packet he needed, continued with relief. “Please be patient, honored guests. This will take only a minute—”

Tearing open the packet, an ordinary-looking brown-paper envelope, he solemnly rested the tip of his cap on the floor, sprinkled it with the powdery contents of the packet, turned it sideward and lifted it. The spell worked.
and pronounced the magic words in a murmur that even the Queen, who was in the front row, couldn’t catch.

The air in the pavilion seemed to shimmer slightly before it turned into a clammy white mist, as if the audience had been sitting in the middle of a cloud. The Queen smelled roses before the mist cleared and left in the cap a pair of tiny feet waving wildly. The Wizard blushed and turned the cap over so that the feet were on the ground. “Slight miscalculation,” he murmured, and went on in his public speaking voice, “Behold, your Majesties!” Grasping the bell at the tip of the cap, he pulled the cap off the feet.

“Oh!” said the third chambermaid, quite suddenly awake, “It’s a baby!”

“A baby?” said the jester, startled, and bent down to examine it more closely. “Ah, yes,” he continued loudly, his face now as red as his silk suit, “A baby. In fact, a young child of the Underus Waterus species which inhabits the lake surrounding this magnificent kingdom.” He cleared his throat, on firmer ground now, and expounded, “Observe, if you please, that it is admirably fitted by nature to breathing water and is enabled only by the power of Magic to stand before you now breathing air.”

The child had sat down on the floor, fairy ears slightly pointed and dark fairy hair cascading down its shoulders, and begun playing with the King’s three-yard shoe lace. Awkwardly scooping it up, the jester bowed to loud applause. “And now, honored guests,” he said, “I shall return the child to the land it came from.”

He set the child down and covered it with the cap, which reached down to its ankles. Tapping his wand importantly, he muttered some magic words. Again, the cold, clammy mist filled the room. The Queen smelled flowers, but when the cloud cleared, the child was still there, cooing under the fool’s cap.

The jester creased his brow and tried again, muttering slightly louder this time. Carnations sprouted out of everyone’s ears, but the child was still there.

The jester turned a shade paler and shut his eyes tightly to concentrate. This time the Queen caught snatches of his incantation. “Bachelli, retumco, Cheballi, mutroco,” said the jester, but when he opened his eyes, he found that though he had managed to spread a slimy mass of seaweed on the pavilion floor, the child was still there, singing to itself under the cap.

At a loss for words, the jester snatched his cap back and pulled it over his own head. Making an hasty bow in the general direction of the King and Queen, he stammered, “Most dreadfully sorry, slight miscalculation, slight miscalculation. Must consult my books. Please do excuse me—” and tapping his cap with the silver and ebony wand, he vanished with a faint poof, leaving his cap and magnificent silk suit to collapse like punctured balloons and his wand to clatter to the floor.

There was a slight pause while everyone looked astonished at the place where the jester had stood.

“Well,” said the Queen finally, and at the sound of her voice, the whole crowd broke into excited talking. The Queen poked the King with her elbow, and he stood up to announce, “Thank you all for coming, and good night.”

“Good night, Your Majesties,” said the
cooks and kitchen helpers, gardeners and under-gardeners, housekeepers and chambermaids, and filed obediently out to bed, leaving the King and Queen alone in the pavilion, all except for the baby and the third chambermaid, who was on the floor letting the baby play with the ribbons on her cap.

King Gerald looked at Queen Lucy, Queen Lucy looked at King Gerald, and they both looked at the baby. "This is a fine kettle of fish," said the King firmly.

"What on earth are we to do?" inquired the Queen. She sat down on the floor and started to tickle the baby’s neck with the end of her braid.

The King got up and began to pace the floor, kicking carnations away impatiently. "You see, my dear, it’s even worse than it seems. Winter is coming on so early this year that it won’t be another week before the lake freezes over—"

"Yes?" said the Queen, as she tried to retrieve her braid from out of the baby’s mouth.

"And when the lake freezes over," continued the King, "there will be no way of returning a member of Underus Waterus to its home under the lake. Even Magic has its limits—"

"Do say ‘baby,’ dear," returned the Queen, "and not ‘Underus Waterus.’ I’m sure the baby doesn’t know its scientific name."

"Oh, very well," said the King impatiently, who had gotten up early that morning and was getting tired and cross.

"Anyway," continued the Queen, "I’ve just had an idea. About returning the baby, I mean."

"What’s that?" asked the King.

Retrieving her braid in exchange for one of the kittens, the Queen stood up. "We’ll have to do it ourselves," she said. "Look, don’t you see that the poor thing’s changing color?"

The King looked more closely and sure enough, the baby’s skin was tinged with blue.

"Even Magic has its limits," said the Queen, "and it’s wearing thin here. The baby won’t be able to breathe our air much longer."

"But we have no idea where its family lives," King Gerald was protesting when someone chimed in unexpectedly, "I think I know." The King, who had forgotten about the third chambermaid, looked down in surprise.

Betty blushed furiously. "I mean, I think I know, Your Majesty," she corrected herself, and went on boldly, "Haven’t you ever been out on the lake on a clear evening when the moon was full, and felt sure that you could see, way down deep in the water, what might have been a fairy town?"

The Queen looked thoughtful. She picked up the jester’s forgotten wand and twirled it between her fingers like a baton. "I wonder if the jester left his boat here, too," she said, thinking out loud. "We’ll have to take the baby back by boat."

"Yes, but—" said the King but discovered that he didn’t have a better idea, so he reached out a hand to help Betty up instead. "Here you are," he said, handing her his cloak to put around the baby, "It’s cold already tonight." Queen Lucy took his arm and together they followed the purple-speckled trees, just visible in the light of the huge full moon, back to the beach. The jester’s boat was still there, pulled up on a sandy bank.

