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Troubling Our Heads about Ichabod: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” Classic American Literature, and the Sexual Politics of Homosocial Brotherhood

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ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN MEN WERE SCOPOPHILIC SPECTACLES, PROJECTED ONTO vast social screens where they were perpetually scrutinized by innumerable punitive eyes. The intensity of these combined reformist glares reached their zenith during the reign of Andrew Jackson. Emerging in 1820, Washington Irving’s short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” presages certain thematic elements of Jacksonian manhood and the simultaneous resistance to and complicity with it and other gendered ideologies on the part of certain antebellum authors.¹

I locate Ichabod Crane, the hapless protagonist of Irving’s famous story, within an antebellum literary tradition of inviolate men—figures such as James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo; Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fanshawe, Minister Hooper, Owen Warland, Giovanni Guasconti, Dimmesdale, and Coverdale; the constructed inviolate selves of Henry David Thoreau and Frederick Douglass; Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Tom; and, at a much greater temporal though not thematic remove, Herman Melville’s Billy Budd—who articulate the intense anxieties that surround the contested site of American manhood. In light of several recent studies of the bachelor figure generally (notably Katherine V.

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Snyder's) and in Irving specifically, the inviolate male provides an interesting new dimension of the category, most pertinently in terms of the self-conscious deferment of desire, given that the bachelor is more commonly understood as a figure of bounteous desire with no clearly directed, socially responsible aim.²

The inviolate male, in his alienated relationship to both heterosexuality and fraternity, allows us to consider these compulsory social aspects of nineteenth-century American life. Since it is no longer unusual to discuss reproductive heterosexuality—when considered as, in Michael Warner's view, "repronarrative"³—as a compulsory demand of capitalist citizenship, one might also imagine that, given their widely documented sheer social pervasiveness, same-sex intimacies would now be taken as a given in studies of the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, however, a diverse array of critics, commentators, and theorists continue to treat nineteenth-century homosociality as transgressive. I do not mean to challenge or denigrate this work, from which I have learned so much and which inspires me, as a gay man and a literary critic. Despite multiple critiques from feminist and queer scholars, however, fraternalist fantasies continue to proliferate not only in treatments of nineteenth-century American literature but also in certain men's studies and queer theory texts, which would otherwise certainly seem like unlikely allies.⁴ Hollywood film adaptations of classic American literature also reinforce fraternalist biases. Literary criticism, men's studies, queer theory, and mainstream films have all displayed a willingness to celebrate homoaffectional bonds while ignoring the evidence of the *compulsory* nature of homosocial ties, the recurring literary interest in treating the homosocial as a field of competitive cruelty, and the abject status of the isolate outsider who has not been assimilated into male collectives. While my work appears to run counter to the zeitgeist—as exemplified by works like Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which bemoans the dissolution of American communities even as it points ways to their revival—I wish to make very clear that my intention is not to offer a typically American romanticized paean to classic rugged individualism.⁵ Rather, my interest is in isolate and often endangered persons' responses to the powerful and mutually exclusive demands of two mythic American cults: community and individualism. It is precisely the impossibility of fulfilling both cults' demands simultaneously which informs the response of inviolate manhood.

In this article I offer a close reading of Irving's story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." My analysis considers its treatment of the figure of the solitary Ichabod Crane in light of recent interpretations of the story as representative of powerful bonds between men. I emphasize the way in which Woman is figured as an uncannily mysterious force that traps Ichabod into compulsory heterosexuality and consider the ways in which the story pits isolate, inviolate manhood against fraternity. In addition, I analyze the recent film version of Irving's story and two other film adaptations of classic American literature in order to broaden and support my claims about the ongoing fetishization of fraternity. I then track the uses of these paradigms in cultural studies. Finally, I offer a theory for the preponderance of the myth of homosocial brotherhood and consider the myth's implications.⁶

Troubling Our Heads about Ichabod

In *American Sympathy*, Caleb Crain highlights the mention of John André in Washington Irving's ghost story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," claiming that the real ghost inhabiting this story is that of the executed Englishman André, who was hanged for treason for assisting the traitorous Benedict Arnold and inspired, in the very officers who had to see to his execution, an "imprudent fondness," as Crain puts it. For Crain, "John André represents sympathy . . . a principle higher and more appealing than nationality, an ideal to which America as a nation aspired—the disinterested fraternity of men. . . . In John André's story are the seeds of many themes . . . : the power of sympathy . . . romantic friendship between men, writing as a vehicle for men's affections for one another, the conflict between sentiment and authority, and the peculiar fate of all these things in America."⁷

I am grateful to Crain for emphasizing the overlooked significance of André's ghost. As a textual figure, André synthesizes several important themes in the story, including the interest in the ineradicable marks of history and ties between European and inchoately American men. As the 2003 telefilm *Benedict Arnold: A Question of Honor* makes clear, the relationships among André, Benedict Arnold, and George Washington embody a particular understanding of war between nations as the violent disruption of ardent ties between men, just as it reaffirms the ongoing cultural interest in such ties in its remarkably tender depiction of the love between Arnold and Washington. In this regard, Irving's

self-conscious inclusion of André's ghost could not be more relevant to a discussion of nineteenth-century American culture generally and homosociality specifically. Nevertheless, I find it problematic that, in order to make this point, Crain's revelatory study overlooks or de-emphasizes certain powerful elements of Irving's memorably lonely, brooding story, whose whimsicality of tone makes its depiction of the erasure of Ichabod Crane even more terrifying: its critique of the homosocial; its figuring of the ostensible hero Crane as an isolate, excluded other, vanquished by the forces of male competitiveness and hostility. In my view, Irving's story, rather than being haunted by the specter of male sympathy, is written to expose its limits and even its absence. Like the story of John André, Irving's story is a narrative about the killing of one man by other men. It is the story of Ichabod Crane's murderous removal from the ranks of the homosocial sphere by a fraternity deeply *interested* in maintaining its own purity.⁸

Is Crane's murder more than just a metaphorical flourish on my part? Is Crane literally murdered at the end of "Sleepy Hollow"? In his fine study of Irving, Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky writes that Ichabod "is forced to flee . . . adopt a new identity," endorsing the conventional reading of the story that Crane leaves Sleepy Hollow to pursue his new identity as a politician in New York, which Rubin-Dorsky calls "a fitting conclusion to Ichabod's career."⁹ But this commonly held interpretation is a compensatory myth designed to soothe the reader who might be troubled by the terrifying fate of Ichabod Crane. Specifically, the certainty with which critics aver that Crane will have a life outside of Sleepy Hollow—after his encounter with the Headless Horseman—ignores the fatal ambiguity of and authorial ambivalence over Crane's fate. Perhaps I can be accused of wanting to eat the cake I have given myself, but in my view, whether or not Crane does indeed pursue the politician's life after Sleepy Hollow or really is killed by the Headless Horseman—that is, Brom Bones in disguise—he is indisputably murdered in narrative terms, ejected from the fictive landscape that housed him only grudgingly in the first place.

The story offers two possible readings of Ichabod's fate after the encounter with the Horseman. In the penultimate paragraph, we are assured that it "is true that an old farmer," having gone to New York, came back with the news that "Ichabod Crane was still alive; that he had left the neighborhood, partly through fear of the goblin . . . partly in mortification at having been suddenly dismissed by the heiress."

Ichabod, according to the old farmer, becomes a lawyer, a politician, an electioneer, a newspaperman, and then a judge.

But in the last paragraph, the narrator tells us that “the best judges of these matters”—that is, “the old country wives”—maintain up to the present that Ichabod was “spirited away by supernatural means.” With astonishing swiftness, in the very next clause of this sentence, Ichabod is reified as legend: “and it is a favorite story often told about the neighborhood around the winter evening fire.” “The unfortunate pedagogue” returns as the ghost who, it is believed, haunts the decaying remains of the “deserted” old schoolhouse.

