

TIME AND LITERATURE

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CHAPTER 12

Historicism

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Here is a bit of history: the November 24, 1859, issue of the *New York Independent* features on its front page an article by the poet and abolitionist Theodore Tilton (today best remembered for suing Henry Ward Beecher for committing adultery with Tilton's wife), titled "Half an Hour at Sunnyside," an effusive account of Tilton's recent visit to the home of the aging Washington Irving.¹ The article reads like the nineteenth-century equivalent of a celebrity interview on *Entertainment Tonight*, as Tilton fawns over Irving like a teenage fanboy. He confuses Irving with the fiction he produced – "The quaint, grotesque old dwelling, with its old-fashioned gables, stood as solemn and sleepy among the trees, as if it had been built to personate old Rip Van Winkle at his nap"; asks only the most puerile questions – "which of your books do you look back upon with most pleasure?"; and takes the liberty of offering Irving an idea for "one more book" – a "reminiscence" of Irving's "literary friends." The article even concludes with an image of Irving sanctified by the glow of the sun: as Tilton takes his leave "the old man stood a few moments on the steps" while "a momentary burst of sunshine fell on him through the breaking clouds" (1). Over sentimental thought it may have been, in retrospect the image is oddly fitting: four days after the article appeared, Irving died.

In addition to its rather conventional sentimentality, what is perhaps most striking about Tilton's account of his visit is his view of Irving as a relic from a bygone era, remote from any immediate temporal concerns – hence the article's central interest in the fact that Irving has now ceased to write. Of course, Tilton inherited this view of Irving from innumerable other critics and readers, who from very early in Irving's career cast him as outdated, outmoded, and quaintly and charmingly out of step with the times.² This is a view that has persisted in American literary history until quite recently. One consequence of this view is that Irving can often appear to have very little to say about the pressing issues of his day – or ours. It appears not to have occurred to Tilton, for instance, to ask Irving

about slavery, including Irving's recent support for the presidential bid of John Fremont, which was public knowledge; about sectional division; or about John Brown. All of which is a little strange since these things were very much on Tilton's and most other Americans' minds in late November 1859, following the shock of the news of Brown's raid and his very public wait for execution. Indeed, adjacent to Tilton's interview with Irving in the *Independent* is reprinted a letter from Brown to a childhood teacher who had written to Brown in prison. The letter is just one of six articles in that issue alone about Brown, who was hanged the following week, just four days after Irving's passing.

Despite its spatial and material proximity to current events in the columns of the *Independent*, "Half an Hour at Sunnyside" seems otherwise curiously walled off from the present, as if sealed inside a time capsule. Hence Tilton's closing image of Irving, looking like "the same genial, generous, merry-eyed man at seventy-seven as [portraitist John Wesley] Jarvis had painted him nearly fifty years before." Tilton then adds, "I wish always to remember him as I saw him at that last moment" (1). In what follows, I want to take the unwitting conflictedness of this "last moment," to which I return, as a starting point for a more general consideration of time's conflicted relationship with historicism. Tilton's "wish" and his trouble with time, I argue, exemplify and therefore help illustrate some of the difficulties that a renewed attention to time has posed for entrenched historicist practices. Indeed, one way to account for the emergence of time studies – a "temporal turn" in literary criticism and time's emergence as an enabling critical concept in literary studies – is to recognize it as a challenge or corrective to historicist literary criticism's investments in (or encumbrances by) normative ideas about the temporality of history. Time, to put it bluntly, has been historicism's blind spot.