"Betty, you sit in the back, with the baby," directed Queen Lucy. "Gerald, you in the middle, with the oars, and I’ll push off and sit in the front." The boat slid into the water with a smooth "swoosh," and King Gerald, who had grown quite green, pulled doggedly at the oars to point it in the right direction. Once they were fairly underway, the Queen inquired anxiously, "How is the baby, Betty?"

"It’s not much bluer, Your Majesty," said Betty, peering in among the cloak’s folds to look at the color of its face by moonlight.

"Hand it to me," said the Queen, holding out her arms, "and you start looking for the right spot."

Betty propped her elbows on her knees and peered down into the water. The moon, huge, shone a spotlight through the glass bottom of the boat, making the colors of the plants and rocks and fish that glided by underneath seem even more brilliant than they did during the day-time. The boat had almost circled the island when Betty finally saw what she was looking for. "A little more that way, Your Majesty," she said to the King, who obligingly steered to the left. "This is where I thought I saw something before."

Queen Lucy looked into the depths and saw underneath them a great sea-valley, where the floor of the lake deeped down to its deepest point. She squinted like she did when she was painting and seemed to see, just beyond the place where the mass of sea-plants made it impossible to see clearly, the sky-line of a coral kingdom.

She smiled at the King and kissed the tip of his greenish nose. "We’re almost through, my dear," she said. The King smiled weakly and handed her the fool’s cap, which the Queen set lightly upon the baby’s head. She gave the baby to the King to hold, took out the wand, and squeezed her eyes shut, straining to remember the jester’s magic words.

"Bachelli, retourco, Cheballi, mutrico,"

said the Queen before correcting herself impatiently. "No, that’s the mistake he made."

"Bachelli, retourco, Cheballi, mutrico,"

she tried again. "Still not right."

"Mutreco,"

came a voice from the back of the boat. "I mean, ‘Mutreco,’ Your Majesty."

"Exactly!" said the Queen and prepared to try one last time.

"Bachelli, retourco, Cheballi, mutreco,"

and still with her eyes shut tight, she tapped the wand on the baby, who grabbed it and stuck it in its mouth.
boat. This time, it smelled of violets, and when the Queen opened her eyes, she was looking straight down into the eyes of a woman who had surfaced from beneath. Her sleek dark hair clung wetly to her head and shoulders, and herears, slightly pointed, bore the unmistakable fairy mark. She held out her arms for the child.

The Queen blushed. “We beg your pardon,” she whispered and handed her the baby, still wearing the fool’s cap and chewing on the ebony-and-silver wand. Hugging the child tightly to her, the woman vanished, ripple-less, into the crystal lake. The Queen stared after her until a noise behind her reminded her of the seasick King. She turned around to find that the green was gone from the King’s complexion. “Smell of violets was just what I needed,” the King chuckled. “Strange mist, that. And now, my dear, I propose we head for home.”

“Splendid idea,” concurred the Queen, and as King Gerald rowed them home and the third chambermaid fell asleep in the back of the boat, Queen Lucy, whose braid had slipped over the side and was trailing in the lake, leaned forward to watch the bottom of the lake go rushing past, watching for some particularly lovely shades of green and purple that she wanted to mix tomorrow.
Apple Wars

Stanley and I,
we used to play war, two farm kids
filled with energy and mischief.
We stole apples from Old Burly's orchard
next to the cornfields
where the trees stood impatiently, like
children waiting for the bus.
I plucked the windfallen, frost-bitten fruit
with mittened hands
from amongst the tall crackling weeds.
He listened for the singing in the train rails—
those cold steel arms that reached
to the end of the world, it seemed.
The rails vibrated and we
crouched down
with ammunition piled between us—
round pock-marked apple faces—acne from
the summer's violent hail,
soft and bruised, embarrassed red.

The people trains were the fastest,
slicing through our orchard playground.
We caught glimpses of the faces
of the passengers—faces of the silent
caught in the grumbling belly of the steel serpent
as it raced with dizzying speed.
"Those are city people," Stanley often said
and his mouth screwed up in a pucker.

We whipped our apples at them
and laughed out loud,
but our small children laughs
were drowned out by the trains' roar.
Today I stand
Near the track
still playing war with those trains,
remembering how they swept him away
to the city
like mobs with iron grips, pulling him in the flow
to the end of the world.
His laugh still rings in my ears,
sweet but stinging like hot cider.

The distant voices of my children
playing games in the barnyard
beckon me home.
I shiver
and make my way through the orchard
and past the cornfields where the
ripened ears hang limply,
husk coats ripped open,
kerneled teeth bared in iron grins.

*Grace Sikma-Pot*
American Images:

Understanding The Sketch Book of Washington Irving

by David R Smith

In _Sensational Designs_, Jane Tompkins questions many notions about traditional literary criticism and suggests an alternative strategy for approaching a given text. In her analysis of American literature written between 1790 and 1860, she offers convincing proof that the pages in these works reflect social concerns of this time period and that they contain the authors' responses to these events. Tompkins asserts that we need to evaluate the original intentions of the author outside of her own expectations:

History is invoked here not, as in previous historical criticism, as a backdrop against which one can admire the artist's skill in transforming the raw materials of reality into art, but as the only way of accounting for the enormous impact of works whose force escapes the modern reader, unless he or she makes the effort to recapture the world view they sprang from and helped to shape. (Tompkins xiii)

How we make sense of perceived literary links without imposing our own twentieth-century expectations is the issue confronting us.