I see no reason to endorse the old farmer’s view over the old wives’. And what’s more, the narrator inclines toward the old wives’ view, since they are the “best judges” in such matters. To accept the old farmer’s view of the events is to know for sure that Katrina Van Tassel, “the heiress,” dismissed Ichabod, which we do not. *Something* occurred between her and Ichabod, but the narrator, pressed to reveal it, exclaims, “Heaven only knows, not I!” (352). The rationalist response to the supernatural intervention that the old wives posit—that no such supernatural thing could have occurred—is no more appropriate to the tale’s enigmatic refusal to assign a clear, explicit fate to Ichabod than the old wives’ tale. Yet the old wives’ view—seductive though it is—is not, in the end, any more (or less) plausible than the politician myth. They don’t know for sure what happened to him either. The only “fact” we have is that Crane has been removed from Sleepy Hollow. An examination of the events that led to his removal is revelatory.

The lanky loner Ichabod Crane, smitten with Katrina Van Tassel, a Dutch farmer’s daughter, is driven out of the town—or murdered—as a virtually direct consequence of his pursuit of Katrina. The fate of Ichabod confirms the narrator’s piquant aside: “His path had . . . been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches brought together, and that was—a woman” (337).¹⁰ Katrina exudes the “drowsy, dreamy influence” of the supernatural elements that characterize Sleepy Hollow, which “abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions” (330). These occult references to ghosts, goblins, and witches situate Woman as an uncanny intrusion in the otherwise routine, untroubled existence of men.

Katrina occupies the fancy of others beside Ichabod: “the numerous rustic admirers, who beset every portal to her heart, keeping a watchful

and angry eye upon each other, but ready to fly out in the common cause of any competitor." Ichabod competes against not one man but the entire homosocial sphere: "a host of fearful adversaries" (340). The homosocial sphere is starkly defined here as a system that encircles Woman while promoting mutual, rivalrous enmity yet can rally men united to the cause of the annihilation of the threat of the single individual.

Chief among these competitors for Katrina is the "Herculean," "broad-shouldered and double-jointed" Brom Van Brunt, a.k.a. Brom Bones, vast of frame and spirit—and, with his "strong dash of waggish good humor," fiendishly likable even in his massive threat to poor Ichabod (340–41). Stealthy Ichabod abstains from explicit male rivalry—having heard Brom's threats, he is "too wary to give him an opportunity" to make good on them. But the homosocial realm itself wages war against Ichabod. Irked by Ichabod's "obstinately pacific system," Brom "draws upon . . . funds of rustic waggery" and enlists members of his "gang of rough riders" in making Ichabod "the object of whimsical persecution" (343): Brom and his gang bash Ichabod at every turn. The story pits isolate Ichabod against "Brom Bones and his gang!" (as he and his "three or four boon companions, who regarded him as their model and at the head of whom he scoured the country, attending every scene of feud or merriment for miles around" are called [341])—in other words, isolate manhood against the homosocial sphere.

It is worth noting that, right before Ichabod comes across the "fearful tree" marked by the memory of John André, the narrator observes that Ichabod "had never felt so lonely and dismal" (353). In fact, both the tree that signifies André and his fate and Ichabod's painful isolation anticipate the wrath of Brom Bones, who will momentarily, in the guise of the Horseman, wreak havoc on Ichabod. Herein lies my central disagreement with Crain's view: John André's story does not signify male sympathy in this story. Rather, it serves as the historical reminder of the homosocial sphere's capacity for literally murderous violence against one who stands apart from it. To remove the textual significance of André's ghost to the story—as Crain, in my idiosyncratic view, does—is to render it denatured. (Crain primarily discusses the relationships among André and his circle; the disjunct between the ardent nature of the historical homoaffectional ties Crain skillfully uncovers and Irving's despairing fictional treatment of them is my chief interest

here.) Ichabod comes across a bridge, “the identical spot that the unfortunate André was captured, and under the covert of those chestnuts and vines were the sturdy yeoman concealed who surprised him” (353–54)—surprised him and killed him. André and Ichabod suffer the same fate, at nearly the same hands.

A winking aside all but reveals Brom’s complicity in Ichabod’s disappearance or, more likely, murder: “Brom Bones [who] shortly after his rival’s disappearance conducted the blooming Katrina in triumph to the altar, was observed to look exceptionally knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laughter at the mention of the pumpkin, which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell” (358). In triumph, the embodiment of the power of the homosocial sphere—a murderer (such is the suggestion) with a huge grin—Brom Bones brings his bride to the altar. The homosocial triumphs with him.

The representation of rivalry between Ichabod and Brom *and* his gang resists a Fiedlerian reading.¹¹ It also enlarges a possible Girardian-Sedgwickian reading—which would pit Brom and Ichabod against each other in the battle for Katrina, thus forming a model of triangulated desire¹²—in that Ichabod battles the homosocial *sphere*, not one man. And Katrina, often depicted as “the coquette,” might be said to be allied to the homosocial, which makes her an agent in the contest of desire and not merely its battleground. The narrator deplors her witchlike ways: “Oh these women! these women! Could that girl have been playing off any of her coquettish tricks! Was her encouragement of the poor pedagogue all a mere sham to secure her conquest of his rival?” (352). Considering that the capturing of Katrina’s heart is depicted throughout in martial terms—“a man must battle for his fortress at every door and window . . . a man who keeps sway over the heart of a coquette is indeed a hero” (342)—it is interesting that Katrina may have her *own* plan of conquest, deploying her uncanny womanly arts to ensnare Brom and eject Ichabod, the implication being that she is aroused by the spectacle of male competitiveness in which Ichabod is annihilated.

If Katrina is indeed complicit with Brom Bones’s plan, an interesting dimension to the campaign against Ichabod opens up. The headlessness of the Brom-operated Horseman may be seen as Katrina’s symbolic victory over Ichabod—which would figure Brom Bones as the agent of *her* desires. As Anne Billson writes: “a severed head [is] a symbol of

castration, hence the Symbolist movement's fondness for femmes fatales like Judith and Salomé. Bram Dijkstra, in *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, writes that 'woman's lust for man's severed head, the seat of the brain, "that great clot of seminal fluid" Ezra Pound would still be talking about in the 1920s, was obviously the supreme act of the male's physical submission to woman's predatory desire.'"¹³ Although we have no way of knowing precisely what Katrina said to Ichabod before he storms off from the Van Tassels' party, the narrator's lamentations over her possibly devious behavior corroborate the tale's associations between Katrina and the uncanniness of *Sleepy Hollow*. When Ichabod makes his way home before his fateful encounter with Brom-the-Horseman, "it was the very witching time of night"—the temporal domain of witchlike Katrina (352). He is in *her* sphere of power—and the violence that ensues can be seen as either a tribute to her or the fulfillment of her stratagems. Deploying the power of the homosocial to vanquish one man, Katrina becomes a castrating sorceress, a Circe turning men into animals who prey on one another, the decapitating woman like the Old Testament Judith. Most strongly, the scene of Katrina's (likely) dismissal of Ichabod at the Van Tassels' dance corroborates a reading of Katrina as the New Testament Salomé. Herod Antipas's niece, Salomé requests the head of chaste exile John the Baptist as a reward for her dancing. Similarly, Katrina requests the head of a chaste exile, Ichabod, within the spectacle of dance. By spurning Ichabod, Katrina would be asserting her own desires within the homosocial sphere. In the tale, then, we have a system—generally ignored by critics—in which an isolate male is pitted against both the homosocial *and* Woman. Irving therefore assigns Katrina considerably more agency than women are generally given within the Fiedlerian schema—even if he also keeps her firmly entrenched within the essentialist tradition of Woman as duplicitous, Eve-like seducer, the ultimate misogynistic reading.