Washington Irving, it turns out, is a figure whose life and work are particularly well suited for this kind of examination of the relations between time, history, and literature – and not only because of his career-long status as a kind of living anachronism. Irving's literary output, perhaps more so than any other writer in the American literary tradition, deftly negotiated the often narrow avenues that divided history from fiction in the nineteenth century: he produced works of serious history (such as those mentioned earlier), fiction and fictional sketches, and works – most notably his first book, *A History of New York* – that comically interrogated the norms and strictures of his era's historiography – and ours as well. In addition, Irving's most famous story, "Rip Van Winkle," because of its peculiar and intricate historical and temporal entanglements, has become a kind of *ur-text* for the

temporal turn.³ For that reason, I also enlist "Rip Van Winkle" here. But rather than producing another reading of that story's endlessly fascinating handling of time, I focus on one version of its afterlife. Specifically, I consider Irving, who died in 1859, and "Rip Van Winkle," published in 1819, in relation to the Civil War – to place them *out of context*, we might say – as a way of thinking about the generative prospects of a literary history unencumbered by historicism's mandates and the difficulty of shedding those encumbrances.

Although it has a much older – and sometimes contested – genealogy, dating back at least to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I use the term "historicism" in this chapter broadly to designate a set of assumptions and procedures shared by a range of critical practices, not all of them identical, that together constitute a "historical turn" in literary studies. Those practices gained hegemony over the last few decades of the twentieth century and continue to hold sway in the twenty-first. They include what we might now call first-generation New Historicism – itself comprised of various, sometimes overlapping, strains, such as the New Americanist criticism, British Renaissance New Historicism, and the scholarship associated with the founding of *Representations* at Berkeley in the 1980s. They also include the canon revisionism and recovery of minority and women writers that began to flourish in the 1970s, as well as a vast body of more recent scholarship that simply takes for granted Fredric Jameson's famous injunction to "always historicize!" Despite substantial differences, what unites this work are, first, a belief that phenomena, including cultural expressions like the creation of art and literature, are best understood historically; second, a conception of history as a sequence of discrete eras each one unique in its own right; and third, an assumption that the moment of a literary text's production constitutes its self-evident historical context, the bedrock of its historicity. These assumptions, in turn, generate historicist criticism's basic view of literary texts (as embedded in history rather than self-contained artifacts whose meaning and value inhere only in their formal design); its methodological responsibility (to faithfully re-create and thereby attempt to understand the past on its own terms); and its contextualizing procedure (to assign texts to their proper historical moment, typically understood to be the time of their production). According to this view, to historicize and to contextualize amount to the same thing.

Historicist tenets have by now been so thoroughly absorbed into literary-critical practice that in some fields their acceptance has practically become a professional requirement.⁴ At the very least, a refusal to historicize, to place literary texts "in context," risks leaving one vulnerable to charges of

having committed a host of distinct but overlapping methodological and historiographical sins: ahistoricism, anachronism, presentism. The first of these involves being *insufficiently* historical and hence recalls the earlier critical practices – New Critical formalism and poststructuralist hyperformalism – that the return to history sought to correct by recovering the "historicity of texts" and thereby restoring social and political questions to the foreground of literary study.⁵ By contrast, the latter two offenses represent ways of being *wrongly* historical. Anachronism and presentism transgress against historical norms by failing to respect the past's otherness, instead imposing modern terms, concepts, and values on earlier periods, and thereby collapsing or flattening the distinction between one historical moment and another. Historicism, by contrast, promotes respect for historical difference as perhaps the foremost of all historiographical virtues.

Underwriting the set of assumptions about history and historical inquiry I have briefly sketched here is a conventional view of historical time as linear chronology, always advancing forward in steady, measurable units. These units – years, decades, centuries – mark the distance between one era and another; they represent the space and span of difference. They allow us to distinguish *now* from *then*. Of course, this conception of time might well seem unremarkable. It is, after all, for most of us a commonsense view of time, the naturalized time of secular modernity. Wai-Chee Dimock, for instance, has argued that our modern "sense of duration and the historical relations it permits" is governed by what she explains is a spatialized "Newtonian" (that is, mathematical and quantifiable) time that operates under the jurisdiction of number.⁶ Time is divided into a sequence of identical, sequential units, each one assigned a number that functions as a "receptacle" and performs a regulatory function: "The temporal axis," Dimock further explains, "becomes a series of synchronic planes, a series of numbered cross-sections. Events are assumed to be unified if they happen to fall on the same plane" (128). Thus, historicist contextualization, as Dimock puts it, "lock[s] a text into a brief duration, a numbered slice of time, as if that slice were a container" (128). In a similar metaphor, Dipesh Chakrabarty has described this container as a "bottomless sack" into which "any number of events can be" placed.⁷ Distinguishing between the "nonnaturalness" of history as a discipline and the "naturalism of historical time," Chakrabarty notes that the latter resides in "the assumed universal applicability of its method"; that is, "in the belief that *everything* can be historicized. . . . It is always possible," Chakrabarty says, "to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time" (36; emphasis