This challenge is a facet of the argument proposed by Jane Tompkins, namely that the canon is shaped more by subsequent critical criteria and political forces than by inherent and transcendent greatness. In her quest to reform how we view literature, she states, "I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which their authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions" (Tompkins 200). This "cultural work" approach to literature demands that to the best of our abilities we set aside our modern needs for psychological rigor and formal coherence, allowing the printed material to address its own cause in its intended manner. Applying this methodology to _The Sketch Book_, I have attempted to use this principle to guide my analysis, allowing the stories to shape me.

My purpose, then, is to search for what it is that Irving conveyed to his audience and, in this way, to draw out some clues as to his own worldview. Tompkins' approach reveals that _The Sketch Book_ operates within the context of its culture and the personal life of its author, Washington Irving, by echoing the concerns of the tumultuous postheroic generation, by highlighting the unique demands this society placed on Irving as a professional author, and by subtly affirming American values in the course of discussing British culture.

Irving wrote at a time of great unrest. Early nineteenth-century society felt intense pressure to live up to the great republican vision of America left as a legacy by the Founding Fathers. Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky states that "even at the outset of this period there were those who feared that the glory days of the Republic had already passed" (1). We hear an echo of this in Robert A. Ferguson's book on The Sketch Book.
where he notes that:

these anxieties were based upon hard realities and a negative course in events that later Americans have ignored in their eagerness to trace the developing nation. Between 1790 and 1860 virtually every state, major faction, and interest group tried, at least once, to weaken the federal government or break up the union. (24)

In addition to political disruption, there was a loss of morale because of perceived shortcomings in how the nation was developing. To what did this culture compare itself?

Right or wrong, they felt as though they had allowed selfish interests to usurp the supposed virtues of their revolutionary parents. Being removed from the War of Independence by only a few decades, the postheroic generation felt the presence of symbols of sacrifice still tangibly evident in the aging veterans. However, as these models of patriotism passed away, the younger citizens were left with a “moral imperative” to guide the new nations by “virtue, by morality, by religion, [and] by the cultivation of every good principle and every good habit...” (Webster quoted in Rubin-Dorsky 7). At the time of the Revolution, a vision of America was formed that linked “a correct, theoretical application of man-made or positive law” to the harmony of the unspoiled continent (Ferguson 16); in the early nineteenth century, there was an oppressive feeling that second-generation Americans failed their high callings.

The believed consequences of this apparent loss of virtue may be summed up in two primary concerns: the loss of community due to land speculation and rapid mobility and the subsequent loss of “home” and domestic ethics (Rubin-Dorsky 5, 10). The first of these two anxieties stemmed from the monetary practices of the time. A popular author of this time period, Sarah Hale, speaking through one of her characters wrote, “Excessive luxury and rational liberty were never found compatible” (quoted in Rubin-Dorsky 26). While this maxim simmered in the back of the nation’s consciousness, it became evident that “a nation rapidly multiplying and materially prospering, and yet one that was inexorably moving away from the harmony of republican cooperation and toward the disorder of civil strife, burdened the conscience of the postheroic generation” (Rubin-Dorsky 6). It is not surprising that a society trapped between the desire for economic success and the belief in the Founding Fathers’ goal of a commonwealth would experience internal conflict. The culprit was a widening rift between “popular and private virtue” (New-England Magazine quoted in Rubin-Dorsky 13) manifested as a disruption of the home.

For those living in the first half of the 1800’s, the notion of “home” meant two similar ideas: the domestic dwelling place of the family unit, and the nation as a whole. Constructed by the Founding Fathers as a symbol of harmony of the rising republic, this second image tied into the ideals of citizenship. Both concepts are related, for it was thought that family tranquility was dependent on accepting the responsibilities of patriotism. Hence, as the private home was the seat of moral authority between parent and child, the concept of a public home implied that the nation as a whole was the model of virtue for its citizens (Rubin-Dorsky 8). Only by sacrificing self-interest to common good could the country “home” thrive in righteousness. A fear that the economic trends noted above were signals of the decay of the national home, then, prompted a call for a return to republican values; this phenomenon is evident in the literature of both Cooper and Hale (Rubin-Dorsky 16, 20). While Washington Irving held more ambivalent feelings toward this effort, his writing springs from the same climate of cultural concern, and, therefore, reflects such anxiety (Rubin-Dorsky 30). That this environment of tension is overlooked by those who seek to understand The Sketch Book may be explained in part by the aura of congeniality that surrounds Washington Irving created by accounts of his life and work that temper his distress with images of quiet gentility.

Flowery phrases abound in the portion of Van Wyck Brooks’ The World of Washington Irving that describes “Washington Irving in England.” According to this version, Irving “rejoiced in the traces of former splendour in crooked lanes and shabby squares, the houses that had once been lordly mansions, with oaken carvings, time-stained chambers, fretted ceilings and great bow windows, bulging with diamond panes that were set in lead” (Brooks 207). We are assured that “he was equally charmed by the countryside, the hawthorn... the first nightingale, the lark, and in huge monastic ruins like Titbit Hall...” (Brooks 208). Armed with the
notion that "such was the state of mind of Washington Irving, as he traveled through England" (Brooks 208), we are led to see him through a golden tinted lens.

Hamilton Wright Mabie, writing at the very beginning of the twentieth century, is only slightly more helpful when he suggests:

Irving and Longfellow were primarily translators and interpreters of the Old World to the New... not by the use of fresh motives or of novel literary forms, but by bringing the American imagination in touch with the imagination of Europe, and reknitting the deeper ties which had been, in a way, severed by forcible separation from Old World rule. (101)

While this passage hints at a bit more integrative approach to understanding Irving, his commentary Backgrounds of Literature essentially offers the same gentle-glow depiction of Irving that Brooks expounds. Describing the two mentioned literary figures, he quaintly depicts "their urbanity, geniality, hospitality of mind, and sweetness of nature [which] gave them rare sensitiveness of feeling for things old and ripe and beautiful and a winning quality of style..." (Mabie 105). From this romanticized vision of the


man Irving, it is only a short jump to a slanted view of his writing as little more than the ramblings of an amiable fellow.