If Brom is Katrina's messenger—her hit man—what exactly does he, in the guise of the Headless Horseman, thereby present to Ichabod at the story's climax? Is Ichabod forced to gape at the spectacle of his own decapitated—that is, castrated—manhood, his failed heroism, his inability to perform successfully in the game of heterosexual conquest and male rivalry? It would then be little wonder that Ichabod disappears after glimpsing his own headlessness, fleeing the terrifying recognition of his own male lack. There may even be something worse than

castration that the Horseman suggests to anxious Ichabod. Rubin-Dorsky finds that Ichabod may in fact be more traumatized by seeing “the projection not merely of loss, but of absence”: “Unconsciously, he fears that . . . he has no core of being, merely a void where his selfhood—or manhood—should be.”¹⁴

My suspicion, however, is that such readings amount to a blaming of the victim—in this case, turning the bashing of Ichabod by a brute oppressor into a psychomachia in which Ichabod must wrestle with his own impotency or soullessness. It is also to deny, dismiss, or ignore the burst of genuine violence with which Ichabod is dispatched, from Sleepy Hollow and possibly from the world: “[Ichabod] saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, and in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod endeavored to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash—he was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider, passed by like a whirlwind” (356–57). Properly for someone bashed, Ichabod is left to lie in the dust, as his assailant races past him, unconcerned. The blow to the head is unmistakable physical trauma, not a psychological conundrum. Its “tremendous crash” reverberates with its possibly fatal force. Readings, then, that assign to Brom/the Headless Horseman the task of exposing—on Ichabod’s behalf—Ichabod’s gendered failures erase the excruciating specificity of Irving’s description of the actual, rather than merely symbolic, violence perpetrated *against* Ichabod. Such readings (quite unwittingly, I am sure) collude with Brom Bones and the narrator, for, as one critic puts it: “The sympathy of the narrator, though it often touches Ichabod Crane, rests finally with Brom Bones. Crane has to go.”¹⁵ We should ask *why* Crane has to go.

The next morning Ichabod’s hat, lying next to the shattered pumpkin, is found, but there is no trace of the pedagogue (357). His disappearance remains unsolved. Before the funeral meats are even baked, Hans Van Ripper burns Ichabod’s books, including Cotton Mather’s *History of Witchcraft*, a *New England Almanac*, and Ichabod’s love poetry to Katrina. It’s a ritualistic blaze of cleansing—something right out of the legend of Sodom and Gomorrah. Adding to the note of the town’s purgation, the townspeople draw this conclusion at the following Sunday church service: “Ichabod had been carried off by the galloping Hessian.” Does this theory provoke sympathy for Ichabod Crane? “As he was a bachelor and in nobody’s debt, nobody troubled his head any

more about him. The school was removed to a different quarter . . . and another pedagogue reigned in his stead” (358). Just like the ever-recurring figure of the Handsome Sailor in *Billy Budd*, the “pedagogue” is a generative species; another pedagogue fills Ichabod’s “stead.” The order of isolate men replicates itself; presumably so too does the horrific struggle between men and the man apart from men. I want to suggest that, even if Brom and his compatriots and the whole town do not trouble their heads about Ichabod Crane, perhaps it is time that *we* did. We should at least be as “knowing” about Ichabod’s fate as Brom Bones and his ilk are.

In some ways, the supernatural conclusion (matching that of the old wives) at which the town *first* arrives—that the Hessian spirited away Ichabod—is the first interpretation of the story that exculpates Brom Bones for his actions. Yet it also brings up an aspect of Ichabod to which I have been alluding, one that informs his inviolate isolation: his potential queerness. Given the homoerotic tradition of the relationship between pedagogue and pupil, it is tempting to read iterated phrases like “lonely pedagogue” as coded references to Ichabod’s queer sexuality.¹⁶ The figuring of lonely Ichabod as deviant exculpates Brom and his gang for their “boorish practical jokes” against him (343). It makes their pogrom against him ethically sound—they are ridding Sleepy Hollow of Ichabod’s queer threat. And Ichabod’s inviolate nature corresponds to the program of expulsion in the story. The story ingeniously preserves the hygienic purity of Ichabod’s sexuality by making sure that he is expelled from Sleepy Hollow before any sexual contact with Katrina—or anyone else—occurs.

The townspeople offer a remarkably homoerotic resolution to Ichabod’s relationship to the Horseman, in which the Hessian captures Ichabod and keeps him for himself. At least two queer interpretations present themselves: Ichabod becomes the inverted heroine of a fairy tale, “rescued” by the phantom Hessian from the clutches of Brom, the brute who has impersonated him. Or—though this reading will no doubt strike some as outlandish—this might be an occluded reference to *Brom’s* desire for Ichabod, his wish to sweep Ichabod off of his feet: Ichabod, after all, is likened to “that stormy lover Achilles” (342), a highly suggestive allusion given the tradition of viewing the Achilles-Patroclus relationship as a homosexual romance.¹⁷ Irving’s deliberate categorization of Achilles as a lover is significant. In Homer’s depiction, Achilles is the younger and passive partner, Patroclus the aggres-

sive and active lover (though the tradition has gone through several interesting permutations throughout the course of European and American literature).

In many respects, *Brom* truly is the lover of this tale, and Ichabod the object of his affections.¹⁸ Brom is obsessed with Ichabod. Tracking him, stalking him, plotting against him, ensnaring him, forcing Ichabod to confront the full magnitude of his interest in him, Brom relentlessly prowls Ichabod's embattled domain, literally forcing himself upon the pedagogue at the climax. His annihilation of Ichabod performs a cathartic function, eliminating the focus of his violently and even perhaps lustfully consuming obsessions. Ichabod, who maintains little interest in Brom's fervent attentions and wishes nothing more than to be freed from them, is in this way similar to the Dimmesdale who desperately attempts to flee Chillingworth, the Billy Budd who frees himself, through only seemingly inadvertent murderous violence, from obsessed Claggart. If Brom Bones represents a queer threat to Ichabod, the story suggests that the homosocial sphere—here represented by Brom and his ever-present and loyal gang, a male collective—is on some level unified by homosexual desire instigated yet left unsatisfied by the inviolate male, a situation reproduced exactly in Melville's *Billy Budd*. Two forms of interrelated yet mutually alienated queer identity—Ichabod's inviolate isolateness, Brom and his gang's homoerotic hazing program—vie for dominance even as they deflect each other's energies.

Brom and his gang's persecution of Ichabod makes him a queer figure even if he himself is not allied to any clearly defined sexuality. As James V. Catano, in a study of the self-made man in American life, writes: "Gender behavior can be seen as a rhetorical act that keeps arguing itself out in an attempt to clarify its own dynamics. Positive appeals to masculinist aggression or mutual brotherhood, for example, are regularly aligned with ongoing psychological anxieties that if a man is not correctly masculine, then he must be something else. The most encompassing negative appeal is to association with the feminine, and American cultural myths draw heavily and continuously on the desires and fears that surround the resulting stereotypes."¹⁹ Ichabod's interest in hanging out with old wives and *also* his preference for Katrina's company over Brom's both represent his rejection of the fused offers of masculinist aggression and mutual brotherhood embodied by Brom and his gang and confirm the story's suspicions that this interloper must

indeed be something else. If, as Hélène Cixous has argued, decapitation represents woman's position in patriarchal culture, just as castration represents male anxieties over female sexuality, we must consider the gendered connotations of Ichabod Crane's head injuries.²⁰ Physically vulnerable, stalked, embattled, and endangered, Ichabod occupies the subject position of woman in this tale; his associations with the feminine, which ensure his perception as a queer figure, are concretized by the attacks on his cranium from Brom and his gang. And if—as Stanley T. Williams, in his famous biography of Irving, reports—rumors that Irving was to marry “the original of Katrina Van Tassel” are true, it is very likely that Irving, who himself never married, identified with Ichabod in ways that might account for the preponderance of tales of ruined heterosexual love and homosocial violence in his work.²¹

I do not wish to argue on behalf of the hidden queerness of all isolate and inviolate men in American literature—only that the demarcated zone of isolate inviolability *allows* for queer potentiality in characters like Ichabod. The threatening homoeroticism of the Ichabod-Brom relationship, the ever-looming specter of the fulfillment of heterosexual romance between Ichabod and Katrina—both represent forces of sexual complicity that encircle Ichabod but which, through his death or disappearance, he manages to elude. Even if he really does go to New York to become a politician, there is no mention in this possible denouement of a romantic or sexual partnership of any kind. Ichabod's inviolate isolation is a force field that—while ineffective at shielding him from blows to the head—keeps the “secret,” however open, of his sexuality. It keeps his purity intact. It also allows us to see that *he* is as much the site of competing desires as he may be the vessel of them.