original). In the same way, historical time's secular character can be seen in the assumption, also universally applicable, that "independent of culture or consciousness people exist in historical time. That is why it is always possible to discover 'history' (say, after European contact) even if you were not aware of its existence in the past" (37).

Dimock and Chakrabarty represent two notable examples of how an interrogation of the seeming naturalness of modernity's secularized time perturbs historicist norms. Both explore non-Western modalities of time that challenge the authority of linear chronology. For Dimock, the expanded timescale she terms "deep time" features "irregular duration[s]" that "loosen up" (4) the borders, both temporal and geographical, established by fixed dates. For Chakrabarty, the "singular times of gods and spirits" (43) in Indian culture reveal some of the ways that a disenchanting (temporal) world can "set limits to the ways the past can be narrated" (51). These critics have been joined by a host of others working in a variety of fields, perhaps most prominently queer studies, whose interest in the untimely—that is, in nonsequential, asynchronous experiences of time—likewise confronts historicism's uncritical investment in normative accounts of historical time.⁸ This work has led, among other things, to compelling critiques of historicist practices of contextualization and periodization—critiques that, in turn, help reveal historicism's own fraught relationship to presentism and underscore its unwitting investments in historical progress.⁹

That is to say, despite its attempts to keep them at bay, presentism and progress nevertheless dog historicism and its policing of temporal boundaries. For instance, the otherwise commendable respect for historical difference (a correlate to the respect for cultural difference that emerged in concert with the rise of historicism) that motivates historicist inquiry remains present-minded insofar as it adopts a certain confident knowingness in relation to its objects of study. Despite its wish to return to the past "as it was" or to view a past era "on its own terms," the historicist critic cannot help but revisit the past with the benefit of knowing how things turned out. This form of presentism, although relatively benign, also takes for granted historical progress: from the vantage of a more advanced period, the historicist critic understands authors, texts, and other historical phenomena in ways that those authors and texts could not have understood themselves. Indeed, the ideological critique and symptomatic reading that have typically been historicism's stock-in-trade are predicated on just such a notion of historical advancement: the critic's now is not just *different* from history's then; it also knows more, knows *better*. In this way, historicist criticism adopts a posture that can verge on condescension or superciliousness.

Which brings me back to Theodore Tilton, whose fawning reverence and patronizing wistfulness toward Washington Irving are likewise tinged with condescension. In Tilton's view, Irving is a man who belongs to the past. Thus his "wish," as he says when taking his leave of the aging author at Sunnyside, "always to remember him as I saw him at that last moment." Tilton's wish bespeaks a certain desire for history that rhymes with historicism: he wishes to "lock" Irving (to borrow Dimock's language) into a particular moment of time, to consign him there permanently. Indeed, to Tilton, Irving looks at that last moment just as he did fifty years earlier: Tilton sees in him the young man whose portrait John Wesley Jarvis painted in 1809, not long before Irving published his first book, *A History of New York*. Tilton's Irving, in other words, is *ahistorical* a historical Irving, fixed and unchanging, associated then and forever with a distant past. Tilton even projects this static, historicized Irving into the future. His "wish" "to remember" him in that particular manner, after all, is proleptic: it looks forward to a time when that glimpse of Irving will exist as memory.