It is precisely this fallacy that Rubin-Dorsky seeks to dismiss. Understanding Irving from within the parameters of cultural anxiety "has eluded most readers, since they have approached Irving with too many preconceptions about his fabled 'geniality,' usually finding little more than confirmation of this image" (xv). What Rubin-Dorsky contends in his critical commentary Adrift in the Old World is that Washington Irving touched the needs of his audience by working out his own personal, parallel anxieties in The Sketch Book. Dispossession and homelessness felt by a distressed Irving helped soothe the fears of his country, which was feeling the national "home" shaken by the rapid changes taking place during the early nineteenth century (Rubin-Dorsky xvi—27). Rubin-Dorsky asserts that "in spite of what he accomplished, no matter how much prosperity he enjoyed, Irving, like America, was unable to regain a sense of himself as virtuous" because "like his countrymen, Irving was haunted by the memory of the home he had once possessed, by the thought that somewhere back in his youth in New York existed a golden age of uncircumscribed and untrammeled emotional freedom" (29, 28). Clearly, this interpretation offered by Rubin-Dorsky implies that strong tensions characterized portions of the life of Washington Irving. When we glance at his history, this fact becomes evident.

While he does tend to gloss over the rough spots in Irving’s life, HW Boynton, in his biography of Irving, bears witness to the premise that Irving suffered periods of great stress in his life. Irving’s history reads like a list of woes: he was a sickly child brought up by a strict father; the woman he wished to marry died at age seventeen from tuberculosis. Irving entered a partnership with two of his brothers to run a hardware store and watched the business go bankrupt despite two years of feverish labor. After publishing The Sketch Book, he sunk his money in an ill-fated riverboat venture and later in a shaky Bolivia mining operation. Irving stayed in England long enough to feel the tension produced by an outbreak of cholera at the same time the Reform Bill was passed. This string of frustrations, Rubin-Dorsky posits, helps to explain the nagging sense that he didn’t fit in anywhere and that success was doubtful, for Irving thought himself to be the victim of a series of losses.

In reaction to the painful trials in life, Irving worked out some of his feelings within the pages of The Sketch Book. Because he felt “devastated by his losses, and psychologically imprisoned by his need for nurturing traditions, Irving depended upon his art to channel disruptive feelings, and at times to create an alternate dreamlike world, a territory in which all the feeling and meaning he sought temporarily existed” (Rubin-Dorsky 54). What Irving sought in England paralleled what the New World sought in the Old World: stability. Just as Irving “began to wander the Continent, seeking literal and figurative houses—places of comfort, nurture, and creative freedom—where...he might at least escape from the trials of his current existence,” Americans escaped “from the pressures and demands and drudgeries of their own New World existence” by immersing themselves “in an idealized Old World” which soothed their fears even though it violated “the countrymen’s need to believe in freedom.”
Dorsky 27, 68). While they could experience British traditions through the persona of Geoffrey Crayon, Irving and America were acutely aware that they were outsiders, aliens to the English culture.

The culmination of this fact is reached narratively in the sketch “Westminster Abbey,” which is “the most important symbol of the ordering forces of tradition and culture” (Rubin-Dorsky 90). While Geoffrey Crayon walks among the tombs of the honored dead, he begins to muse about the transitory nature of life. As the surrounding monuments crumble and decay, they become fixtures attesting to the fact that even memories must surrender to time. This pondering prods Crayon to accept a fact that he really knows all along:

For Crayon and, as Irving means to suggest, for all Americans, the ‘past’ is basically ungraspable: it is but a memory, doomed to be obliterated. For the British, conversely, the past is preserved in their internalized sense of identity, not in any one cathedral. Change in this respect matters less to them because it does not alter the fundamental character of the nation. (Rubin-Dorsky 92)

While The Sketch Book provided a short jaunt through the magical realm of a fictitious, golden Old World, neither its author nor its audience could avoid the reality of social disorder in the New World.

Rubin-Dorsky believes that Rip Van Winkle represents the postheroic generation’s desire to escape from a future that must be inevitably faced. While it is possible to avoid dealing with societal pressures for awhile, it is not possible to ignore their consequences. Eventually, Rip is forced to adapt to a changing culture that he does not fully understand (Rubin-Dorsky 76). While this interpretation sheds some light on the popularity of “Rip Van Winkle,” it fails to highlight the role Rip has played in creating his own environment. After all, Rip is not entirely the victim of his world; by choosing to shirk responsibility, he has helped to bring about the very reality that he feared.

Rip is first introduced to us in rather warm terms as a town favorite, “a simple, good-natured man... moreover, a kind neighbor, and an obedient, hen-pecked husband” (Irving 33). We are quickly alerted, however, to Irving’s use of satire when the narrator informs us that “the great error in Rip’s composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor” (Irving 34). With this disclaimer in mind, then, we are prepared to understand the true nature of Rip Van Winkle. The victim of a noisy wife who needles him about getting his work done, Rip seeks refuge one day in the Catskill Mountains. As everybody knows, Rip falls in with the supernatural crew of Henry Hudson, sips some potent wine, and falls asleep for twenty years. Upon his return to the village, he finds that many of his close friends have passed away and that his wife has joined their ranks. Nobody seems to recognize the bewildered old man as he stumbles around the town, trying to clear his befuddled brain. Eventually, he discovers that he has a son left in town. “Rip looked, and beheld a precise counterpart of himself as he went up the mountain; apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged” (Irving 52). Rip also locates his daughter and accepts her offer to live with her new family. “As to Rip’s son and heir, who was the ditto of himself, seen leaning against the tree, he was employed to work on the farm, but evinced an hereditary disposition to attend to anything else but his business” (Irving 56). Being an old man now, the senior Rip spends his time in long walks and in chats, especially “among the rising generation, with whom he soon grew into great favor” (Irving 56). Is this image of a life spent in sleep a portrayal of what is good in society? Clearly not, for we must enter our society to shape our world. Consider the contrast to Rip found in the old man in “The Angler.”