The Fraudulence of Fraternity: *Sleepy Hollow*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and the Hollywood Entrenchment of Homosocial Brotherhood

Three recent film adaptations of classic American literary works disturbingly alter, revise, reimagine, or obliterate altogether the dark visions of male enmity within literary texts. In so doing, each also “corrects” its protagonist's imperfectly realized sexuality—or lack thereof—through a violently explicit depiction of the protagonist's now unquestionable heterosexuality. These films make painfully clear how closely linked idealized homosociality is to the reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality and the erasure of queer potentiality.

Although it removes the “Legend” of Irving’s title from its own, *Sleepy Hollow*, Tim Burton’s 1999 movie elaboration of Irving’s tale (Andrew Kevin Walker wrote the screenplay) puts that legend right back in. While Irving all but explicitly states that Brom killed off Ichabod—and that the Headless Horseman was merely Brom’s evil prank—*Sleepy Hollow*’s Horseman is an actual supernatural monstrosity, the violent, vengeful ghost of a “Hessian mercenary, sent by German princes to help the English keep Americans in line.” It’s 1799, and this monster has returned from the dead to rampage around Sleepy Hollow and wreak vengeance upon his assassins. Enter Ichabod Crane—*Constable* Ichabod Crane. Crane is no longer a pedagogue but instead an alienist garbed in gadgets of scientific wonder and acuity. The film not only has him solve the mystery of the Horseman but also has him united by movie’s end in heterosexual bliss with Katrina. “Welcome to a new century,” he tells his beloved, as they step into the New York City dawn of nineteenth-century America.

In addition to scrupulously heterosexualizing Ichabod, the filmmakers also do away nearly completely with the rivalry between isolate Ichabod and the Brom-led homosocial sphere. There is a weary winking nod to Irving’s narrative when a Headless Horseman figure who hurls a flaming pumpkin (suggestive image) at Ichabod is revealed to be Brom underneath. But the film dispenses with its only halfhearted depiction of this rivalry. In one sequence Brom fights off the *real* Hessian ghost—and Ichabod rushes in to lend assistance. Together they battle the violent apparition, united in their retaliatory cause. Brom is killed, then Ichabod faints. The film *allies* Ichabod and Brom *against* the Hessian. In so doing, *Sleepy Hollow* dispenses with the themes of alienation, isolation, loneliness, and male enmity that course through Irving.

Roland Joffe’s mesmerizingly awful 1995 film version of *The Scarlet Letter* (the credits list the screenplay, by Douglas Day Stewart, as “freely adapted” from Hawthorne’s novel) fascinatingly warps the themes of failed male friendship and inviolate manhood so crucial to Hawthorne. The film almost entirely dispenses with and diffuses the sadomasochistic relationship between vengeful Chillingworth and guilt-ridden Dimmesdale, utterly reshaping each character. The learned if craven physician becomes a witch-hunting tyrant out of *The Crucible*, and Dimmesdale becomes an artful heterosexual seducer, utterly remote from the wracked man Hawthorne envisioned.

The novel painstakingly tracks the course of the Dimmesdale-Chillingworth relationship as it devolves into the ultimate “violation of the sanctity of the human heart,” as Dimmesdale puts it. Hawthorne forces us to question male friendship, the ease with which Chillingworth infiltrates Dimmesdale’s life. The horror within the Dimmesdale-Chillingworth relationship lies in its sustained duplicity and cruelty. Though incapable of mitigating the desperate loneliness of each man, the intimacy they develop is absolutely crucial to the harrowing commentary on male enmity in the novel. Yet the film keeps the men entirely separate, exploring neither the homoerotic side of their sustained physical proximity to each other (in the novel Chillingworth moves in with Dimmesdale) nor the anguish between them. In keeping them physically isolate, the film obfuscates the genuine isolation with which Hawthorne imbues each man.

Part of the terrible joke at the heart of Dimmesdale’s character is that he is beloved by the townspeople yet has no real intimate. The film inverts this joke: the townspeople become increasingly vicious toward Dimmesdale, but he establishes close personal ties to a Native American community, of whom we only see men. These Native Americans (I am unable to make out which tribe the film depicts, so hazy are the details), a kind of exotic martial brotherhood that Dimmesdale can summon when in jeopardy, valiantly rush to his defense at the film’s climax, saving him, Hester, and Mistress Hibbins (who has now been imprisoned for witchcraft) from death. Originally associated with Chillingworth, a former captive of the “Indians,” as Hawthorne simply calls them, the film’s Native Americans make Dimmesdale the nucleus of their atomic realm of homosocial allegiance and intimacy.

The film’s Dimmesdale becomes, then, a New Age sensitive white man with friends of color, much like the hero of Kevin Costner’s comfortingly revisionist *Dances with Wolves* (1990). The bloody climax of the film allies Dimmesdale and his new Indian comrades against the harsh Puritan elders, whom they graphically butcher and annihilate. Dimmesdale and the Indians truly are blood brothers. The movie’s Indians become a sign for Dimmesdale’s enhanced, improved virility. Existing to protect their white male friend, the Indians confirm the film’s interest in transmuting the failed male friendship of the novel into a seemingly politically correct homosocial brotherhood. Yet the film’s idealization of male bonds hinges on racist sensibility—the Indians simply exist to lend sexual and gendered credibility to Dimmesdale.

Similarly, the film's invention of Mituba, Hester's young African-American female slave, fuses a program of normative sexuality with a racist sensibility. The relentless campaign to heterosexualize Dimmesdale incorporates soft-core porn footage of this African-American woman's autoerotic abandon.

There is a deep gendered instability in the novel's depiction of Dimmesdale. At one point, he says to Hester of uncanny Pearl, of whom he is terrified, "Pacify her if thou lovest me!"²² It is hard to believe that Dimmesdale could have ever summoned up the courage to enter into a sexual relationship with Hester; Hawthorne keeps any eros between them well beyond the temporal and experiential zone of the novel. Yet in its most stylized, elaborate sequence, the film painstakingly depicts their sexual coupling. It intercuts shots of simulated sex between Dimmesdale and Hester with images of a newly sexually awakened Mituba taking a warm, sensual bath. As Mituba bathes, a red bird, the film's symbol of sexual liberation, flits about. Mituba caresses long, phallic candles, which she plunges into the water.

The film employs a woman of color as an affirmation of—a seal upon—the successfully achieved heterosexual legitimacy of the couple, just as it uses men of color to bolster Dimmesdale's gendered normalization. The particularly brutal yet offhand way the film dispatches Mituba—beaten to death for her allegiance to Hester—starkly conveys the film's disregard for her. Associating Mituba with animal imagery (the red bird) to signify sexual ecstasy and using the Indians' martial arts for climactic purposes (the annihilation of the Puritan villains) corresponds to historical theories and uses of the racial other as, on the one hand, uncannily, animalistically sexualized and, on the other hand, uncannily, animalistically barbaric. The film's thoroughgoing revision of Hawthorne's disturbing themes, then, manages to include racist iconography that rivals D. W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation*—all ultimately for the purposes, as we have seen, of assuring us that Dimmesdale is clearly viewed as a normal heterosexual man with homosocial ties.