To put this another way, Tilton is so invested in Irving's near-obsolence, in binding him to an earlier era in history that has been superseded, that he can hardly see the living, breathing man standing right in front of him. In a similar way, historicist contextualization can condition, as much as it can help explain, what we do and do not see. That is to say, as much as historicism's understanding of context legitimizes, enables, or authorizes certain kinds of (lateral, synchronous) comparisons, its "numerical determinism" (Dimock 126) also restricts, forecloses, impedes, and precludes the apprehension of other kinds of (nonsynchronous, uncanny) resemblances. Something like this, I think, accounts for why Tilton does not seem to think about Irving in relation to current events. It is as though Irving needs to be protected, inoculated from the present, as carefully preserved as his study at Sunnyside, which Tilton describes as if it were a meticulously curated museum tableau, books and papers perfectly arranged, "the pen . . . laid precisely parallel to the edge of the inkstand" and "not a speck of dust upon carpet or cushion"—the ideal "poetic haunt in which a great author wrote his greatest works!" (Tilton 1).

Yet Tilton's and the *Independent's* careful partitioning, which associates Irving with a past that functions almost as a retreat from the tumultuous present, is betrayed by the article's many disparate, shifting, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting timescapes. Although Tilton begins with the distance between distinct moments in time, contrasting the morning prior to the visit with the afternoon the visit takes place, and the relative solitude of the region at the time of Sunnyside's construction with "now," he

then proceeds to register a host of other chronotypes. He highlights, for instance, the length of the visit (the half-hour of the article's title), the age of Irving's mansion (23 years), and the age of Irving himself (77 years). He observes the discrepancy between Irving's appearance and his age: he is "not so old-looking as one would expect who knew his age" — such that sequential time seems unreliable or deceptive. He refers to modern forms of time measurement, mentioning the "time-tables of the railroad" and the caretaking duties of Irving's nieces who always administer Irving's medicines "at the right time" so that he never has to "look at the clock" (Tilton 1). Much of the conversation about Irving's career and writing habits likewise focuses on temporal concerns: Irving wishes he had twenty more years so he could write his books over again. He describes to Tilton his typical working hours (morning until noon), but expounds on the temporal irregularities — what he calls the "capricious periods" — of his writing life. He says, for instance, that once he started to write he could rarely tell how much time had passed. But he also tells of a "long period" while Irving in Paris when he was unable to write at all. In contrast, he says that he wrote the *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* very quickly, even "more rapidly than" *Bracebridge Hall*, and while writing *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* he would sometimes "write fourteen or fifteen hours out of the twenty-four." These moments of rapid outpouring, when the writer's imagination is "aglow," as Irving puts it, are "an author's right time to work" (Tilton 1). But harnessing such energy also requires patience; the author must "wait" until the precious moments come. Even Tilton's fondness for Irving — it is, after all a *prematuro* nostalgia — is oddly asynchronous. And that final image of Irving that makes such an impression on Tilton itself operates through a temporal doubling: Irving looks to Tilton both old and young *at once*.

These other orders of time reveal the myriad ways that time might be measured or experienced: in terms of social change, aging, clock and calendar, memory and regret, the uneven rhythms of intellectual labor, and longing, just to name a few. Such temporal diversity — much of it experiential and affective — undermines the authority of normative time's mechanical, plodding regularity — and in doing so invites us to consider other ways of thinking about time's movement, about the relations between past and present (and future), and about texts' historicity. They invite, for instance, other ways of regarding the aging Irving. Had Tilton been more present-minded, for example, instead of so eagerly anticipating a settled, historicized view of Irving, he might well have viewed Irving's youthful look as a sign of Irving's continuing vitality. But one effect of consigning Irving to history as Tilton does, safely tucking him away in the past, is

that it renders him — and by extension, his works — rather anodyne. The "genial, merry-eyed" old man Tilton describes simply belongs to a different era, an era distinct, remote, and shielded from the contentious, turbulent world of 1859, the world that Tilton otherwise inhabited and engaged so passionately.