Under the figure of his pen name, Goeffrey Crayon, Irving describes a fishing expedition in which he encounters an old man teaching the art of fishing to two younger “rustic disciples.” Finding a living example of Izaak Walton’s ideal sportsman, Crayon engages him in conversation. After awhile, the old-timer relates the misadventures of his life to Crayon, including the loss of his leg during the battle of Camperdown. What impresses the author the most, and hence what is most prominent in this short story, is the man’s irrepresible cheerfulness:

Though he had been sorely buffeted about the world, he was satisfied that the world, in itself, was good and beautiful. . . and, above all, he was almost the only man I had ever met with who had been an unfortunate adventurer in America, and had honesty and magnanimity enough to take the fault to his own door, and not to curse the country. (Irving 416-7)

His time was spent caring for his cat and parrot, scrubbing his cabin clean “every morning,” and fishing. Like Rip Van Winkle, “he was a universal favorite in the village…” (Irving 413). Yet, unlike
Rip, he wore “clothes very much but very carefully patched, betokening poverty, honestly come by, and decently maintained” (Irving 413). Rip and this nameless old man are opposite symbols of the same social condition; the crucial difference between the two is that the latter possesses a sense of virtue the former lacks. The difference between ragged Rip and the honest old-timer is their approach to dealing with responsibility. Both pass into the fruits of pleasant retirement, but one has attained that state by voiding his life in sleep; the other embraces his well-earned rest.

Ferguson casts Rip into a different role, for Rip’s lazy attitude and “his final success combine to make him a subversive force within a republican culture” (171), a culture that depends on social duty. That Rip has merely endured, however, is not sufficient grounds to label him a hero; while it is true that he has not lost his pleasant stock of stories or his good humor, he has lost an idyllic past. The culture to which he must now adapt might have been averted had he seized his right to act responsibly instead of passively allowing the concerns of the future to shape him. Jane Eberwein notes that “in most respects, as we well know, Rip’s life has been a disaster. Critics recite a litany of defects” (165). It seems to me that Rip the archetype of sloth and his son the disciple of sloth provide the antithesis for the father-son relationship that appears later in the century in a novel by Sarah Hale which, according to Rubin-Dorsky, “involves a decent but misguided son learning to adopt his father’s values in order to become the ideal republican of the postheroic generation, one who uses his money and influence to support and extend the Fathers’ heritage” (23). Since this is viewed as the only road back to national virtue, Rip’s apathy actually defeats any hope for an internally settled country.

It is, however, possible that Washington Irving sympathizes with Rip Van Winkle, for while Irving generally held republican values in his political life (Boynton 72; Rubin-Dorsky xvii), he felt great pressure placed upon him by this cultural vision and was, therefore, at odds with his contemporaries at times. From a twentieth-century perspective, it is difficult to understand these anxieties perceived by Irving the author.

This is precisely the point of much of Law and Letters in American Culture, which “seeks to recover the lost context out of which Adams and Jefferson, and then Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and other early republicans, dared to read, think, speak and write” (Ferguson 5). In this work, Ferguson depicts the intricate relationship between the practice of law and the republican worldview. Because the Founding Fathers shared in a legal tradition that assumed “a visible link between the observance of natural law and the attainment of civic happiness,” the American lawyer held a “virtual monopoly as republican spokesman”; legal professionals became self-appointed “natural guardians” of this value system (Ferguson 16, 12, 25). Like most aspiring young men of his time, Irving entered law school and, eventually, passed the bar. However, he was not satisfied with this occupation, for “apparently Irving tolerated these activities instead of making them fully his own—at least his letters complain generally about ‘this wrangling driving unmerciful profession’ and dismiss those ‘ponderous fathers of the law’ who were his intellectual guides” (Ferguson 151). Strong cultural norms dictated that writing be viewed as a dutiful hobby of legal intellectuals, a trifling necessity (Ferguson 87). When Irving abandoned the practice of law, it was with fierce stress:

Vocational anxiety was particularly great for writers like Brown, Irving, and Bryant because of the special anathema the legal profession reserved for heretics. . . . To deviate was to violate an established code. Criticism from former colleagues at the bar was explicit and intense when a law student or lawyer turned away from the profession. The young man who ignored such criticism soon encountered questions concerning his patriotism and personal integrity in ways that compounded the practical problem of making a living. (91)

Facing this onslaught of criticism, Irving understandably felt the barbs of academic attack. Here we glimpse a social environment that naturally produced some animosity in Irving toward the entire republican culture.