One of the greatest of film adaptations of classic American literature, Michael Mann's 1992 *Last of the Mohicans* nevertheless distorts some of the themes of isolate, inviolate manhood and male friendship in its source material. In *Mohicans*, Cooper's famous white-man-raised-by-Indians, Natty Bumppo, maintains a deep intimacy with his Mohican "father" and "brother," Chingachgook and Uncas. The film passion-

ately honors the homosocial love between these men. Yet it presents the relationship between Natty and Duncan Heyward, a British soldier, as deeply antagonistic, whereas Cooper depicts it as respectful, honorable, loyal, and affectionate. Natty speaks to Heyward with “solemnity and warmth of feeling,” saying to him: “You have shown a spirit that I like.”²³ The film’s creation of enmity between Natty and Heyward demonstrates that the insertion of male enmity into an adaptation can be just as problematic as the de-emphasis of it. Enmity between Natty and Heyward helps the film make Natty’s position to the British more antagonistic as it affirms the rarefied love he has for his Mohican comrades. The film, then, uses Natty’s friendship with the Mohicans as proof that Natty is a properly PC white man, contemptuous of imperial oppressors, cleaving to the crunchy, holistic lifestyle of Native Americans.

Although an infinitely better film than Joffe’s *Scarlet Letter*, *The Last of the Mohicans* shares its queasy idealization of ties between white men and men of color. The queasiness lies in the manner in which these men of color are deployed—as signs of the modern, enlightened hipness of the protagonists. The Mohicans exist, as well, to lend Natty’s martial prowess an uncanny, “spiritual” power—one that allows him to be both virilized and soulful. The film also entirely removes the fey, non-hypermasculinist presence of the Christian musician David Gamut—there is no place in Mann’s forest for soft masculinity. (Like Ichabod Crane, whom he strikingly resembles, Gamut is a non-normative male rendered starkly isolate from the province of male friendship, to say nothing of heterosexual desire, a characterization on Cooper’s part both radical and reactionary. Mann’s film does to Gamut what Brom Bones does to Ichabod: eject him from homosocial bonds and narrative itself.)

The film’s chief distortion of Cooper’s masculine themes, however, lies in its ruthless heterosexualization of the famously chaste Natty. Cooper’s Natty treats heterosexual love as an alien legend: “I have heard,” he said, “that there is a feeling in youth, which binds man to woman, closer than the father is tied to the son. It may be so. I have seldom been where women of my colour dwell; but such may be the gifts of nature in the settlements.”²⁴ The film’s Natty hastily opens up this natural gift, romancing Cora, the heroine whom Cooper depicted as the crossbreed daughter of British general Munro and a West Indies woman. The film, however, entirely erases the racial complexities Cooper presented, making no mention whatsoever of Cora’s problem-

atic “rich blood,” mentioned in the very first chapter of the book.²⁵ Not only a sexual but also a racial program of purification—Natty and Cora are now both racially pure and coherently heterosexual—dominates the film. The fanatical devotion to its own erasure of Natty’s inviolate manhood causes the film to disrupt, dispute, and dissolve the racial, sexual, and gendered complexities of Cooper’s original vision.

These films narrativize the process whereby studies (such as Irving’s, Hawthorne’s, and Cooper’s) of an inviolate male isolate, estranged from both men and women, can be, with frighteningly skillful ease, transformed into a vision of fraternal unity and heterosexual closure. This fraternalist bias is prevalent in hegemonic pop culture. It is also surprisingly evident in theory and criticism from a remarkably heterogeneous array of thinkers. We must question why this inclination to idealize male relations—and render abject the isolate—exists.

Belonging to the Club

“The American founders aspired to create a republic of men,” writes Mark E. Kahn.²⁶ American society, founded as it is on the idea and the ideal of a masculine republic, has privileged fraternity and homosocial relations throughout its history. The fetish for fraternity can be contextualized as a subset of the larger American obsession with community, with privileged, exclusive, utopian spaces. I wish to point out—to track, assemble, and compare—the fraternalist biases in certain texts in literary criticism, men’s studies, and queer theory. I do not mean to suggest that some collusive plot to maintain fraternalist order exists among these commentators, many of whom are extremely hardworking and thoughtful contributors to the ever-growing fields of gender and sexuality studies, among others. Yet impelling my argument is a sense that there *is* nevertheless a disturbing facet to this discursive reliance on models of positively valued homosociality. To be as explicit as possible, it seems especially troubling to me that queer theory, a discipline one might imagine would be more suspiciously critical of homosociality, given its historical uses as the logic of heterosexist capitalist citizenship, has occasionally been complicitous with the establishment and maintenance of fraternalist biases.

It is tempting to view fraternity—brotherly bonds, friendship, secret groups, private clubs, special orders, and so forth—as a sybaritic antidote to institutionalized marriage. For Jonathan Rauch, institution-

alized marriage functions to transform males into domesticated and reliable caregivers.²⁷ In the words of historian Nancy Cott, “Marriage was seen as a relationship in which the husband agreed to provide food, clothing, and shelter for his wife.”²⁸ The sheer separateness of the separate spheres, as historians like Peter Gay and D. Michael Quinn remind us, had many effects. One of them was to render heterosexuality deeply exotic; the opposite sex was deeply otherized.²⁹ As Gay writes: “[Nineteenth-century America] fostered, even institutionalized, the segregation of young men and women . . . and idealized the differences. The two sexes . . . seemed to have distinct natures.”³⁰ Should male bonding—with its promise of a return to the liberation of boy culture—be viewed, then, as an escape from the conscription into domestic responsibility and a relief from the uncanny and perhaps even terrifying mysteriousness of the opposite sex?³¹

If it is clear that men were anxious about compulsory marriage, it is less clear that male friendship historically constituted an escape from such social demands. Recent work has also suggested that homosocialization was as normalizing and compulsory a practice as marriage. Another effect of sex segregation was to make the company of one’s own sex deeply familiar and even inescapable. As Quinn describes it: “Nineteenth-century America was extremely homosocial, homotactile, and homoemotional. In other words, most American males looked to other males for intense emotional bonding as well as for social activity and physical touch. . . . The pervasiveness of nineteenth-century America’s ‘homo-culture’ of same-sex dynamics would be alien to many of us.”³² The central question I wish to beg, then, is: How transgressive can homosocial brotherhood actually be, when it was *itself* a socially engineered, deeply endemic aspect of culture? A deep yet underexplored tension exists between models of utopian homosocial brotherhood and the widespread compulsory fraternity of nineteenth-century life.

In certain critical treatments of American literature, homosocial brotherhood—a more refined, sociohistorical account of the Fiedlerian model of male friendship—becomes the organizing principle of studies of male relations in the nineteenth century. For example, Laurie Robertson-Lorant, correcting queer readings of Melville that, in her view, mistakenly assign a homosexual agenda to the author, writes: “What Ishmael and Queequeg [represent] is not necessarily overt, covert, or latent homosexuality, as Leslie Fiedler argued . . . but transgressive paradigms of homosocial brotherhood and male intimacy

that challenge and seek to subvert the soulless, misogynistic competitive construction of masculinity dictated by the new market capitalism and industrialization.”³³ Whereas in Fiedler male friendship could be seen as a misogynistic flight from woman (in that Fiedler’s work could be interpreted this way and has been) and a form of arrested development, in Robertson-Lorant it is retooled as utopian homosocial brotherhood, devoid of the threat of male rivalry and enmity, associations with misogyny, and the taint of homoeroticism.³⁴ A hygienic utopianism characterizes the construct of homosocial brotherhood—male bonding emptied of the potential for messy complications, such as misogyny, sex between men, and the potential for internecine strife.³⁵ I think these critical hygienics present us with interesting problems in terms of the valorization of the homosocial *as* brotherhood in and beyond literary theory.