Tilton was among John Brown's most ardent supporters, for instance, after the failed Harper's Ferry raid. Yet the proximity of Irving's death to Brown's execution seemed for many people only to reinforce the discrepancy between the genial writer and the radical man of action. This difference extended to the ways their contemporaries regarded their respective passings. Brown's hanging was widely seen, especially by abolitionists, as an event directed toward the future — Brown as harbinger, Brown as meteor, Brown as "portent" of the Civil War (as Melville put it). In contrast, while Irving's death evoked only the same sort of nostalgia for a not-very-real past that Tilton evinced while Irving was still alive, Henry David Thoreau expressed this view most succinctly in his 1860 address on Brown. Brown's last days, Thoreau wrote, caused Irving's death to go "almost unobserved." "I shall have to read of it in the biography of authors," he adds wryly, relegating Irving to antiquarian history. By contrast, even in death Brown seemed to Thoreau "more alive than he ever was."⁷⁰

But in fact Irving was, in one sense, still very much "alive" following his death, alive not *despite* his noncontemporaneity — the conventional view that he was somehow out of step with the times — but *because* of it. That is, a common experience of the politics of slavery and the Civil War involved precisely the kind of untimeliness or historical dislocation that Irving had come to represent by the time of his death. Justine Murison has productively examined one version of this kind of "feeling out of place" in her reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Civil War writings. Tracing the intense responses inspired in readers by Hawthorne's failure to adopt the "correct" sort of emotional posture toward the war, Murison reveals the workings of what she calls "affective history." Affects — like loyalty and disloyalty — Murison shows, can "seep out of, not just into, the historical archive." As an example of what she calls "affective history," the reception of Hawthorne's Civil War writings allows us to see that "history itself is a process of both embodiment and displacement, of being both here and elsewhere simultaneously."⁷¹ Thoreau provides a related example of such a historical feeling. In his first address on John Brown a few months earlier, Thoreau highlighted the asynchronous quality of the principles that animated Brown's efforts, describing him as an "old-fashioned man" linked to the original Puritans. Brown "died lately in the time of Cromwell," Thoreau says, "but

he reappeared here."¹² There are obvious echoes, in both of these examples, of "Rip Van Winkle," the quintessential American tale of noncontemporaneity. Asleep for twenty years, Rip reappears in his village only to discover that he is out of place, that his own here and now is out of sync with everyone else's. Rip thus embodies precisely the kind of process Murison describes: "being both here and elsewhere simultaneously."

Because of the tale's – and Irving's – popularity, Rip's experience of historical dislocation quickly became a useful cultural trope, deployed in all sorts of contexts to identify that which was seen as backward, behind the times, outdated, or pathetically anachronistic. So, for example, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, North Carolina became nicknamed the "Rip Van Winkle state" for maintaining outdated economic policies, making the state appear to be sound asleep, missing out on the modern progress going on all around it. More to the point at hand, the trope was frequently deployed by abolitionists before and during the Civil War to describe politicians and others whose attitudes and positions seemed to be behind the curve of history; those contemporaries who failed to perceive the plain writing on the historical wall. An 1862 editorial in the *Independent* (New York), for example, appropriately titled "Then and Now" (and quite possibly written by Tilton who by that time was editorial assistant to Beecher), mocks the American Tract Society for belatedly issuing an antislavery book, featuring decades-old speeches by Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, causing the editor to feel "like that dreamless old Rip Van Winkle that did not know the most familiar scenes."¹³ A September 1865 article by James Redpath, also in the *Independent*, titled "A Rip Van Winkle in Office," employs the trope to denounce Southern resistance to black suffrage.¹⁴ Belaboring the analogy, Redpath imagines Rip awakening from his sleep, making his way to South Carolina, changing his name to Perry, and getting himself elected governor.

These metaphors are interesting for a number of reasons. For one, they help trace the rich afterlife of a literary text and remind us that, while other historical phenomena, like events themselves, remain bound by the moment of their happening, literary texts traverse historical time. Circulating in other times and in other places, literary texts *always* exceed their containment within discrete historical periods. Moments of consumption – that is, often in periods long after the text's original publication – are contexts too – a fact that challenges complacent assumptions about which contexts ought to be privileged as sites of textual meaning. For another, literary texts do not just register historical moments; they also shape our experiences of them. The temporal complexities of those

experiences might also challenge our assumptions about the time(s) of history. This is what I find fascinating and instructive about the "Rip Van Winkle" trope: its deployment reproduces the historicizing gesture that the story's handling of time otherwise seeks to unsettle. I conclude with an explanation of this admittedly presentist claim.