As a struggling young writer feeling out of place in a community hostile to his interests, Irving fought back by painting a picture of a republican society where all of the nineteenth-century fears come true.
where an ideal society withers under blind devotion to legal principle (Ferguson 157). This famous work *Diedrich Knickerbocker’s A History of New York* came to be the first literary success for Irving. To heighten his revenge, Irving steeped this attack, whose “driving force is anger...,” in “exactly those terms that every good Whig lawyer from John Adams to Daniel Webster used to express fear of republican collapse” (Ferguson 155, 161). All of the primary concerns of his time are manifested within the covers of this satire: the fear that the culture would inevitably fold inward on itself, the spread of destructive luxury, and the effects of uncontrollable growth (Ferguson 155, 162, 161). However, despite the bitterness present in this piece, Irving was within the realm of republican orthodoxy again when he created *The Sketch Book*:

*The Sketch Book* flows from the bewilderment of one who has just realized the unfair pain that life inflicts upon the living. *The Sketch Book*, in contrast, represents a calculated move by Irving the bankrupt to regain lost caste... The first book counters; the second seeks to rejoin. (Ferguson 168)

With this more conservative tone, however, did not come a life of peace. Irving wrote *The Sketch Book* under pressure of a different type. First, he began the project out of a desperate need to raise money following the failure of his brothers’ hardware store in 1818. This became the turning point in his career, because he was forced to rely on his writing as his primary occupation. Also, being in England at this time, Irving faced “the enmity of the British reviewers and their scorn for the general inferiority of American letters” (Rubin-Dorsky 33).

What is especially interesting in *A History of New York* is that in Irving’s jab at the notion of a legal “civic vision of the Founding Fathers,” he names the oppression of the Indians by the original settlers as a facet of the injustice of republican ideals, an inherent evil in this worldview: “America itself has been built upon the unwarranted seizure of Indian land in a history of murder, theft, and fraud legitimized by legal rubrics (pp. 52-61)” (Ferguson 158). While Ferguson suggests that by the time Irving wrote *The Sketch Book*, he had already vented most of his anger, we see traces of this issue of human rights appear again in the Indian sketches. Clearly, Irving had not entirely forgotten his concerns of republican oppression.

Writing in a time when caucasian supremacy coupled with religious fervor justified and exalted the exploitation of the seemingly barbaric Indian, Irving felt compelled to offer his own appraisal of this history of misguided abuse:

The rights of the savage have seldom been properly appreciated or respected by the white man. In peace he has too often been the dupe of artful traffic; in war he has been regarded as a ferocious animal, whose life or death was a question of mere precaution and convenience. (343)

His method is direct in both stories that address these grievances. In the first, “Traits of Indian Character,” he takes aim at the prevalent American misconceptions one at a time, dismissing each prejudicial belief in a logical, rational way. While Irving does generate some stereotypes to dismiss others, the overall thrust of his message stands apart from this. His wrath is particularly evident in his admonishments to those who have cheerfully recorded the systematic destruction of the Indians. Irving notes that “in discussing the savage character, writers have been too prone to indulge in vulgar prejudice and passionate exaggeration, instead of the candid temper of true philosophy” (Irving 346). Curiously, Irving turns these one-sided accounts into a condemnation of their authors, especially in the following story.

The adjoining tale, “Philip of Pokanoket,” applies Irving’s cool-headed arguments to a particular example of Indian nobility crushed by inhumane exploitation. The story traces the tragic life of an Indian prince who falls victim to dogged persecution; he loses his home, his wife, and his friends to a white conception of justice. In describing Philip’s destitute condition, Irving mixes his own account with that of a biased historian. Irving holds that “there needs no better picture of his destitute and piteous situation than the furnished by the homely pen of the chronicler, who is unwarily enlisting the feelings of the reader in favor of the hapless warrior whom he reviles” (386); Irving proceeds to quote observations written by this man that invert the historian’s original intentions:

“Philip,” he [the historian] says, “like a savage wild beast, having been hunted by the English forces through the woods, above a hundred miles backward and forward, at last was driven to his own den upon Mount Hope, where he retired, with a few of his best friends, into a swamp. which proved but a prison to keep him
fast till the messengers of death came by divine permission to execute vengeance upon him.”
(quoted in Irving 386)

The tragic irony conjures up less pride for the historian’s point of view than shame. Indeed, this portion of *The Sketch Book* serves as an extension of Irving’s deep sense of empathy; he forces his audience to consider the glorified travesty that they endorse, first by logical arguments, then by Stowe’s method, sentimentalism. While he may have returned to the republican fold, Irving was not unaware of this negative aspect of its vision, namely “just” oppression.

We have seen that “despite its kindly tone and humorous manner, then, *The Sketch Book* served Irving candidly, yet sympathetically, portrays the relationship between England and the United States as a fragile balance between a time-honored culture and a rapidly rising, though unsteady, power.

Irving as a way of working out his worries about his own prospects and those of his country” (Eberwein 154). Within this context of anxiety, though, *The Sketch Book* quietly affirms the potential for American creative greatness. In fact, Jane D Eberwein submits that beyond the surface of the sketches is “a tendency to debunk assumptions of British superiority while advancing subtle claims for the advantages of America as a seed bed of imagination” (155). By this reading, Irving placed value in the natural scenery of a country as a tool for creative imagination. England, with its meticulously cultured landscapes, “gains its placid charm from human effort,” and while this provided a smooth, sober evenness to its society, it inhibited the breathtaking (Eberwin 157).

In the same way, the English mind had been so confined by centuries of constant uniform cultivation that “Crayon never says so directly, but his England seems to be a place where imagination froze sometime in the past and has now been in formula” (Eberwein 160). The “American wilderness” is a far better place to learn about nature’s “variety” (Eberwein 158), at least a wilderness that has not completely succumbed to evils of a greedy society. Therefore, suggests Eberwein, when Crayon visits England to find the “great men of the earth” what he finds is generally disappointing. What value he takes from the English at the time of his tour stems more from his own imagination than from British wonder, evident, for example, in his willingness to play along with the townspeople that share their Shakespearean “relics” to him—the “shattered stock” of a rifle, a “tobacco-box,” a sword, and the “identical lantern with which Friar Laurence discovered Romeo and Juliet and the tomb” (Irving 314). While this provides Crayon with a pleasant diversion, this hardly speaks of British greatness; in fact, Crayon discovers that he knows more about the English literary tradition than most of the people he meets. For example, in “The Boar’s Head Tavern, Eastcheap” Crayon states, “Suffice it to say, the neighbors, one and all, about Eastcheap believe that Falstaff and his merry crew actually lived and revelled there” (Irving 152).