In his best-selling work *Iron John*, Robert Bly sets out to treat the wounded psyches of the “soft men” that our culture, in his view, has been producing in the wake of feminism. In this reverie-like account of Native American ritual, Bly longingly mourns the absence of such nourishing rites of male bonding in American life: “Among the Hopis and other native Americans of the Southwest, the old men take the boy away at the age of twelve and bring him *down* into the all-male area of the kiva. He stays *down* there for six weeks, and does not see his mother again for a year and a half.”³⁶ As a critique of Bly, I can offer no better response than Calvin Thomas’s: “Some versions of ‘men’s studies,’ especially those influenced by the mythopoetic school of Robert Bly, are spectacularly uninformed by and hostile to feminism [while others seem like a] defensive reaction against feminism. They seem motivated by the desire to ameliorate the condition of men while ignoring or minimizing the oppression to women.”³⁷

Thomas’s critique easily deflates Bly’s wildly masculinist rhetoric, almost laughably transparent as an attack on the pre-Symbolic maternal, but it is shockingly applicable to Richard Mohr as well.³⁸ In his study *Gay Ideas*, Mohr proposes that “male homoerotic relations, if institutionalized in social ritual, provide the most distinctive symbol for democratic values and one of its most distinctive causes . . . [it] promotes the likelihood that equality as an ideal will be had by all. . . . [In fact,] democracy will be firmly grounded only when male homosexuality is seen and treated in social ritual as a fundamental social model, when male homosexuality is, as it is some cultures, treated as a

priesthood.”³⁹ Echoes of the Whitmanian homosexual republic reverberate in Mohr’s declaration. But unlike Whitman, Mohr is not the poet of the woman as well as the man, or even of the “man,” as his insistence on a gay male priesthood as a definitive social model makes clear. What unites such seemingly distinct figures as Mohr and Bly is their mutual insistence on social models that privilege male homosocialization and the erasure of women. I do not mean to suggest that I do not believe that there is a much-needed place for homosexual and/or homosocial spaces in national life, yet I remain no less deeply suspicious of the explicit exclusivities in the Mohr gay priesthood than of those in the Bly kiva.

Collectivized fraternalist rhetoric informs the work of other queer thinkers. In his book *Dry Bones Breathe*, about new developments in AIDS-era gay identity in the wake of protease inhibitors, Eric Rofes writes: “For much of the last two decades, many surviving gay men of all antibody statuses were reduced psychologically, spiritually, and sometimes physically to dry bones, languishing in the hot sun, awaiting destruction or revival. In the aftermath of decimation, we’ve heard the bones connecting again, and witnessed muscle and skin again covering the skeleton. The dry bones have had life breathed back into them and now stand as giant tribes, eager to move forward, awaiting the new era.”⁴⁰ Moved though I am by Rofes’s work, I remain puzzled and disturbed by a set of unexplored questions. The necessary exclusivity suggested by terms like “giant tribes”—can everyone belong to them? does everyone want to?—remains an enigmatic aspect of “postgay” identity as Rofes describes it.

An interesting tension between an inclination toward brotherhood and an inconsolable acknowledgment of its limitations exists in *The Crisis of Desire: AIDS and the Fate of Gay Brotherhood*.⁴¹ An unfinished work, this collection of writings by the late activist Robin Hardy was edited for publication by Hardy’s friend David Groff. Between Groff and Hardy, a most interesting dialogue about brotherhood in gay thought can be overheard. Although Groff writes that the mercurial Hardy “was not cut out to work with other people in groups” (xv), he goes on to say that “in the harsh landscape of death, gay warriors were building tribal campfires, sexual circles providing warmth and light. [Hardy] saw gay men not just getting off but getting together, engaged in a primal connection central to the functioning of the tribe and the spiritual calling of gay men. For Robin, sexual desire was the electricity that bonded us like brothers” (xvi).

As in Rofes's work, giant tribes of gay men loom here. What strikes me as especially odd, however, is the extraordinary resemblance of Groff's spiritual gay campfires to *Iron John* manhood-reclamation forest-bound rituals. Hardy's own view of fraternity is much more densely complicated. He acknowledges that within fantasies of brotherly love and fraternal love, we can find a "paradigm we might healthily embrace," "recognition," "the dear love of comrades," a brotherhood in which we fraternally encounter the "vicissitudes of life and time like the stone towers of Brooklyn Bridge standing side by side and stalwart in the river." If we can hear overlapping echoes of Mohr and Bly in Groff, we hear Whitman and Hart Crane in Hardy. Hardy refuses to leave fraternal fantasies uncritically unchecked, stating that the portrait of the fraternal bond in myth and history is "problematic" (184). He also acknowledges that a history of male enmity impedes the establishment and maintenance of brotherly love (185).

The queer interest in the fraternal rather too easily coalesces into an interest in tribalization. For Michael Warner, as Leo Bersani quotes him in *Homos*, queer people are "characterized by determined 'resistance to regimes of the normal.'" (Yet, as Bersani dryly adds in his critique of Warner's view, "we have all known men who lust for other men while otherwise feeling quite comfortable with 'regimes of the normal.'")⁴² For Warner, despite his avowed trouble with normal, the idea of the queer community is used as a normalizing structure of queer life. In *The Trouble with Normal*, Warner writes: "Queer scenes are the true *salons des refusés* where the most heterogeneous people are brought into great intimacy by their common experience of being despised and rejected in a world of norms that they now recognize as false morality."⁴³ For me, that last clause—"that they now recognize as a false morality"—emphasizes community in a provocative but troubling way: You too can join this salon—as long as you have the right attitude. This queer salon may be full of outcasts, but once assembled, the outcasts can think as one. What happens to those despised outcasts who do not tow this party's line? Do they have a place in this community?

There is an almost terrifyingly linear progression—a telos—from the ideals of homosocial brotherhood to fraternity to community. Fraternities, tribes, salons, kivas, priesthoods, communities, republics—each assumes the shape of an ark. If my critique seems to come down especially hard on queer theorists, I have been misleading. My critique of fraternity in queer texts is meant not to impugn queer commentators

but instead to demonstrate how widespread fraternalist biases yet remain. To put this another way, if *queer* commentators no less than others can promulgate fraternalist fantasies of homosocial brotherhood, then fraternity truly is a dominant ideology that poses no mean defense against efforts to dismantle it.

As many critics appear to argue, republics, whether they are made up of the privileged or of the calumniated, are predicated on the idea of exclusivity. The isolate, the embodiment of the excluded, has been eschewed on behalf of the community—the Lawrentian view displaced by the Fiedlerian. D. H. Lawrence wrote in his classic study of American literature: “The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer.” And this is the crucial next line: “It has never yet melted.”⁴⁴ We have, however, insisted upon the melting—the melting of men, in terms of the agenda of this essay, into one fraternal mass in the pot of male friendship—ignoring the frightening isolation of the “essential” American soul, if Lawrence’s view has any credence, in order to celebrate fraternity (to say nothing of the women left to confront the ineluctable concentration of homosocial male power). Left behind, as well, is the contemplation of the “killer” instincts of this isolate figure—his resistance to community.

What has been lost in the emphases on same-sex friendship and fraternity—metonymic of the larger fetishization of community *as* American life—is the sheer number of loners, losers, outcasts, pariahs, and orphans who roam, unclaimed, our literature and culture. *Moby-Dick*’s Ishmael—floating, alone, after the destruction of the *Pequod* and all others aboard it, as the ship the *Rachel*, sensing an orphan in the water, approaches him—is a powerful symbol of isolate manhood.