Toward that end, a final example of the Rip trope occurred in early December 1862. Following Lincoln's ill-conceived proposal for a constitutional amendment that would compensate states that abolished slavery before 1900, William Lloyd Garrison penned a furious response (reprinted in *Frederick Douglass's Paper* the next month) in which he accused President Lincoln, first, of incompetence as a writer – specifically, his "crudeness, incongruity, febleness, and lack of method" and his inability "to write in a style required by the dignity of the position, good sense and a respect for the critical judgment of the world" – and, second (and more importantly), of being "demented – or else a veritable Rip Van Winkle, who, for the last thirty years, has been oblivious to everything going on in the country!"¹⁵ What I find interesting here is not so much Garrison's fury – which he put on display weekly for thirty-four years – but his astonishment, his utter incredulity; Garrison simply could not believe that anyone thinking rationally, much less someone entrusted with the presidency, could seriously entertain such a proposal. To do so, Garrison says,

is something more deplorable than lack of common sense; it closely borders upon hopeless lunacy. It will assuredly excite the astonishment of all Europe, the derision of the Southern traitors, and the pity of every true friend of freedom. It would in our judgment, warrant the impeachment of the President by Congress as mentally incapable of holding the sacred trusts committed to his hands.

In this state of bafflement, Garrison turns to mental diagnosis, rather than rational argument. Incredulity, it appears, is not a condition from which one can generate any effective or productive political action; impeachment for lunacy, after all, is surely an even less serious proposal than Lincoln's amendment. Of course, one might consider Garrison's bafflement and bemusement here to be simply rhetorical posturing; he feigns astonishment in an attempt to make his political opponents (in this case Lincoln and anyone else over the past thirty years who supported gradualist schemes of emancipation) look foolish. But for purposes of my argument, I want to resist the ironic reading and take seriously Garrison's bewilderment. For even if his suggestion of impeachment is just comical exaggeration, I do not think there is much doubt that Garrison really does find it incredible –

particularly by 1862 — that any of his fellow citizens would continue to cling to such outdated, overworked, immoral ideas about emancipation. This is a style of argument, or an affect, that I suspect many of us are familiar with in political debates, particularly after the election of 2016 (when proposals of presidential impeachment for lunacy have once again appeared).¹⁶ It is the feeling that makes so funny the old airplane joke in which, on landing, the pilot announces over the PA system, “Welcome to [insert region of derision], please set your watches back fifty years.”

We might describe this as a historicist joke — and a historicist feeling. That is, it is a joke whose humor and a feeling whose power depend on a tacit acquiescence to the historicist orthodoxies this chapter has described: that ideas belong to periods, that dates measure those periods, that time moves forward. It relies, too, on the recognitions of a liberal-progressive view of history that is oriented toward the future. That is, it is a way of locating one’s self in history (a “now” distinct and different from a “then”) and aligning one’s self with its forward movement, like merging smoothly into the flow of traffic. Second, it is a feeling that is both confused and self-certain at the same time. Or to put this another way, its confusion — its bewilderment at how others could be so bewildered, so out of touch, so cluelessly driving the wrong way down a one-way street — derives from a feeling of certainty that things (history, politics, society) are clearly and obviously moving in a certain (desirable) direction. Third, it is anxious. As Sianne Ngai (drawing on Ernst Bloch) points out in her discussion of “ugly feelings” (to the list of which the feeling I am describing might well be added), anxiety is an “expectant emotion,” aimed at “the configuration of the world in general” and “the future disposition of the self.”¹⁷ Aligning one’s self with the tide of history and casting those with whom one disagrees as not just wrong, but *crazy*, betrays a certain doubt, a certain apprehension (in that term’s dual senses of temporal anticipation and anxiety or dread toward the unknown), a nagging sensation that things might not turn out the way one desires after all. Imagine the prospect that it is not others but you who misapprehends the drift of history. Now who’s crazy?