In fact Eberwein goes so far as to say that “in the end, there is only one unqualifiedly great figure in *The Sketch Book*, and that is Shakespeare” himself, who is less a product of British culture and more a product of his own natural genius (166, 167). Eberwein does, however, acknowledge Irving’s appreciation of the English for their longstanding traditions and for their attention to the picturesque. In her closing, she notes that “the transatlantic contrasts running through *The Sketch Book* lead to no clear statement of any nation’s superiority as a home for literature. Certainly Crayon’s deference to his English hosts stops short of acknowledging long-term cultural dominance” (Eberwein 167). A certain amount of respect is due, after all, to a “landscape that nourished poets over the centuries” (Eberwein 167).

This affirmation of American worth without overly demeaning Great Britain may be seen in two sketches in particular where we uncover Irving’s thoughts on British-American relations. The sections in which Irving addresses this issue are particularly revealing, giving his audience a glimpse at his perception of international politics. Poised between two continents, Irving candidly, yet sympathetically, portrays the relationship between England and the United States as a fragile balance between a time-honored culture and a rapidly rising, though unsteady, power. Caught in the friction of two countries seeking to define their places in a changing world, Irving confesses, “It is with feelings of deep regret that I observe the literary animosity daily growing up between England and America” (Irving 59).

His love-hate emotions for Great Britain become especially clear in the short story, “English Writers on America.” Overtly, Irving intended the American public at large to be the recipients of his advice. vet
his lengthy analysis of Great Britain suggests that he hoped for an attentive foreign audience, as well. Irving believed the conflict to spring from a combination of English quirks and youthful American obsequiousness. In his writing, he defines British misconceptions, among them the belief that Americans despise the older country, as fictions produced by any “broken-down tradesman, the scheming adventurer, the wandering mechanic, [and] the Manchester and Birmingham agent” (Irving 61). Irving contends that core hostilities produced between feuding countries “originate in the mischievous effusions of mercenary writers, who, secure in their closets, and for ignominious bread, concoct and circulate the venom that is to inflame the generous and the brave” (66). England, submits Irving, blindly accepted these accounts, failing to apply the same intellectual scrutiny that made them a nation of philosophers and that produced accurate surveys of exotic lands to the United States.

As I have stated, “English Writers on America” is primarily addressed to Americans. In this capacity, it serves as a letter of encouragement to his colleagues; Irving attempts to soothe the fever stoked by the merciless British press and to assure the United States that “it is not in the opinion of England alone that honor lives, and reputation has its being. The world at large is the arbiter of a nation’s fame...” (65). A bit later, he asserts, “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” (Irving 67). Without offending the citizens of Great Britain, Irving places his confidence in the United States. Ultimately, he desired reconciliation, so that Americans will never need to “cast back a look of regret as we wander farther and farther from the paternal roof, and lament the waywardness of the parent that would repel the affections of the child” (Irving 69). That he maintains great admiration for the English, though, is evident in the conclusion of this sketch, which emphasizes the positive qualities of the English and where he recommends a policy of pacifism for the United States so that the inter-continental injuries are not increased by answering scorn with scorn.

While “English Writers on America” works toward restoring harmony between the two countries, Irving dedicates “John Bull” exclusively to evaluating the British. In fact, he uses an analogy of their own design to do so, namely the title character, a fictitious, self-created British stereotype; what this caricature offers us is yet another window into the political agenda of Washington Irving. It seems to me that the work emerges in two parts. To educate those in his audience who are not acquainted with the figure and, I submit, to lend credence to his later analysis, Irving begins by summarizing the qualities that the English believe themselves to possess: tenacious loyalty, a jovial disposition, generosity to a fault, a preoccupation with the country’s welfare, and a touch of pride—generally “a good-hearted, good-tempered old fellow” (Irving 394). The second section of the short story, Irving’s own thoughts on the current condition of Great Britain, takes on some legitimacy, then, after Irving “proves” that he has a grasp on how the British view themselves.

There is no distinct separation between the two parts of “John Bull”; the division becomes clear only when the beginning of the depiction is compared to the end. By the conclusion of the sketch, Irving has shifted from being descriptive to being prescriptive, from objective generalizations to subjective analyses. It is the second half that is of interest, because it displays his attitudes toward Great Britain more clearly than the first portion. Irving portrays England as experiencing a period of uncertainty after several generations of honored stability. Irving hints that the plight of this majestic island nation stems from a difficulty to adapt their traditional institutions, life-styles, and military power to the changing conditions of the modern world. Irving’s concern manifests itself in the story in the striking symbol of John Bull’s house, a venerable country mansion that has almost outgrown itself. Consider his description of the stately building:

It has been built upon no regular plan, but it is a vast accumulation of parts, erected in various tastes and ages. The centre bears evident traces of Saxon architecture, and is as solid as ponderous stone and old English oak can make it. . . . Additions have been made to the original edifice from time to time, and great alterations have taken place; towers and battlements have been
erected during wars and tumults: wings have been built in time of peace. . . . (Irving 397)

In microcosm, this model follows the development of the nation of Great Britain, starting even before the Norman invasions.