To clarify, I have not intended to replace one fetishized model with another; I do not mean that we should now celebrate the ruthless loneliness of the classic rugged individual, a mythic model that has often been critiqued as representative of misogyny and misanthropy.⁴⁵ My concern here has been the isolate individual’s determined resistance to assimilation into regimes of the normal, but I also wish to demonstrate that the “normal” may not always be predictably defined: what is transgressive to some may be deeply, inescapably normal to others. However futile, resistance has been offered by some intransigent figures. Ichabod Crane’s fate reveals a great deal about the collective’s response to resistance.

Ichabod Crane—ever described as an interloper, the one who must go, the one whose absence receives little attention—is the foreigner in the world of *Sleepy Hollow*. As close as anyone who shares the same pigmentation as the other principal characters could come to be, as a Connecticut Yankee who disrupts the unities of culture and community in this Dutch enclave, he is the Other. As such, he maintains a defiant relationship to the social order of his day. Dana D. Nelson describes it in almost sci-fi terms: “White manhood worked as a transistor for a chain of political, economic, class, and professional displacements between ‘white’ men. It circuited political and economic inequality as individual failure, and routed frustrations . . . into ‘healthy’ market and professional aggression.”⁴⁶ The foreign Ichabod intransigently refuses to acknowledge his failures as such, much less internalize them by accommodating the vigorous, “healthy” aggression of Brom and his gang.

Ultimately the defiant refusal on the part of inviolate men to see their foreign strangeness as their *own* failure is their most singular and even heroic contribution to the multivalently assimilationist programs of their day. As an unrepentantly weak link in the chain of collective white manhood, Ichabod allows us to think about the full implication of fraternalist biases throughout the heterogeneous texts we have been examining. Ultimately fraternity is the last and most resilient stronghold of embattled white manhood, what keeps those circuits from breaking.⁴⁷ Though obviously and painfully a decidedly asymmetrical structure of persecution aligns them, non-normative white men can be otherized just as easily as the racial other; non-normative heterosexual men suffer the same potential ostracism as do homosexual men (to use those sexual categories very freely here). To call Ichabod heroic is not to suggest that he is terribly likable or appealing or without disturbing aspects. Much like the young, pre-Egypt Joseph in *Genesis*, he is off-putting, remote. Yet nothing can prepare us for or excuse the profound cruelty of the punishment either Joseph or Ichabod endures at the hands of their “brothers” for their singular differentness.⁴⁸

Overall, Irving’s deep ambivalence over Ichabod, his mingled respect and contempt for him, emblemizes antebellum authors’ depiction of inviolate men, figures of mingled sympathy and consternation. Yet the engineered extinction of Ichabod Crane is rendered with a vociferous force that powerfully suggests that an extremely audible discontent, rather than a “half-articulate” one, can sometimes be heard within antebellum letters.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. Although Andrew Jackson synthesizes some of the major trends and tensions endemic to national fantasies of gender in antebellum America, it is important to view the national imperative of Jacksonian manhood as only one of several discrete forces that determined and shaped manhood in what has been called the “postheroic age,” the years in which the early promise and cohesiveness of the new republic waned and new forms of civic, gendered, and sexual identity proliferated. For a discussion of postheroic America and authorship, see Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky’s *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1–31.

2. The bachelor has been established as a powerfully interesting figure in recent critical work. In her excellent study *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Katherine V. Snyder writes: “Bachelor trouble was gender trouble. While they were often seen as violating gender norms, bachelors were sometimes contradictorily thought to incarnate the desires and identifications of hegemonic bourgeois manhood” (3–4). Bachelors have a “wide variety and sheer intensity” of “erotic and identifactory energies” (5). It is precisely the bachelor’s association with directed erotic energies—even if they remain unconsummated and multivalent—which distinguishes him from the inviolate male of my formulation. In “Irving, Masculinity, and Authorship” (*American Literature* 74 [March 2002]: 110–37), Bryce Traister writes that in antebellum America, “the bachelor was included in the category of normal masculinity, so long as bachelorhood was a temporary stage rather than a permanent destination” (113); in many regards, Ichabod Crane “embodies the bachelor as masculine failure. . . . The literary bachelor thus provided a link between the language of masculine failure and the domain of marriage and heterosexuality, whose successful consummation were as important to the performance of masculinity as the achievement of economic success” (117). No less than the inviolate male, the antebellum bachelor had a fluid identity, as Vincent J. Bertolini writes in “Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s,” *American Literature* 68 (December 1996): 707–37. This very fluidity was intransigent, given the various programs on the part of the sexual reformers of the 1830s onward (among others) aimed at turning antebellum men into “self-interpellating subjects of sexual ideology . . . oriented towards a socially stabilizing sexuality” which precluded “the transgressive triple threat of masturbation, whoremongering, and that nameless horror—homosexual sex” (708–9). Michael Warner has also written recently on Irving and the bachelor; see “Irving’s Posterity,” *English Literary History* 67, no. 3 (2000): 773–99.

3. See Warner, “Irving’s Posterity,” 786. By “repronarrative,” Warner refers to the cultural narrativization of the compulsory reproductivity of capitalist citizens.

4. Feminist thinkers like Lora Romero, Robyn Wiegman, and others have provided salutary correctives to the fetishization of homoaffectionalism. See Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Robyn Wiegman, “Melville’s Geography of Gender,” in *Herman Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Myra Jehlen (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 187–99. More recently, Dana D. Nelson discusses the relationship between the construction of male friendship among white men and nationalism in *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

5. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 24–25.

6. For a critique of the rise of masculinity studies generally, particularly of treatments that establish parity between modes of manhood through the commonality of gendered anxiety regardless of the differences in social power and equity among them, see Bryce Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,” *American Quarterly* 52 (June 2000): 274–304.

7. Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 13.

8. I hope that it is clear that, despite my disagreements with it, I am not trying to impugn Caleb Crain’s elegant study, which I examine only briefly here.

9. Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift*, 110, 118.

10. Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” in *The Sketch Book* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 329–60; hereafter cited in text.

11. In his depiction of Ichabod’s relations with Brom and his gang, Irving refuses the Fiedlerian view of a mythic male bonding that allows the protagonist to escape “the gentle tyranny of home and woman,” in that he is estranged from normative heterosexuality and thus “a man apart from men.” See Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), 179–214.

12. René Girard and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick privilege the triangle as the graphic schema for erotic competition between men—two men warring over the same woman. See Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 1–52, for his elaboration of “triangulated desire.” For Sedgwick’s version, which builds on yet reformulates Girard’s theory into a model for understanding male-male relations in a homophobic culture, see her *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), esp. 1–27. The schema of triangulated desire posits that *both* men have desires, occluded or otherwise, whereas, in my view, an inviolate male may offer no desire—or no clearly definable desire—to the rivalry. In addition, the inviolate male may be eluding both men and women—desiring to escape the system of desire and rivalry itself. My aim here is not so much to dispute the schema of triangulation, especially as Sedgwick so brilliantly retooled it, as to enlarge and/or problematize it.

13. Anne Billson, *The Thing* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 75.

14. Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift*, 214.

15. William L. Hedges, *Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802–1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 143.

16. I am thinking of the established relationship in classical antiquity between the *erastes*, the older man, and the *eromenos*, the boy who is his passive sexual partner.

17. In a fine study of classical education in England and manliness, Carolyn D. Williams tracks the homoerotic tradition of Achilles-Patroclus and its permutations over time: “Homer’s silence” has historically been interpreted as “an invitation for the initiated to read between the lines.” Aeschylus based his tragedy *The Myrmidons* on the assumption of a homosexual bond between the two warriors; Plato in the *Symposium* argues that Achilles must have been the passive partner, given his beauty and youth, though Achilles come to be seen as the active partner in later thought. If I am correct to view Brom as a violent Patroclus wishing to ravish—in unclearly defined ways—the quarry Ichabod, then Irving reverts to the Platonic reading of the story. See *Pope, Homer, and Manliness: Some Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Classical Learning* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 99–109.

18. The overall vigor of the tale telling would seem to ally itself with the lusty, vigorous Brom rather than the emaciated, spindly Ichabod. Irving appears to have found Brom irresistible even in the inchoate form of his brother-in-law's narrative. The story's outline was provided by Irving's brother-in-law Van Wart, "who had been dwelling upon some recollections of his early years at Tarrytown, and had touched upon a waggish fiction of one Brom Bones, who professed to fear nothing, and boasted of his having once met the devil on a return from a nocturnal frolic and run a race with him for a bowl of milk punch." The imagination of the author suddenly kindled over the recital, and in a few hours he had scribbled off the framework of his renowned story and was reading it to his sister and her husband. See Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. 1 (New York: Putnam, 1862), 448–49. The particulars within this semiotic banquet—wagging, racing the devil at night, milk punch—are irresistible in terms of a homoerotic reading of the story; an ominosness also attaches itself to "nocturnal frolics," if one reads Brom's actions as bashing. I find it interesting too that the solitary Irving read the story back to the heterosexual couple who conceived it for him.

19. James V. Catano, *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 9.

20. See Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" (1976), in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Robert Scheifler (New York: Longman, 1989), 488–90.

21. See Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 429–30, n91. There are distinct plot valences between *The Sketch Book's* suggestively titled "The Spectre Bridegroom" and "Sleepy Hollow." Irving's 1824 *Tales of a Traveller* contains stories that reimagine "Sleepy Hollow" themes, especially "The Bold Dragoon," which charts the failures of another interloper; "The Adventure of the German Student," in which a young bibliophile—shades of Hawthorne's Fanshawe—literally meets the woman of his dreams only to discover that she is dead; and "The Story of the Young Robber," which involves murdered bridegrooms and ferocious male groups.

22. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850; New York: Norton, 1988), 143.

23. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 229.

24. *Ibid.*, 265.

25. *Ibid.*, 19.

26. Mark E. Kahn, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

27. See Jonathan Rauch, "For Better or Worse," in *Same-Sex Marriage, Pro and Con: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Sullivan (New York: Vintage, 1997), 177, for a discussion of institutionalized marriage as a means of "civilizing" young, fraternalized males.

28. Quoted in Kahn, *A Republic of Men*, 6.

29. Certain nineteenth-century American texts make very explicit the uncanny nature of heterosexual relations in the nineteenth century. Cooper's *Pathfinder*—in which solitary cowboy Natty Bumppo has to learn about heterosexual desire through his pursuit of Mabel Dunham—is exemplary as a text that does not take as a given the "natural" relationship between the sexes.

30. Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 2, *The Tender Passion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 215.

31. E. Anthony Rotundo discusses the "free nation" of nineteenth-century American boy culture as "a distinct cultural world, with its own rituals and its own symbols and values. As a social sphere, it was separate both from the domestic world of women,

girls, and small children, and from the public world of men and commerce. In this space of their own, boys were able to play outside the rules of the home and the marketplace. It was a heady and even liberating experience." See *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 31.

32. D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 1996), 69, 107, 3.

33. Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 620.

34. A genuine tension continues to exist in treatments of nineteenth-century American homosociality between an acknowledgment of the possibility of homoerotic desire and the scrupulous differentiation between homosocial and homoerotic desire. "Most important were the cult of romantic friendship, the phrenological notion of adhesiveness, and the idea of passional social bonding," writes David S. Reynolds of nineteenth-century male relations in his study *Walt Whitman's America* ([New York: Vintage, 1995], 391). Yet Reynolds also writes that Whitman's "homoerotic themes have never been adequately placed in their nineteenth-century context"—i.e., never contextualized as products of nineteenth-century American Romantic male friendship. Betsy Erkkila, in an appealingly direct essay, writes that academics, among others in "positions of social and cultural power . . . are heavily invested in keeping Whitman's sexuality, and specifically his sexual love of men, out of any discussion of his role as the poet of democracy, and the American poet" ("Whitman and the Homosexual Republic," in *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, ed. Ed Folsom [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994], 154).

35. It should also be pointed out that not all social models that privilege homosocial brotherhood are as predicated on the evacuation of homoeroticism as Robertson-Lorant's. Paul D. Hardman ends his study of homoaffectionalism with a notably impassioned paean to the liberating potentialities of bonds between men in which homosexuality is incorporated as a vital component of the homosocial. Writes Hardman, "It is the tendency towards male bonding and homoaffectionalism which permits individuals to cooperate and work together for a common purpose, for the general good" (*Homoaffectionalism: Male Bonding from Gilgamesh to the Present* [San Francisco: GLB, 1993], 231). While moved by Hardman's expression of a fervent and pervasive cultural wish—that men would be allowed to "bond" freely and without constraint—I also remain critically suspicious of the impulses that drive the passionate hymns to utopian homosocial spaces—impulses that almost implacably insist on exclusivity even as they strive toward utopian unity. In a related vein, I am also disturbed by the ways in which fraternity—the hidden code of the homosocial—often obscures or obfuscates or pointedly precludes homosexual identity, love, desire, and/or practices.

36. Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 2–3, 14–15.

37. Calvin Tomas, "Reenfleshing the Bright Boys: or, How Male Bodies Matter to Feminism," in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, ed. Judith Keegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 61.

38. In Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, the male subject must enter the Symbolic patriarchal realm of language and reason and transcend the messy, unintelligible pre-Symbolic realm of the maternal. There is a powerful discussion of the misogynistic implications of this psychoanalytic narrative in Barbara Creed's essay "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 35–65.

39. Richard Mohr, *Gay Ideas* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 140–41.

40. Eric Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Harrington Park Press, 1998), 28.

41. Robin Hardy with David Groff, *The Crisis of Desire: AIDS and the Fate of Gay Brotherhood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); hereafter cited in text.

42. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2.

43. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 35–36.

44. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; New York: Doubleday, 1951), 73.

45. A thoroughgoing feminist critique of such individualistic figures can be found in Joyce W. Warren, *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

46. Nelson, *National Manhood*, 132.

47. A scathing critique of the privileging of fraternal white masculinity within queer culture can be found in “Where Has Gay Liberation Gone? An Interview with Barbara Smith,” in *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life*, ed. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed (New York: Routledge, 1998), 195–207. I appreciate commentators like Bersani and Tim Dean for offering brilliant and engagingly idiosyncratic perspectives on queer issues that do not fall predictably within fraternalist guidelines.

48. Karen Armstrong offers a superbly suggestive interpretation of the Joseph story in her study *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), 100–117. Irving suggests that Ichabod’s deepest erotic cravings are for non-normative gustatory rather than feminine objects; his eye is “ever open to every symptom of culinary abundance” (346); if anything, Katrina may simply be the potential conduit to all of the heavenly food at the Van Tassels’. The initial description of Ichabod semiotically conflates hunger, sexual desire, vulnerability, and an overriding barrenness: “To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield” (332). In our post–Matthew Shepard moment, I find the allusion to Ichabod as a “scarecrow” unbearably poignant. Whatever Ichabod Crane’s sexual predilections may be, his intransigent isolation makes him a figure of queer heroism: Ichabod remains “a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance . . . though he bent, he never broke” (341).

49. “Irving’s writings show how reproductive narrative exerts itself, often successfully, against a lot of half-articulate discontent. But it also shows that some half-articulate discontent has been audible for a long time. The conditions that have put the culture of reproduction on the defensive have a long history, as does reproductive ideology itself. In our own day, with more and more forms of surrogacy challenging the forms of reproductive ideology—from public schooling, to the social movement form, to lesbian parenting, to queer culture—the strenuous attack in the name of family values has targeted an extrafamilial intimate culture that we are still learning how to have. Perhaps we will learn to think of it as something other than surrogacy, to see in these conditions a future in which reproductive narrative will appear as an archaism” (Warner, “Irving’s Posterity,” 794).