A final point: if there is a literary mode or genre that is the counterpart of this historicist affect, that mode is dramatic irony. Which returns me to “Rip Van Winkle” — a story that at its core offers its readers both the anxieties of historical dislocation, of waking up one day to find that one has become an anachronism no longer in step with the times — and the safe, knowing, certainties of dramatic irony: because, unlike Rip, we know that the Revolution happened and can therefore share with Irving a laugh at

Rip’s expense, safe knowing that however bewildered Rip and even the villagers who think he is crazy may be, we possess the knowledge to sort it all out; we get to supply the story with its explanatory context. Wayne Booth notes that the effects — and I think he means the pleasures and rewards — of dramatic irony “depend upon an absolute sharing of certain knowledge.”¹⁸ But there is also something smug and pandering, something condescending, about dramatic irony, just as there is something smug and pandering about Garrison’s response to Lincoln: if Lincoln is Rip, then Garrison is the knowing reader and author who already knows how things turned out. Garrison wants to feel about slavery and the Civil War the way that readers feel about Rip — and perhaps the way that historicists feel about the past.

NOTES

- 1 Theodore Tilton, “Half an Hour at Sunnyside,” *The Independent*, November 24, 1859, p. 1. All subsequent quotations are cited in parentheses.
- 2 The nineteenth-century critic William Hazlitt described Irving’s writings as “literary anachronisms” (*The Spirit of the Age* [London: H. Colburn, 1825], p. 421).
- 3 See, for instance, Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Michael Warner, “Irving’s Posterior,” *ELH* 67 (2000), pp. 773–99; Jeffrey Insko, “Diedrich Knickerbocker, Regular Bred Historian,” *Early American Literature* 43 (2008), pp. 605–41; and Michelle Sizemore, *American Embellishment: Rituals of the People in the Post-Revolutionary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 4 In an essay-review, Joel Pfister (following Mark Edmundson) observes, “It remains true that many graduate programs in English have become historicizer-training factories. Most Americanists have to historicize if they want to land jobs. Professors assign an ethos to historicism” (“A Usable American Literature,” *American Literary History* 20 [2008], p. 583).
- 5 Here I invoke Louis Montrose’s well-known formulation, the “historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (“Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture,” in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser [New York: Routledge, 1989], p. 23).
- 6 Wai-Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 128. All subsequent quotations are in parentheses.
- 7 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Times of the Gods,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 35. All subsequent quotations will be cited in parentheses.

- 8 See, for instance, Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010). For a helpful discussion of how American literary history conflates history and time, see Jordan Alexander Stein, "American Literary History and Queer Temporalities," *American Literary History* 25 (2013), pp. 855–69.
- 9 For a representative critique of new historicist contextualization, see Rita Felski, "Context Sinks!" *New Literary History* 42 (2011), pp. 573–91. For compelling recent interrogations of practices of periodization, see Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 10 Henry David Thoreau, "The Last Days of John Brown," in *Thoreau: Political Writings*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 167.
- 11 Justine Murison, "Feeling Our of Place: Affective History, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the Civil War," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 59 (2013), p. 546.
- 12 Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," a speech delivered in Concord, MA, October 30, 1859, in James Redpath, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), p. 19.
- 13 "Then and Now," *The Independent*, April 17, 1852, p. 4.
- 14 James Redpath, "A Rip Van Winkle in Office," *The Independent*, September 28, 1865, p. 1.
- 15 William Lloyd Garrison, "The President's Message," *The Liberator*, December 5, 1862, p. 194.
- 16 See, for instance, Jennifer Rubin, "Maybe Trump Isn't Lying," *WashingtonPost.com*, January 25, 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2017/01/25/maybe-trump-isn-lying/?um_term=.4523ea1936fa](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2017/01/25/maybe-trump-isn-lying/?hpid=hp-top-uncle-tom%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp-top-uncle-tom%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp-top-uncle-tom%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp-top-uncle-tom%3Ahomepage%2Fstory).
- 17 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 210.
- 18 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 256.

PART III
Application