Special attention is given to the wing of the building that houses the family chapel, a passage that sheds some light on Irving’s view of the state of English religion. It is with a sharp edge that Irving discusses the primary reason for the existence of the Church of England, John Bull’s desire to compete with the “many dissenting chapels [that] have been erected in his vicinity, and several of his neighbors, with whom he has had quarrels” and who are “strong Papists” (398). Hence, John pays the considerable expense of keeping a chaplain on his payroll, one who is a well-fed and agreeable country gentleman and who is willing to support any and all of John’s opinions.

Like the aged parson, there are others supported through the magnanimous charity of Mr Bull. We witness “groups of veteran beefeaters, gouty pensioners, and retired heroes of the buttery and the larder are seen lolling about its walls, crawling over its lawns, dozing under its trees, or sunning themselves upon the benches at its doors” (Irving 400). In addition to these useless dependents, John has the care of the two sons, one of whom sullenly sulks in the taverns he frequents unless murmurs of reform surface, in which case he stokes up his fiery temper and lashes out against all such proposals for change. The other son, a young military officer, embraces all of his father’s decisions with a pledge to defend the old man from all dissidents, including the outbursts of his brother. For his own part, John Bull finds himself laden with worries over his growing debts. Also, time has sapped him of physical prowess; he no longer wields his cudgel with force. In former times, he settled his neighbors’ feuds with direct intervention. Now he must content himself with solving his own domestic struggles.

Clearly, Irving jabs at the English in “John Bull,” yet his writing is free from malice. Instead, he fashions his analysis out of concern for the future of a nation he respects highly. That Irving desires continued prosperity for Great Britain is evident in his advice to the United States in “English Writers on America” discussed above, for there we witnessed his hope that the American public would look to the English as a model. Rubin-Dorsky phrases it this way, “The voice is that of a younger generation’s praise for parental fortitude and endurance . . . the primary value of the mother country for the New World imagination” (81). There is the notion that “although he was a thoroughly New World man, Irving nevertheless wanted John Bull’s mansion to remain intact” for it was of “powerful symbolic import for America of the indestructibility of English society” (Rubin-Dorsky 82) and, therefore, had a psychologically soothing effect for a nation feeling lost and vulnerable.

Still, Irving recognizes that the first step toward solutions is to accurately identify the problem, and, therefore, it is with little softening that he names the English abuses as he sees them: a government paralyzed by its own size and saddled with the responsibilities of obsolete dependents, likely the leisurely aristocrats, a religious tradition hollowed by political claims, a waning military presence in the world, and the self-inflicted wounds of competing dissident factions. Irving suggests that “in short, John [read England] has such a reverence for everything that has been long in the family, that he will not hear even of abuses being reformed, because they are good old family abuses” (402). This vision of England compliments the appraisal of the United States rendered in “English Writers on America.” Irving finds the former to be a praiseworthy exemplar, albeit a bit tarnished, and the latter to be “a country in which one of the greatest political experiments in the history of the world is now performing; and which presents the most profound and momentous studies to the statesman and philosopher” (61), a rising nation that could benefit immensely from the experience of the other. This relationship between the United Kingdom and America, then, constitutes Irving’s fond feelings toward his own nation in a background of respect for the established traditions of the other.

In looking at The Sketch Book, we have applied the criteria suggested by Jane Tompkins, that we examine a text within the framework of how it shapes and is shaped by its surrounding culture. It has become clear that Irving did not write in a societal vacuum but that he reflects the anxieties of a postheroic generation, both in his response to the republican vision and in light of his own personal losses. The Sketch Book, then, served as a means of self-assurance, and in doing so soothed some of the concerns present in his audience. In his essay “Identity in British America,” Michael Zuckerman discusses the impossibility of transplanting one culture to another, for:

the past could not be brought back intact, and the transformation of traditional society could not be arrested so easily. Archaic ideals could be
carried across the Atlantic and reconstituted in America from the models in people's minds, but such deliberate recourse to tradition was, at bottom, the antithesis of tradition. The rich particularity of the past could not be remade from models. . . . Traditional ends had therefore to be achieved under novel circumstances by novel means. In the exigencies of existence three thousand miles from kings and archbishops and in the cause of serving customary ideals, the colonists improvised a variety of institutional arrangements that had no parallels in their communities of origin. (117)

As this new set of values extended through the War of Independence and then into the nineteenth century, there is little doubt as to why the postheroic generation felt insecure, for they were still attempting to define what it meant to be American. What Irving and America witness in *The Sketch Book* is that "the only way to secure a comparable stability [to that of Great Britain] is to create it at home, to redefine and realize it in specifically American terms" (Rubin-Dorsky 87). Paralleling the national quest for security, Irving touched on the needs of his culture and, in doing so, generated a work that shared their sentiments.

WORKS CITED


The Baker Man

The Baker man
spoke bitter
words.
He came to our
door
each day
with a loaf of
stone ground
bread
and a bosom
full of obscenities.
Anger swelled in
him
like rising
yeast
turned rancid.
We nodded our heads
to him
politely
in silence
and paid the man.

Who, I wonder
will pay the
price
for silence
when this man
dies,
cheated of the
bread of life,
whole wheat
loaves,
the body of
Christ.

Grace Sikma-Pot
What didn't appear in this month’s issue:

“Eve’s decision to eat the forbidden fruit, for instance, was made on the basis of emotional appeal, and you know the consequences!”

“If you talk too much about Jesus Christ, or are habitually reading your Bible in front of him, or are always going to Gospel meetings, your husband could begin to feel about Christ the same way he would feel about a man with whom you were having an affair.”

“Submission never imprisons you. It liberates you, giving you the freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authority.”

“Let your schedule be flexible so that you will be available to meet your husband’s needs at night, in the morning, or in the middle of the day.”

Above excerpts and diagrams from: