"Of Thee We Sing": Microhistories of the Northeastern United States through the Lens of American Folkloric Opera

By

Christian Krenek

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Abstract:

The folklore of the United States of America is, like its peoples, extremely multifaceted and complex, to the extent that singular statements about the entirety of this folklore are impossible to make. This thesis instead focuses on an extremely particular aspect of American folklore—operatic versions of the tales—from the Northeastern United States, specifically New York and New Hampshire. By analyzing, through a microhistorical and theatrical lens, how these folktales, and their operatic adaptations, change over time, it is possible to engage in a discussion of how this lore was used to shape Northeastern American identities throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

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-And to the storytellers…

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Introduction: Settling the Score

> On September 27th the aggregation brought out a new opera by George Frederick Bristow, with a libretto by J.H. Wainwright. This was no less than *Rip Van Winkle*...The libretto followed the events of the stage play…Unlike many native musical compositions, *Rip Van Winkle* won considerable success; it was sung nightly up to and including October 6th. After that, it was heard three times weekly—on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays…other operas of the repertoire completed the season, except on October 23rd, when *Rip Van Winkle* was sung for the benefit of the composer, and on the 29th, when two acts were sung.[1]
>
> *OPERETTA AT BRONXVILLE: School Cast Gives World Premiere of 'The Headless Horseman'*
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> BRONXVILLE, N.Y., March 5.—The world premiere of "The Headless Horseman," a new American school operetta, was held tonight at the Bronxville High School auditorium, presented by students of the Bronxville school. The operetta was written by Stephen Vincent Benét and Douglas Moore, and is based on Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."[2]
>
> *[The Devil and Daniel Webster* was] almost completely dramaless [sic] and never more so when Mr. Moore periodically embroidered it with his genteel and wholly respectable, if generally impotent, score. The lyrics, with their allusions to pies, farmyard esoterica [sic], and the like, might have passed critically in print but they warred against any musical accompaniment and, in the singing, impressed the sensitive ear with much of the discomfort that would be attendant upon simultaneously listening to a violin concerto and reading *On a Slow Train through Arkansas.*[3]

These varying source texts—a paragraph-long description a chronicle of the nineteenth century New York stage, a small item in the *New York Times,* and a harsh review in a news magazine—seem like strange places to begin a thesis that explores the link between American folklore and

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1. George Odell, "Chapter XII: Niblo's, Barnum's, Academy of Music, German Plays, Minstrels, Circus, Concerts and Entertainments, 1855-1856," in *Annals of the New York Stage, Vol. 6: 1850-1857,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931) , 469.

2. "Operetta at Bronxville: School Cast Gives World Premiere of 'The Headless Horseman,' *New York Times,* March 6th, 1937, Page 10. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=980DE7DB123AE23ABC4E53DFB566838C629EDE

3. George Jean Nathan, "Theater Week: The Eagle Lays Two Eggs," *Newsweek,* 5 June 1939, 34. In *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* (Middleton, WI: McBride, 2011), 431.

American opera, two enormous fields in their own right.[4] With so many rich sources to choose from, why start with such contained texts as two sentences about a school production? The answer lies in the very size of the texts themselves: this thesis, rather than beginning with the abstract concepts of "folklore" and "opera," instead approaches those terms through three moments crystallized in time: the nights of September 27, 1855, March 5, 1937, and May 18, 1939, when three operas based on Northeastern American folklore had their world premieres. From these instances, I begin analyzing the operas themselves, and from there, studying the social, political, and cultural climate of the times that produced these operas, and how the identities of the citizens of those times manifests in their works of art. In short, this thesis seeks to join the scholarly conversation on the ever-shifting definition of "American identities" by using microhistory to focus on folkloric operas of the Northeastern United States, which offer insight into changes in that identity over time.[5]

In order to approach this admittedly daunting task—intervening in a debate on the concept of American identity—I have chosen to work within extremely structured parameters: namely, operatic adaptations of Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* and Stephen Vincent Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster." I have selected these three for geographical, thematic, and even pragmatic reasons. Geographically, each story in this trio takes place in the Northeastern United States; this concentrated locality allows for an

4. General texts on American folklore range from *The Penguin Dictionary of American Folklore* to Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt's *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent* to the *Journal of American Folklore,* a publication of the American Folklore Society. American opera's texts include Ken Wlaschin's *Encyclopedia of American Opera* to Elise K. Kirk's *American Opera* to *American Opera Singers and Their Recordings: Critical Commentaries and Discographies.*

5. Texts on the question of American identity include Peter J. Spiro's *Beyond Citizenship: American Identity After Globalization,* Jill Lepore's *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity,* and Deborah J. Schildkraut's "Defining American Identity in the Twenty-First Century: How Much 'There' is There?", published in *The Journal of Politics.*

analysis that is both literally and figuratively contained. Thematically, both Irving's and Benét's tales share a similar plot structure: a white heterosexual male hero of Northern European descent encounters local supernatural forces which are tied to the history of the Northeastern United States. By exploring how the essence of these folktales manifests in the form of opera, I hope to provide a new perspective on shifts in the concept of Northeastern American identities. Finally, and as discussed at the end of this Introduction, the United States is not only large in territory, but extremely fragmented in its sense of self; various regions, and even the states within those regions, have their own unique histories and cultures. Choosing three particular stories centered in one region allows for more focused conclusions to be drawn about the ever-changing identities of the peoples of that region. It is impossible to make any statements that refer to the "American people" as a whole; microhistory allows me to instead study operas both created and seen by a highly particular group of those people, and therefore offer suggestions about that people's shifting concepts of self.

Having explained the ideas found in this thesis, I will now discuss its format. The Introduction defines the key terms of the work—"microhistory," "folklore," "American folklore," and "opera"—provides a brief glimpse as to how those terms have been studied in the past, and delineates what is *not* included in this thesis; this final section is necessary due to the conflation of "folk" and "folkloric," which are two highly distinct concepts. This Introduction is followed by three chapters, each of which focuses on one particular opera: Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman,* and Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster.* The chapters themselves consist of introductions which provide the reader with cultural moments from the nights these operas premiered; a brief framing of context for those moments, and how that context manifests in the opera; a summary of the

source material for the opera, along with information about the authors, composers, and librettists; an analysis of the opera, including studies of music, lyrics, and major themes; and finally, my personal theorizing as to how each opera reflects Northeastern American identities during the time of its premiere. The thesis ends with a Conclusion that comments on the current (as of 2015) state of Northeastern American folkloric opera in the United States, and how new trends in that genre, including a sudden resurgence, might reveal new and surprising perspectives on the contemporary identities of the Northeastern United States. By using microhistory as my guide throughout this piece, I hope to follow a path that will allow me to join the conversation on Northeastern American identities; by focusing on theatrical manifestations of those identities, I hope to use my own perspective as a theatre scholar to offer new suggestions and ideas within that conversation.

Language of the People: Terms and Definitions Used in This Thesis

The term "microhistory," which is relatively new in the academic world, refers to a form of analysis that, in the words of Peter A. Davis, "[focuses]… on the particular, the specialized, the everyday, even the ordinary, to understand the agency of life on a smaller scale."[6] Stephen Huff adds that this miniscule analysis "can be subsumed in large macronarratives."[7] However, Huff also quotes microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg by pointing out that "the results obtained in a microscopic sphere cannot be automatically transferred to a macroscopic sphere (and vice versa)."[8] Rather, a full analysis of the details of the topic in question—be it print shop employees' hanging as many cats as possible (as detailed in Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat*

6. Peter A. Davis, "Asking Large Questions in Small Spaces," *Theatre Survey,* 55.1 (January 2014), 3.

7. Stephen Huff, "The Impresarios of Beale Street," *Theatre Survey,* 55.1 (January 2014), 23.

8. Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry* 20.1 (1993), 33.

Massacre), a sixteenth-century miller's trial (found in Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*), or the business practices of African-American and Italian-American theatre managers in Memphis, Tennessee from 1900-1915 (as Huff writes about in his "The Impresarios of Beale Street")—must be performed before any larger conclusions can be drawn about the "macro" elements that are captured in these small stories. I build on the work of Darnton, Ginzburg, and their theatrical descendants[9], including Peter A. Davis, Huff, Natalie Zemon Davis, Odai Johnson, and Michelle Granshaw, to perform my own analysis of the three American folkloric operas mentioned in the citations which begin this thesis: George Frederick Bristow and J.H. Wainwright's 1855 *Rip Van Winkle,* Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét's 1937 *The Headless Horseman,* and Moore and Benét's 1939 *The Devil and Daniel Webster.*

Using microhistory to analyze theatre is an appropriate lens; as Davis writes, "the growing field of microhistory…seems particularly suited to theatre."[10] He elaborates further that "Accounts of individual events, physical spaces, audiences, actors, and performances are often told from a perspective beyond the norm in traditional history."[11] I argue that the seemingly small events studied by theatrical microhistory are not simply jumping-off points for broader understanding of the sociocultural and sociopolitical status of a particular time period, as is the case with the central events in *The Great Cat Massacre* and *The Cheese and the Worms*. Rather, the texts (or para-texts) and performances connected to dramatic events can themselves be mined for hints at the social, cultural, and political atmosphere at the time of their creation and premiere. This seems appropriate for the three operas analyzed in this thesis, as each of them is

9. These descendants include Peter A. Davis, Stephen Huff, Natalie Zemon Davis (*The Return of Martin Guerre*), and Odai Johnson (*Rehearsing the Revolution: Radical Performance, Radical Politics in the English Restoration*).

10. "Asking Large Questions in Small Spaces," 3.

11. Ibid 4.

an adaptation of an earlier work of folklore; in the case of Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman,* nearly a century passed between the publication of the source text and the debut of the opera. The changes between the short stories and their operatic adaptations can thus be used to make further guesses as to transformations in Northeastern American identities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I will use microhistory, then, to study Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman,* and Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* analyzing each text and score for clues as to the identities of the audiences that originally witnessed these operas. Those identities, and how they change over time, are the central point of study for my thesis.

Before beginning this microhistorical analysis, however, there are several key terms that must be further explained, as they form the heart of this work. These terms, including "American folklore," "Northeast," and "American opera," are parameters that place broad terms in highly specific times, places, and genres. The first of the terms, "American folklore," must be subdivided. "American" refers to the United States of America, but "folklore" is a more complicated definition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as "the traditional beliefs, legends, and customs, current among the common people; [or] the study of these."[12] To parse this definition, though, I break the compound word "folklore" into its two components and define them as well. "Folk," which dates back to the 800s C.E., is defined as "a people, race, nation, tribe," and especially "an aggregation of people in relation to a superior…the great mass as opposed to an individual; the people; the vulgar."[13] The OED defines "lore," a word first recorded in the tenth century C.E., as "The act of teaching; the condition of being taught…That

12. "Folklore," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/72546?redirectedFrom=Folklore#eid

13. "Folk," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/72542#eid3942096

which is taught…Applied chiefly to religious doctrine, but used also with reference to moral principles."[14] As will be seen, the terms "folk," "lore," and "folklore" have a particular connection to the United States.

The presence of "folk" and its connection to "the great mass" in the United States is apparent when considering the documents which historians consider central to the foundation of the United States: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The Constitution's Preamble reads:

> We, the people of the United States of America, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence [sic], promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.[15]

Several phrases in the Preamble, including "We, the people," "common defence," "general Welfare," and "ourselves and our Posterity" suggest the definition of "folk" described above: "the great mass," "the people." The Declaration of Independence makes similar claims, stating "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."[16] From a twenty-first century perspective, these statements are suspect or even inaccurate—they were written by heterosexual, white, upper-class males at a time when women could not vote, Native Americans had been displaced from their lands, and African-Americans were enslaved—but within the context of their own time, they represented a new idea of freedom for many, not only a select

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14. "Lore," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/110333#eid38865085

15. "The Constitution of the United States," http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html

16. Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

few. However, it should not be assumed that words such as "people" can be interchanged with the term "folk"; indeed, at this time, the Founding Fathers distrusted the idea of the common masses. Joachim Whaley reports that throughout Europe—and, by extension, its descendants in the American colonies—the term "folk," closely linked to the German concept of the *Volk,* earned criticism: "Most humanists were scathing about the people, the ignorant and uneducated *Volk.*"[17] It was not until 1765 that the term *Volk* was first associated with the common people; author Friedrich Carl von Moser's pamphlet *Vom deutschen Nationalgeist* posited the *Volk* "as a community of free individuals and as the basis for German polity."[18] It is unknown whether or not the "Founding Fathers"—those white, heterosexual, upper-class men who wrote the American Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights—read Moser's work; however, as the pamphlet only appeared twelve years before the Declaration itself was written, it is safe to assume that the Founders' long-lasting association of *Volk* as "uneducated masses" was still mostly intact. However, as time passed, the definition of folk gradually shifted to the concept of "community of free individuals"; this evolution from *Volk* to "folk" can be traced throughout the operas studied in this thesis.

Now that the term "American folk" has been defined as both "uneducated masses, especially in regards to the educated elite" and "a community of free individuals," I turn to the phrase "American lore." What is "that which is taught" for the United States? Alan Dundes responded to this question in 1966 when he wrote, "To most American folklorists, folklore

17. Joachim Whaley, " 'Reich, Nation, Volk': Early Modern Perspectives," *Modern Language Review,* 101.2 (April 2006), 449.

18. Ibid 452.

consists of a number of specific cultural items which are usually transmitted person to person."[19] He then provides a list of examples:

> Myth, legend, folktale, joke, proverb, riddle, superstition, charm, blessing, curse, oath, insult, retort, taunt, tease, tongue-twister, greeting or leave-taking formula, folk speech (e.g. slang), folk etymologies, folk similes (e.g. as white as snow), folk metaphors (e.g. to jump from the frying pan into the fire), names (e.g. nicknames or place names), folk poetry—which ranges from lengthy folk epics to children's rhymes…The common nonverbal genres include: folk dance, folk drama, folk art, folk costume, folk festival, games, practical jokes (or pranks), and gestures. Folklore also includes such major forms as folk instrumental music…and such minor ones as mnemonic devices, the comments made after body emissions…and the sounds made to summon and command animals. This list is hardly exhaustive but it should reveal the general nature of the American concept of lore.[20]

Though Dundes never clarifies exactly what makes this list distinct from the folklore of other nations, its length and scope indicates the broad range of all things that might fall under the definition of "American folklore." More contemporary scholars agree with Dundes, especially regarding the scope of folklore in the United States. Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens write that "Folklore is present in many kinds of informal communication, whether verbal (oral or written texts), customary (behaviors, rituals) or material (physical objects). It involves values, traditions, ways of thinking and behaving. It's about art. It's about people and the way we learn. It helps us learn who we are and how to make meaning in the world around us."[21] Mary Hufford provides an alternate definition of "folklife," explaining, "…folklife is often hidden in full view, lodged in the various ways we have of discovering and expressing who we are and how we fit into the world…Folklife is community life and values, artfully expressed in myriad forms and interactions. Universal, diverse, and enduring, it enriches the nation and makes [Americans] a

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19. Alan Dundes, "The American Concept of Folklore," *Journal of the Folklore Institute,* 3.3 (December 1966), 238.

20. Ibid.

21. Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and their Traditions,* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005), 1-2.

commonwealth of cultures."[22]

The phrase "culture" is particularly important to the study of folklore, as it appears in one of the seminal works on the study of the genre: William Bascom's "The Four Functions of Folklore." This 1954 essay argues that folklore, a "mirror of culture," has the following uses:

> Amusement… the validation of culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them… [education], particularly, but not exclusively, in nonliterate [sic] societies…[and] to control, influence, or direct the activities of others [and thus maintain] conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior…folklore operates within a society to insure conformity to the accepted cultural norms, and continuity from generation to generation through its role in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture.[23]

Though Bascom's points remain valid, the study of folklore has changed in the sixty-plus years since his "Four Functions" was published, and the conversation about what exactly folklore does for a nation's people has changed with it. This thesis hopes to join that conversation by exploring how American folklore manifests in the field of American folkloric opera, how the creators of those operas reflected the culture of their time in their work, and how the audiences who received these works responded to them.

To narrow the scope of those operas, creators, and audiences, I have chosen to study the "folklife" of Northeastern America as represented by three folktales from two states within that region. The first two, "Rip Van Winkle" and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*,[24] were written by the New York-born Washington Irving, and are set in that state. I examine Irving and his work

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22. Mary Hufford, *American Folklife: A Commonwealth of Cultures. (*Washington D.C.: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress 1991).

23. William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore,* 67.266 (Oct.-Dec. 1954), 285- 297.

24. A note on quotation marks versus italics: "Rip Van Winkle" is considered a short story, whereas *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a novella.

through the gaze of microhistory, identifying his own heritage and particular biases, and, subsequently, how that heritage and bias influenced his own writing. Among the challenges in analyzing these tales are identifying how Irving's status as a middle-class merchant and member of British society—his first work, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon,* was published in England in 1840, while Irving himself was working in his "family's import-export business" in Liverpool—affected his literary work. [25]

The third story, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," was crafted by Stephen Vincent Benét and is set in the state of New Hampshire. The story is equally challenging to study, as Benét was born in Pennsylvania, "educated in Georgia, California, and New England, and lived at one time or another also in upstate New York, Rhode Island, New York City, and rural Connecticut."[26] Furthermore, while Irving's tales were either purely fictional (in the case of "Rip Van Winkle") or based in local legend (as will be seen when Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman* is analyzed later in this thesis), Benét's short story was based on Daniel Webster, a statesman and political figure in New Hampshire history. Benét also worked as a librettist for two of the three operas analyzed in this thesis, one of which—*The Headless Horseman*—is an adaptation of Irving's then century-old *Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* Benét was not only a writer of folklore, but an adaptor of it; his perspectives and actions in placing that folklore on stage will be particularly telling, as they represent an author's personal attempts to transform the private act of reading into the public act of viewing.

The discussion of these adaptations leads to the final key term that must be examined

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25. Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories,* ed. Alice Hoffman (New York: Random House, 2001), 11.

26. Eleanor M. Sickels, "Stephen Vincent Benét," *College English,* 14.8 (May 1953), 441.

before this thesis can begin: "opera." Again, the OED provides a helpful definition of the word, which dates back to the seventeenth century: "A dramatic musical work in which singing forms an essential part, chiefly consisting of recitatives, arias, and choruses, with orchestral accompaniment…such works as a genre."[27] The dictionary also provides a distinction between opera and musical theatre, which it defines as "a play or film in which singing and dancing form an essential part…Traditionally, the theatrical musical has been populist and commercial, often tending towards comic or burlesque themes, and as such has been regarded as distinct from opera."[28] However, the entry on "musical" also points out the flaw in this logic, as it reads, "More recently, however, it has been argued that the distinction is no longer so clear-cut."[29] The entry speaks to the difficulty of classifying opera and its audiences as purely elitist. In the United States, operas have long been considered popular entertainment; in his 2011 work *Verdi in America,* musicologist George W. Martin notes the evolution of traveling opera companies as dating back to pre-Civil War America, and indicates that post-Civil War troupes "found success in the small towns and cities of the Midwest and Far West, where the less sophisticated were grateful for music in any form."[30] Such evidence contradicts the OED's declaration that only the "theatrical musical" was "populist and commercial," and suggests that the difficulty of classifying opera's audiences is inherent within the form itself.

The notion of inherent contradiction—the opera as simultaneously the stuff of aristocrats and farmhands—is appropriate in microhistory; Giovanni Levi notes that "Microhistorians have

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27. "Opera," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131729?rskey=0ZIkj2&result=1#eid

28. "Musical," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/254181#eid11500159

29. Ibid.

30. George W. Martin, *Verdi in America: 'Oberto' through 'Rigoletto,'* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 222.

concentrated on the contradictions of normative systems and therefore on the fragmentation, contradictions and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open."[31] This perspective comes to mind when considering opera historian Elise K. Kirk's assertion that "No art form reflects the moods, dreams, and passions of its people quite as powerfully as opera. The history of American opera is a history of the American people—how they felt about themselves in song and drama."[32] But as mentioned above, the notion of "American people" is itself inherently contradictory, as the nation is composed of a "commonwealth of cultures." The fragmentation of the United States has in turn made it difficult to claim a single American librettist or composer as truly representative of the entire country. Musicologist Lydia Goehr indicates this difficulty in her *Elective Affinities,* which, among other topics, details the difficulty in classifying the concept of "American opera." Goehr writes:

> For much of its history, especially after the 1820s, American opera served as an *institutional* concept referring to any opera sung in English and produced in the United States…the only operas that tended to be excluded were those by American composers. Around 1930, "American opera" predominated as a *classificatory* concept designating operas produced "of the people, by the people, for the people," which is to say, by Americans, for Americans, on American themes.[33]

Goehr's definition does not exclude the possibility of American operas on American themes before 1930; the first such work, J.N. Barker's *The Indian Princess,* dates back to 1808. However, her argument does provide an interesting point for further analysis, as two of the three operas researched in this thesis were written in the late 1930s, presumably after the transformation of "American opera" from an "institutional" to a "classificatory" concept: that is,

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31. Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing,* ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 107.

32. Elise Kirk, *American Opera.* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 11.

33. Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory. (*New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 258.

from an opera "sung in English and produced in the United States" to operas based on American themes that were written by American artists for American audiences. Tracing these trends will provide further suggestions as to how the changing identities of creators and audiences in the Northeastern United States affected the work they produced and watched.

Goehr also provides a useful definition in regards to a final combination of the key terms of this thesis: the folkloric opera. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Diane Kestin's 1957 article "Western Folklore in Modern American Opera," which made the case for the existence of opera based on the lives of American people (and therefore folkloric opera) since at least 1790's *Tammany or the Indian Chief,* Goehr concludes that "what Kestin meant is that composers should so immerse themselves in folk expression that their expressions would strike us as natural. But…unless we notice the expression presumably we won't grasp why the work is American."[34] In other words, American folkloric opera is, according to Kestin and Goehr, any operatic work that deals not only with the folktales of the American people, but which uses the "lore" defined by Alan Dundes as American in its plot or music. While this is indeed a useful definition, it is too broad to use for a microhistory. Instead, I choose to focus on a particular type of American folkloric opera: that which is based on Northeastern American folktales centered on singular characters, rather than a general sense of the life of the American people. I hope that by providing such an intense focus on three individual operas, it will be possible to determine how the peoples of the Northeastern United States identified themselves in 1855, 1937, and 1939, and how, in turn, that sense of identity connects to larger themes of American personhood and self.

It should not be assumed, however, that this thesis covers all music and opera that deals with the term "folk"; as seen in the evolution of *Volk* to "folk" and the difficulty of classifying

34. Ibid 283.

folklore, the terminology used in discussing works of this genre is slippery. Therefore, I wish to address those subjects that I will not be analyzing in this work; by setting these limits, I hope to settle any confusion the reader may have. The most important distinction is Northeastern "folk" versus Northeastern "folklore"; the former refers, in general, to Northeastern peoples as a whole, while the latter describes the folktales (and, as Dundes mentions, many other forms of expression) used by those peoples. The best way to demonstrate this distinction is through example. George and Ira Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is what I call a *folk opera*: it does not refer to any specific story or fable from African-American culture, but instead uses and reflects that culture as a whole for its music, plot, and idiom. By way of contrast, the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* is a *folkloric opera*: it uses the specific folktale of "Rip Van Winkle" for its source material, and does not attempt to reflect the actual music patterns found in the Northeast, including the sounds of the Appalachian Mountains and the bluegrass that partially evolved from it. Indeed, the orchestra used in *Rip Van Winkle* sounds much more like a British symphony than an Appalachian band. This distinction also explains why I do not study the works of such American composers as the Gershwin brothers, John Philip Sousa, Aaron Copland, and Irving Berlin; while these men did strive to capture the spirit of the American folk in their songs, they did not do so using American folklore as source material. Instead, I look to the men who used those tales as their inspiration, and explore how the operas that they produced reflected the transforming identities of the Northeastern peoples of the United States.

The notion of identity as fluid and changeable has been long associated with fields as diverse as psychology, evolutionary biology, and even literature; in the final case, the reading and re-reading of books at different points in one's life can demonstrate how personhood transforms over time. To this list I add theatre, which allows for a unique perspective on a

changing sense of self: drama does not only reflect the identity of its creator, but also that of the audiences who witness it. It is through not just tales, then, but the execution of those tales, that I explore the identities of a select group of peoples, including those citizens who originally viewed the operas and the men of Northern European descent who wrote them, of the Northeastern United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By focusing the lens of microhistory on operas based on three particular tales, I will provide a new voice in the conversation regarding American identity: a voice centered on American folkloric opera, and how those operas reflect the identities of the people who originally wrote and witnessed them.

Chapter One:

"New and Original American Opera": The George Frederick Bristow and J.W. Shannon *Rip Van Winkle*

On Thursday, September 27, 1855, the *New York Daily Tribune* ran its traditional morning and evening editions. Among the items on the front page were listings seeking employment ("A respectable Scotch woman wishes a situation as CHAMBERMAID where a Waiting Woman is kept"), a notice announcing that "the celebrated Painting by Ary Scheffer, 'DANTE AND BEATRICE,'" was on exhibition by Goupil and Company, and a cry for all eligible "Handsome Women of America" to submit their photographs to P.T. Barnum's "Gallery of Beauty." [1] Towards the top of the page, there was a listing detailing a theatrical event that was to premiere that evening at Niblo's Garden Theater: "First Performance of the New and Original American Opera, RIP VAN WINKLE, Founded on Washington Irving's celebrated Legend, and produced by the PYNE AND HARRISON TROUPE."[2] This announcement, sandwiched between an advertisement for a pair of "Fine French Calf Boots" and a list of the recent printings of the Redfield Publishing Company, seems literally and figuratively small, hardly an item worthy of front-page news. And yet this tiny piece of print told a powerful tale: for the first time in history, there was to be an opera based on an American folktale, composed and written by Americans, premiering in an American theatre.[3]

The Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* was not the first version of the story seen

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1. *New York Daily Tribune,* September 27, 1855, Page 1. http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1855-09-27/ed-1/seq-1/

2. Ibid.

3. There had certainly been plays, and even musical plays, on American themes before this date; the best-known may be James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess,* an 1808 "operatic melo-drame" based on the folktale of Pocahontas. However, this is, by my own research, the earliest work classified as an *opera,* as opposed to some other form, written on American themes by two American citizens. See Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

on the New York stage; theatrical adaptations of Irving's tale began as early as 1828, only eight years after the story's original publication, with Charles Burke's 1850 interpretation of the tale bearing the most commonality to Bristow and Wainwright's opera. However, Burke's non-musical play and Bristow and Wainwright's piece are so different as to only share a name; the former is lighthearted and cheery, while the latter is extraordinarily serious and has much to say about patriotism and war. Throughout this chapter, I compare these versions of the "Rip Van Winkle" story, and theorize as to why the vast differences between the two might exist. Specifically, I argue that the changes in the tale reflect both taste in different forms of theatre and the gradual increase of severity and seriousness in the general Northeastern populace throughout the nineteenth century; with this seriousness came an attempt to codify the spirit of the New York "folk" as interpreted by Irving as the *true* folk.

Little fanfare was raised regarding the premiere of *Rip Van Winkle*. The *Tribune* published a follow-up piece, nestled at the very bottom of page five of its October 4 edition, which commented, "The American opera *Rip Van Winkle,* by Messrs. Bristow and Wainwright—composer and writer—draws good houses. The merit of the music, the interest of the plot, the local familiarities of the scene, and the excellent singing of Miss Louisa Pyne, adding to the stage mounting—establish its popularity."[4] Theatre historian Gerald Bordman notes that the *New York Times* was more critical of the opera, writing that the publication

> …could only recommend it to its readers on the grounds that native opera needed support even when it was indifferently executed. The paper damned the score with faint praise,

4. *New York Daily Tribune,* October 4, 1855, 5. The Library of Congress. http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1855-10-04/ed-1/seq-5/#date1=1836&index=8&rows=20&words=Rip+Van+Winkle&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=New+York&date2=1860&proxtext=Rip+Van+Winkle&y=7&x=15&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1

> dismissing it as 'pretty.' Adding that it was 'pervaded by a martial manner,' the paper rued its lack of period flavor.[5]

This critique of a "lack of period flavor" is particularly interesting when compared with another item in the October 4 edition of the *Tribune*: namely, an unknown author's musings on the state of opera in New York in 1855. The author describes the activities of the Academy of Music, an operatic troupe which Bordman notes as the replacement for "the virtually forgotten Italian Opera House."[6] In writing about the Academy, the author offers a glimpse into the opinions of opera in that year. The author first describes the cast of the previous night's work in Donizetti's *Linda di Chamouni:*

> Every night some fresh talent is revealed in Mad. La Grange. If the public were not occupied with her as a singer, they would take last night's acting as sufficient inducement to attend the Opera. The next most dramatic part, if not equally so, was that of Morelli, who drew forth much applause…Signore Rovere is one of the few buffos who remain on the stage: a style of music not written by young Italy.[7]

The writer continues:

> A comfortable theory is now enounced, with greater fervor than in Gluck's time, that melody is second to musico-dramatic truth. If this be so, the composers of the future will have an easy time, for the composers of the present day may be as dramatic as they choose, but if they fail in melody—pure and simple—their works fail on the stage. It is this fact that makes the selection of novelties so difficult…As for certain operas critically praised as masterpieces, their merits being granted, if they fail to interest the public as they deserve, it is useless to produce them.[8]

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5. Gerald Bordman, "Prologue: Origins to 1866," In *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 16.

6. Ibid.

7. *New York Daily Tribune,* October 4, 1855, 5. http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1855-10-04/ed-1/seq 5/#date1=1836&index=8&rows=20&words=Rip+Van+Winkle&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=New+York&date2=1860&proxtext=Rip+Van+Winkle&y=7&x=15&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1

8. Ibid.

The author concludes the opinion piece by remarking that the public, which "pants for novelty," are left to decide between opera of "secondary interest" or "one of first-rate interest…played very frequently."

The anonymous author's claims are not without merit. Opera historian Simon Williams quotes various eighteenth and nineteenth century opera experts as insisting on the importance of acting; singing instructor Giovanni Battista Mancini declared that "in order to be a perfect actor merely singing is not enough, but the knowledge of reciting and acting well is required too," while German composer "[Richard] Wagner insisted that his singers' acting talents be as versatile as their singing, and Verdi urged singers to play close attention to characterization."[9] The review also hints that comic scenes, at least in Italian opera, were beginning to fall out of vogue; the reviewer's comments about Signore Rovere being one of the "few buffos who remain on the stage" suggest that *opera buffa* was somewhat out of favor in the mid-1850s (a fact supported by the list of the most popular operas of the day, including Wagner's 1850 *Lohengrin,* Verdi's 1853 *La traviata,* Berlioz's 1858 *Les Troyens,* and Charles Gounod's *Faust* in the same year).

Verdi, mentioned twice above, also provides support for the author's comments that audiences craved "pure and simple melody" in the mid-1850s. Opera historian George W. Martin reports on the surprising initial fate of Verdi's *Rigoletto,* now considered an operatic masterpiece (it ranks as the third most-frequently performed of Verdi's pieces at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City[10]). According to Martin, "despite considerable critical support

9. Simon Williams, "Opera and the Absence of Acting," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera,* ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 442-443.

10. George W. Martin, *Verdi in America: 'Oberto' through 'Rigoletto.' (*New York: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 201.

Rigoletto, on its opening run in New York, failed at the box office"[11] during its debut season in February of 1855; he goes on to cite critiques of the opera's plot and shocking morality ("in *Rigoletto,* the lecherous Duke, though responsible for an innocent's rape and death, walks off happy") as the reasons for this failure. And yet the populace eventually came to embrace *Rigoletto*'s melodies; Martin notes that "Even in the initial performances the Quartet [a piece which opens the opera], the tenor's 'La donna è mobile,' and the soprano's 'Caro nome' were almost always encored. Excerpts were sung in concert halls and on the streets organ-grinders churned out favorite numbers."[12] There are two points to note here. The first, and most obvious, is that the anonymous reviewer may have been correct in his assertion that New York audiences demanded memorable songs and melodies in operas. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the presence of the work of Verdi in "concert halls" and the songs of "organ-grinders" suggests that opera was not constrained to the upper classes of New York; melodies from operas of the day had pervaded the streets, those most public of urban places.

The streets were also the scene of one of the formative events of opera in the late 1840s and early 1850s: the infamous Astor Place Riots of 1849, a conflict that cast a lasting cloud over the field of opera. Theatre historian Bruce McConachie describes the source of the riot as a conflict between the English actor William Charles Macready and the American thespian Edwin Forrest, both of whom were touring in a production of *Macbeth* at the time. Forrest's supporters, including the "Bowery Boys"—a gang of lower-class street toughs—were infuriated by Macready's presence at the Astor Place Theater, and organized a protest in an effort to banish the English actor. Though McConachie comments that "Riots in those days, especially in theaters,

11. Ibid 202.

12. Ibid 204.

were planned ahead of time," the Astor Place Riot represented a particularly sore point for the poorer citizens of New York:

> They used Macready's performance as a means of protesting what they took to be elitist privileges in New York City. This was an opera house that had been built two years before and they had special kid glove dress codes, they had higher prices, so a lot of the rest of the population couldn't get into the opera house. So Macready became a symbol of English oppression, of aristocratic privilege, of all the things that the Bowery Boys had learned to hate.[13]

The Astor Place Riots ultimately ended in the deaths of twenty-two people, which, as McConachie points out, "pretty much ended theater rioting. There were other things that did too, that are policing, more middle-class attitudes that begin to dominate in theater-going modes and manners. But as a theater historian, it's an important turning point."[14] McConachie's words ring true, especially when considering the concept of opera as a strictly upper-class entertainment; the Astor Place Riots were a response and even an attempted rebuttal of that myth. As the presence of *Rigoletto*'s melodies among street performers and concertgoers indicates, opera was certainly found among the lower classes of New York in 1855; however, the audience of *Rigoletto* itself was likely more exclusive.

Rigoletto's popularity in New York in the same year as the premiere of the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle,* especially when coupled with the remarks of the general opera reviewer in the *New York Tribune,* suggests the opera-going public's interest in vigorous, catchy melodies (remember that the *New York Times* insulted the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip* as "pretty). That same *New York Times* review also urged opera patrons to attend *Rip Van Winkle* to support works by American composers; as will be seen, the desire to establish the United States

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13. Scott Simon and Bruce McConachie, "Remembering New York City's Opera Riots." NPR, May 13, 2006. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5402902

14. Ibid.

as a place of artistic merit coincides with a desire to establish a particular (and particularly pure) type of American folk. For further clues about that desire, I now turn to Bristow and Wainwright's work in earnest, using the lens of microhistory to determine how *Rip Van Winkle* reflects both the operatic and sociocultural elements of New York City in 1855.

"We Will Free Our Country Now, or Unconquered Bravely Die": The Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle*

As the original news item announcing the premiere of the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* attests, the opera is based on "Washington Irving's celebrated Legend" of the same name. That legend, a short story Irving published in an 1820 compilation of essays and short fiction entitled *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentlemen,* does not have much in the way of plot. It is set in a small Dutch village in the New York countryside circa the early 1760s, and centers on Rip Van Winkle. Rip is a good-natured man who, despite being willing to help others with their chores, suffers from "an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor"[15] on his own farm, which earns him the wrath of his wife, the shrewish Dame Van Winkle, whose "tongue is incessantly going…morning, noon, and night."[16] When Rip attempts to escape his wife's complaining by traveling into the Catskill Mountains, he finds himself in the company of mysterious, silent men dressed in antique Dutch clothing. After indulging in their liquor, Rip tumbles into a deep sleep, and finds his village remarkably transformed on what believes is the next morning: all of his old friends have vanished, the populace is discussing an upcoming

15. Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories: Or, the Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* Ed. Alice Hoffman (New York: Random House, 2001), 56.

16. Ibid 57.

election, his home is in ruins, and his beard has "grown a foot long!"[17] After initial confusion, the villagers confirm Rip's identity and reveal that his sleep lasted twenty years, a time period which included the American Revolutionary War. Furthermore, the strange men he encountered in the mountains were the spirits of "the great Hendrick Hudson" and his shipmates, who initially settled the area. [18] Rip is especially pleased to learn that his wife has died, and is taken in by his loving daughter Judith and her husband, happily spending the rest of his days telling the village children stories of the past.

The story of a man being scolded, falling asleep, and waking up again is hardly the stuff of great opera; as such, it is important to note that while the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* is based on Irving's short story, the line of adaptation is not quite so simple. Rather, Bristow and Wainwright's work is based on a conglomeration of at least three earlier dramatic adaptations of "Rip Van Winkle"; it is important to analyze, and even compare, these non-operatic texts to Bristow and Shannon's work, as their alterations can provide clues as to changes in Northeastern American identities from 1820 to 1855. Editor Arthur Hobson Quinn, complier of the 1921 text *Representative American Plays,* tells the history of Rip's transfer to the stage. The first version, which has been lost, was "produced [in May 1828] on the Albany stage by Thomas Flynn, written by a native of that town"[19]; no evidence of this "native's" name exists. The next version, penned by John Kerr, premiered in Philadelphia in October of the same year, and even played in London's Tottenham Street Theatre.[20] The final version, which has much in

17. Ibid 59.

18. Ibid 60.

19. Arthur Hobson Quinn, "Rip Van Winkle," in *Representative American Plays* (New York: The Century Company, 1921), 461.

20. Ibid.

common with Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle*, was created by Charles Burke in 1850; this piece premiered at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia.[21] Rather than analyze the entirety of this play, however, I will instead study it in conjunction with the opera; by examining the differences between the two, I will find clues to the distinction between straight plays and operas in the 1850s, and use those clues to theorize about the different identities present in New York City at that time.

Both the Burke play and the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* open in the same way, with the inhabitants of Rip's village singing of their lives in an agrarian society. The two songs are even broken into an identical pattern: three verses, with the second verse performed by a soloist. Their content, however, differs considerably. In Burke's version, the villagers and unnamed soloist provide exposition about their travels to the United States: "In our native land, where flows the Rhine, / In infancy we culled the vine: / although we toiled with patient care, / But poor and scanty was our fare. / Till tempting waves, with anxious toil, / We landed on Columbia's soil; / now plenty, all our cares repay, / So laugh and dance the hours away."[22] This is in contrast to the Bristow and Wainwright opening chorus, which is more bucolic and apparently lacks the grim implications of the words "poor and scanty" and "anxious": "The summer has faded, faded fast away / and autumn is advancing; / Then we'll enjoy it while we may, / with singing mirth and dancing."[23] The melody of the song, which is written with the

21. Ibid.

22. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills; A Romantic Drama in Two Acts,* (New York: Samuel French, 186?), 4. No definitive date is given for the publication of the Burke text beyond the 1860s; however, the play was definitely first performed in 1850.

23. George Frederick Bristow and J.H. Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera in Three Acts,* ed. Stephen Ledbetter (Ann Arbor, MI: Da Capo Press 1991), 8-9.

instruction *Pastorale allegretto,* or "pastoral, quickly,"[24] helps to convey a lighthearted tone; the piece is sung in a rapid 6/8 time signature, and the sopranos, who hold the melody line throughout, sing a series of connected eighth and sixteenth notes that form rising and descending scales and arpeggios. However, the simplicity of the Opening Chorus's lyrics belies difficulties for the villagers as they imply that the coming autumn will be a time of difficulty when compared with the joyous summer. Similarly, the Alto II and Bass lines are lower in pitch, with the former singing their notes on Low C notes and the latter on Low A, and remain relatively constant as opposed to the sopranos and tenors, whose voices move around the scale. That general solemnity is one of the hallmarks of the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle,* and offers the first piece of evidence to suggest that operas were written with higher severity in tone than plays in the mid-1850s; remember too the list of operas provided above, all of which are tragic romances (*Lohengrin, La traviata, Rigoletto, Faust*) and histories *(Les Troyens*).

As both the play and the opera continue, the audience is introduced to the different characters of the "Rip Van Winkle" story; the characterization of Rip in Burke's piece is lighter and more humorous than that of Bristow and Wainwright, suggesting that audiences sought increasingly serious themes in operas as the nineteenth century progressed. In Burke's "romantic drama," Rip is an exaggerated version of the "knickerbocker," an eighteenth-century slang term for New York Dutchmen.[25] His first lines, which I will provide in the dialect Burke writes, provide ample evidence of this fact:

> Rip, Rip, was is dis for a business. You are a mix nootse unt dat is a fact. Now, I started for de mountains dis' mornin', determined to fill my bag mit game, but I met Van Brunt,

24. Ibid 8. I will use italics throughout this thesis to indicate musical directions found in the operas' scores.

25. See Irving Lewis Allen, *The City in Slang: New York and Popular Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

> de one eyed sergeant—comma see hah, unt brandy-wine hapben my neiber friend; well, I couldn't refuse to take a glass mit him, unt den I tooks anoder glass, unt den I took so much as a dozen, do I drink no more as a bottle; he drink no more as I—he got so top heavy, I rolled him in de hedge to sleep a leetle, for his one eye got so crooked, he never could have seed his way straight…[26]

Rip's regional, old-fashioned speech patterns are especially jarring when compared with those of every other character in Burke's play; their lines of dialogue are not written in dialect, suggesting that they were meant to be delivered with greater clarity. But what is the purpose of Rip's strong Dutch dialect? This question must be addressed before I analyze Rip's character in the Bristow and Wainwright opera, as the two versions of the lazy farmer are starkly different. Thankfully, folklorist Richard M. Dorson provides a possible solution to the enigma of Burke's portrayal of Rip: he is a type of stock character known as the "stage Yankee."

Dorson wrote on the concept of the stage Yankee in his 1940 essay "The Yankee on the Stage—A Folk Hero of America Drama."[27] By his definition, the stage Yankee is "a generic folk figure capably illustrating cheeky traits of the American temper."[28] Dorson lists the qualities of the first stage Yankees: he is a "country bumpkin," and "boastful," to the point of "bluster and defiance," and highly inquisitive, asking "question after impertinent question." Verbally, the Yankee "tends to speak in monologues" in a "loose, rambling, seemingly spontaneous" manner—as Rip does in his first entrance—in a "dialect rife with vernacularisms and homely similies"; Burke's Rip does this as well, often saying "Here's your go-to-hell" as opposed to

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26. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 5-6.

27. Other writings on the stage Yankee character include Francis Hodge's 1965 *Yankee Theatre: The Image of the American on the Stage, 1825-1850* and Winifred Morgan's 1988 *An American Icon: Brother Jonathan and American Identity.* "Brother Jonathan" is another term for the stage Yankee.

28. "The Yankee on the Stage," 467. *The New England Quarterly,* 13.3 (Sep. 1940), 467.

"good health" when toasting others.[29] However, Dorson is quick to point out that the Yankee is not a solely, as the type possesses "moral strength and physical bravery" which in turn lead to "heroic qualities that elevate him from buffoon to folk hero."[30] As will be seen, Burke's Rip does indeed possess these "heroic qualities"—he defends his daughter's honor and shrewdly thinks of ways to outsmart an unfair contract—but they manifest during comic moments (Rip's major fear regarding the contract is not legality, but his wife's wrath should he sign something without her permission). All of this evidence suggests that Burke's play, despite its title as a "romantic drama," is a comedy, designed to make the audience laugh with a broad range of jokes, from political puns ("Damn who's cat?" for "Democrat") to men cross-dressing as women. That distinction must be remembered when comparing this work to Bristow and Wainwright's opera, which is largely free of comic moments.

The lack of comedy in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* is apparent when Rip enters and performs a song; Burke's Rip does this as well, but the lyrics are markedly different from one another. In Burke's romantic drama, Rip's song is a "warning to all single fellows," and describes his emasculated position in his marriage: "When a wife to rule once wishes, / Mit poor spouse 'tis all my eye, / I'm d—d if she don't wear de breeches, / Dat nobody can deny, deny."[31] He ends the tune by resigning himself to his fate, commenting, "We can't do mit em, / Nor can't we do mit out 'em, / Dat nobody can deny, deny."[32] Bristow and Wainwright's opera lacks this humor; their interpretation of Rip is as a well-spoken, clever man who speaks in

29. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 6.

30. Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage," 468.

31. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 7.

32. Ibid.

beautifully poetic expression. In his first song, played *Allo spiritoso,* or "fast, with spirit," Rip opines on the simplicity of his life: "The gentry may talk of their excellent wine, / Their liquors so costly and dear, / They may call them divine, / But I ne'er will repine, / If I have but a mug full of beer."[33] Despite Rip's wish for plainness, though, the music moves in a complicated manner: the orchestrations indicate a series of rapidly moving arpeggios played in sixteenth notes, and at one point, Rip is required to move from an A on the staff to a Low A, an octave interval that reveals the large range needed for the part.[34] These factors suggest that the Bristow and Wainwright Rip has more in common with the heroes of European opera—the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto,* the titular character in *Faust,* and the tragic Alfredo Germont of *La traviata*—than the stage Yankees of the Northeastern United States.

A later and more direct connection to "Dat nobody can deny" is further proof of the lack of comedy in Rip's operatic character. Bristow has Rip sing a duet with his wife Dame Van Winkle that includes the lyrics "I wish I a maiden had tarried, Oh! / would I had never been wed" and "A batchelor [sic] would I had tarried, Oh! / would I had never been wed… I am tired and sick of my life."[35] The Chorus, observing the fight, remarks, "'Twere better far to be dead…When marriage of love is divested."[36] The seriousness of the words, combined with the general lack of humorous moments found throughout Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* suggests that in 1855, opera was understood as a grave form of entertainment; again, the list of popular operas in France, Italy, and Germany offers further credence to this concept. It is equally

33. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 8-9.

34. Ibid 10.

35. Ibid 43, 48

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36. Ibid 46-48.

important to note that Bristow himself studied under European musicians; musicologist Howard E. Smither writes that Bristow "received his early training in piano and violin from his father [an English immigrant] and the cellist W. Musgriff. He is said to have studied violin with the Norwegian virtuoso Ole Bull and harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration with the German immigrant Henry Christian Timm."[37] Though Bristow was famously "an outspoken advocate for music by American composers,"[38] it is likely that his European musical training influenced his own style of composition; musicologist and opera expert Brad Hill comments that "Bristow composed in the European style, inspired by American folklore and landmarks."[39]

The differences between Burke's play and Bristow and Wainwright's opera are even more apparent in each work's central plots, which have very little to do with Rip himself. Burke's piece is a classic example of what has been called a "well-made play": a genre of drama popular in the nineteenth century which centered on disguises, eavesdropping, a pair of lovers attempting to unite against great odds, and a sudden reversal of fortune typically caused by a legal document presented at just the right moment.[40] The plot of Burke's romantic drama is twofold: the first act centers on the valiant attempts of Rip's sister Alice and the town's schoolmaster—who, in a sly reference to Irving's writing career, is named Diedrich Knickerbocker—to be wed against the wishes of Dame Van Winkle. However, this attempted union is largely a comic subplot, used to create humorous situations for the two lovers in the first act. At one point, Diedrich, hoping to see his beloved Alice, sneaks into the Van Winkle home

37. Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio, Volume Four: The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,*(Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 467.

38. Ibid.

39. Brad Hill, *Classical* (New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2005), 38.

40. Anna Cora Mowatt's 1845 work *Fashion* is a prime example of the American well-made play; note that it had its premiere only five years before Burke's *Rip Van Winkle.*

and ends up concealed in a closet, prompting Alice to try to prevent her brother and sister-in-law from discovering him. Later, Alice disguises Diedrich as an "old pedlar woman,"[41] a bit of cross-dressing that culminates in Dame Van Winkle pursuing Diedrich with a broom; Diedrich throwing his bonnet in Dame's face; and an escape through a closed window that prompts laughter in Alice.[42] This is the end of the plot, which is resolved at the beginning of Act II without further question. The true tension of the play's story lies with its villain Herman Van Slaus, a scheming wastrel who learns that Rip's seven-year-old daughter Lorrenna is "the richest presumptive heiress in the land" due to a future inheritance from an estranged aunt.[43]

Herman convinces his father Derric, the Van Winkle's landlord to draw up a document that will force Lorrenna either marry him when she comes of age or give him her substantial fortune; Derric reluctantly agrees, and then convinces Rip to sign his name to the paper by tempting him with the promise of rent-free living for the rest of his life. Rip, in a moment of classic stage Yankee virtue (Dorson cites the Yankee's agreeing to a bribe as a stock device and "matter of farce" which is ultimately forgiven[44]) only agrees if Derric will "put down dat I can break dat contract, if I choose, in twenty years and a day."[45] While Rip slumbers, Herman attempts to put this plot in motion, which greatly upsets Lorrenna, who has fallen in love with the dashing sea captain Gustaffe. Just as Herman brings the matter to court, Gustaffe discovers the newly-awakened Rip's true identity, and the older man produces his own contract, nullifying Herman's scheme and providing a happy end for all the virtuous. None of these events happen in

41. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 14.

42. Ibid 14-15.

43. Ibid 9.

44. Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage," 477.

45. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 13.

Irving's original story. They were probably added to the play to add drama to the tale, and that this new plot was crafted to conform to the standards of the well-made play as the dominant theatrical form of the 1850s.

The Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* contains the same basic central plot as the Burke play—the villainous Herman plots to either marry Rip's daughter or seize her considerable fortune—but the execution of that plot differs greatly both in form and content. Bristow and Wainwright conceive an entirely new second act for their piece, which takes place during the American Revolutionary War and features military marches, large ensemble numbers, and sweeping love duets. As the items on this list suggest, the content of these songs is poetic and grandiose, and has much more in common with the tunes from European operas such as *Rigoletto* and *Les Troyens* than the folksy humor of Burke's comedy. These differences are apparent from the moment that begins Act II, when Rip's daughter, here named Alice, enters for the first time, bearing a letter from her beloved, the military captain and dashing hero Edward. She eagerly tells Dame Van Winkle the news, singing, "Joy, dear mother, dims mine eye, / And brings the crimson to my cheek; / Love and hope have made me sigh, / Fear has caused my grief to speak."[46] Later, as the young Van Winkle continues to dream of her lover, her language becomes even more old-fashioned: My constant soul is filled with thoughts of thee, / My every dream some form of thee is taking…"[47] These pronouns, while still used in the 1770s when this act takes place, had begun to fall into obscurity; as linguist Roger Lass writes, "[thee and thou were] not really living option[s] in ordinary usage…by the middle of the eighteenth century *you*

46. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 142-143.

47. Ibid 146-147.

was the only normal spoken form,"[48] a fact that hints at Bristow and Wainwright's choice of a more old-fashioned style when writing Alice's character. That style similarly appears in the vocal score, as Alice ends this particular song with an ad-lib run up the scale which culminates in a high A meant to be held as long as possible. This combination of grand singing and old-fashioned speaking suggests that Bristow and Wainwright deliberately chose to evoke an antiquated and poetic sensibility for their opera's language. That language, especially when contrasted with the plain speaking and even dialect-based humor of Burke's play, suggests that in 1855, operas were expected to have a certain degree of seriousness.

The poetic, even melodramatic nature of Bristow and Wainwright's adaptation of Irving's tale continues when Herman, overcome with lust for Alice, "seizes her and encircles [her] waist,"[49] implying that he will rape the girl. At this moment, "Edward enters quickly and throws Herman to [left] corner [of the stage]"; to emphasize the importance of this scene, it is frozen in "tableau." This contrasts a similar moment in the Burke play: Herman shows no physical interest in Lorrenna whatsoever, instead simply mentioning that she is "compelled to" [50] marry him, and when Gustaffe, Lorrenna's lover, enters, the stage directions indicate that he "embraces her" and says "My tender, charming Lorrenna!"[51] This is certainly a romantic moment, but it lacks the emotional fervor of Edward interrupting Alice's attempted rape; similarly, Edward's first line, "Perfidious wretch my friend I did believe thee,"[52] is far more grandiose than a simple statement

48. Roger Lass, "Phonology and Morphology," *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume III, 1476-1776,* ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 153.

49. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 158.

50. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 20.

51. Ibid 21.

52. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 158-159.

of affection. Such contrasts between Burke's comedy and Bristow and Wainwright's opera hint at a more elevated (or, at least, a perception of more elevation) in the latter form during the mid-nineteenth century.

It is not only language and tone, however, which separates Burke's lighthearted adaptation of "Rip Van Winkle" and Bristow and Wainwright's intense, serious retelling; the two also differ in the presence and degree of the theme of patriotism, which, as will be seen, was a topic on the minds of many citizens of New York City in 1855. Burke's play touches only briefly on the subject. When Rip awakens from his twenty-year slumber and discovers that the village's inn has been named for George Washington, he remarks that "I remember a shoot of dat name, dat served under Braddock, before I went to sleep."[53] Seth Slous, the innkeeper, proudly declares "that shoot, as you call him, planted the tree of liberty so everlasting tight in Yankee land, that all the kingdoms of the earth can't root it out."[54] Though stirring, these themes of pride in the newly-freed United States quickly become the stuff of jokes; when a group of villagers who are busy with an election ask if Rip has voted "federal or democrat," the confused man replies "Fiddle who? damn who's cat?"[55] Again, the character of the stage Yankee defines Rip, and turns the patriotic stirrings of the people of the village into the fodder for laughter: the whole joke is that Rip's twenty-year slumber has made him miss everything from the Revolutionary War to George Washington's presidency to the formation of the political party system in this

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53. Burke, *Rip Van Winkle: A Legend of the Catskills,* 22. The "Braddock" Rip refers to is General Edward Braddock, who led a disastrous campaign during the French and Indian War; Washington, who served as an aide to Braddock, helped to save the colonial army after Braddock was killed. See Rene Chartrand, *Monogahela 1754-55: Washington's Defeat, Braddock's Disaster* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004).

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid 23.

country. That is not to say that Burke's play mocks patriotism; rather, it is Rip's utter confusion about the topic, rather than the topic itself, that is humorous.

Jokes about patriotism are not present in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle*; instead, nearly half the songs of the second act are dedicated to praising the United States and all those who seek to defend her. Edward leads these songs when he prepares to depart for the battlefront with his army of volunteers; as they leave, he declares, "…but let us ere we go, / Beseech that power to whom alone we know, / To take our cause beneath his guardian care."[56] Thus begins the song "We will free our country now, or unconquered bravely die," a rousing anthem to the power of the United States. Later, in a song sung *Allo con Spirito,* or "fast, with spirit," male soldiers sing of the joy of defending their nation: "Hurra, Hurra, for the life the soldier leads, / When he fights for his country's cause, / His sword the only friend he needs, / Which at freedom's call he draws, he draws."[57] Even Alice becomes involved with the army when, sensing that Herman may try to harm her beloved Edward, she travels to the soldiers' camp and volunteers to join the fight as a "Vivandiere," a female giver of provisions, alcohol, and even medical care to soldiers.[58] Though still highly feminine and operatic—during the "Vivandiere Song," Alice performs a rapid run up the scale culminating in a high B-flat and ending on a low D[59]--the tunes are highly militaristic and patriotic in tone, suggesting the vast power of devotion to the United States. This may be why the *New York Times* review of the opera, cited at the beginning of this chapter, claimed that the score was "pervaded by a martial

56. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 193.

57. Ibid 203-204.

58. For more on these women, see Thomas Cardoza's *Intrepid Women: Cantinières and Vivandières of the French Army* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

59. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 220.

manner." Such strong, pro-American sentiment leads to what I consider the central question of this chapter: what events in the mid-eighteenth century might have inspired such feelings, and what do those feelings say about Northeastern American identities in 1855?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to go beyond the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* and search for other clues that might explain an increased sense of patriotism in the Northeastern United States during the mid-nineteenth century. One such clue lies in the State of the Union address delivered by President Franklin Pierce in December of that year; though the speech would likely have been heard by a far smaller audience than contemporary addresses, the themes present in Pierce's oration remain relevant. Pierce, observing the ever-growing unrest over slavery in the American South, spoke proudly of the power of the Constitution:

> …are patriotic men in any part of the Union prepared on such issue [as state violence] thus madly to invite all the consequences of their forfeiture of their constitutional engagements? It is impossible. The storm of frenzy and faction must inevitably dash itself in vain against the unshaken rock of the Constitution. I shall never doubt it…I rely confidently on the patriotism of the people, on the dignity and self-respect of the States, on the wisdom of Congress, and, above all, on the continued gracious favor of Almighty God to maintain against all enemies, whether at home or abroad, the sanctity of the Constitution and the integrity of the Union.[60]

There are interesting (though coincidental) parallels between Pierce's State of the Union and the text of Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle.* The phrase "continued gracious favor of Almighty God" sounds remarkably similar to Frederick's prayer to "the power to whom alone we know / to take our cause beneath his guardian care." Note that this "cause" was the cause of freedom from Great Britain; earlier in Pierce's speech, he speaks angrily about relations between the United States and Britain over issues including Central America and the conscription of

60. Franklin Pierce, "State of the Union 1855." On "American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond." http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/franklin-pierce/state-of-the-union-1855.php

American men into Britain's war against Russia.[61] Such distaste against Great Britain in 1855 may be one of the reasons that Bristow and Wainwright chose to use their opera to invoke America's great victory over that nation in the Revolutionary War.

It was not only Great Britain that was considered suspect in the Northeastern United States in the mid-nineteenth century; a sudden and enormous increase in European immigration to the region during that time led to strong xenophobic sentiment. Historian Elliot J. Gorn observes that in the 1840s and 50s, New York's population exploded by seventy percent, and that its foreign-born populace grew at a rate twice as high as that figure.[62] Gorn also points out that such a massive upswing in the number of immigrants in the Northeast led to a "strident assertion of national identity" that included the founding of secret societies such as the "Order of the Star-Spangled Banner" and the formation of the Know-Nothing Party, a group that "promised a return to the early republican virtues of hard work, piety, and mutuality, all supposedly mocked by loose-moraled [sic] foreigners."[63] Though coincidental, Irving's short story—and consequently, Bristow and Wainwright's operatic adaptation of it—is set in the time of the "early republic," which allows the composer and librettist to include pro-American, and especially pro-early American, sentiment within their work. There is even the possibility that the composer and librettist's removal of the opening song from Burke's play about the New Yorkers' origins in the Netherlands—"In our native land, where flows the Rhine"—was an attempt to recast the settlers as true Americans as opposed to Dutch immigrants. As will be seen below, I argue that Bristow and Wainwright's choice to both adapt Irving's folktale and include an entire act about the power

61. Ibid.

62. Elliot J.Gorn, "'Good-Bye Boys, I Die A True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City," *The Journal of American History,* 74.2. (Sep. 1987), 393.

63. Ibid 394.

of the United States in that adaptation was a deliberate attempt to codify native-born Americans as "true" citizens with a long history and folklore in the country, thus excluding lower-class immigrants from the status of "Northeastern American."

It was not only an increase in immigration that may have led to an identity crisis for the United States in 1855; that quest had begun earlier than the 1850s, when the emergence of new technologies and the rapid expansion of the country led to questions about what it meant to be an American citizen. Historian Pauline Maier notes as much when she writes that, in the era immediately following the War of 1812, "a new generation of Americans turned its attention back in time, and made preservation of the nation's revolutionary history its peculiar mission."[64] Maier goes on to guess that the "beginnings of American industrialization and the canal era" led to this nationwide soul-searching, and summarizes the trend succinctly:

> In the course of recalling and recording the events of the Revolution, Americans of the 1820s remembered the revolutionaries as mighty fathers whose greatness threw into relief the ordinariness of their descendants. It wasn't the first time that Americans attributed superhuman characteristics to an earlier generation. New Englanders of the late seventeenth century had looked back at the Puritan founders of Massachusetts with a similar sense of awe.[65]

Other major events in American history during the nineteenth century, including the nation's doubling in size with Thomas Jefferson authorizing the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the increasingly fervid (and sometimes violent) debates over slavery in the southern and newly founded western states, led to increased confusion over the qualifications of being an American. As such, it is possible that certain groups—like the largely white, native-born Americans who viewed Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle*—sought to use any means necessary,

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64. Pauline Maier, *American Scripture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 177.

65. Ibid 177-178.

including folklore, to establish a concrete identity for themselves in a time when the definition of that identity was shifting rapidly Irving himself, one of the earliest scribes of the American folk tradition, admitted his desire to create a unified sense of self for his fellow New Yorkers. In an edition of *The History of New York*, he wrote that the "main object of [his] work…was to embody the traditions of [New York City]…[and] illustrate its local humors, customs, and peculiarities."[66] By doing this, he created what he felt was a "convivial currency" which "link[s] our whole community together."[67] But Irving's statement is a half-truth, as the stories and legends found in *The History of New York* create a "convivial currency" for only a certain portion of New York City's inhabitants: namely, those of Dutch descent. This is the irony of Irving's folklore; while it did indeed provide a unified spirit for a certain portion of the United States, it did so at the exclusion of other groups in the same area.

I argue that this exclusion explains one of the major impetuses behind Bristow and Wainwright's work; their opera premiered at a time when New York City's immigrant population was increasing rapidly, prompting fear and distrust in the native-born individuals of the metropolis. By providing an opera that not only praised the Dutch (and only the Dutch) population of New York as the individuals who "freed the country," but also cast the audience's mind back to the time before the recent upswing of European immigrants, the composer and librettist provided a sense of security and stability for the longstanding inhabitants of the city. In other words, the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* fragments the identity of New York City into an "us" and "them," a "true" American versus the foreign-born and thus "false" American; as American opera historian Julia Chybowski notes, remarks, "…opera would always

66. Irving, *A History of New York,* 10. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.

67. Ibid 10-11.

exclude some Americans…in the nineteenth century, opera [in American] was both democratized and made to seem exclusive."[68]

Remember too that the Astor Place Riots had occurred only six years earlier, further driving a wedge between the poor and immigrant classes and the well-to-do, native-born people of the state. This is the power of the Northeastern American folkloric opera: it often asserts an identity for a particular subset of the Northeast, but does so at the exclusion of other sets within that group, which ironically helps to provide those sets with a stronger sense of self as well, by delineating what they are *not.* In the case of the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle,* the "true" Americans are those non-immigrant citizens of New York City who could trace their lineage back to the time of the Revolutionary War and had enough wealth and leisure time to enjoy an evening at the opera house. As the first Northeastern American folkloric opera on record, the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* began this trend, which, as will be seen in the remainder of this thesis, transforms throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Though Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle* was a landmark work in the creation of American folkloric opera, it, like many other works of the nineteenth century, has somewhat fallen out of vogue throughout the 1900s and 2000s; though the great opera houses of New York City mounted (and continue to mount) the Italian, French, and German operas written in the nineteenth century, *Rip Van Winkle* has been, and is, decidedly absent from their seasons. The production was certainly mounted again at least once, as some publications of the opera date from 1881 and list J. Howard Wainwright, not J.W. Shannon, as librettist. Beyond this, however, no record of a staging of Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle* in a major American venue

68. Julia Chybowski, "Opera in America," in *Music in American Life: An Encyclopedia of the Songs, Styles, Stars, and Stories That Shaped Our Culture,* ed. Jacqueline Edmonson (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 824.

exists. Theatre historians, too, tend to focus on later versions of the play rather than the opera. The adaptation penned by Joseph Jefferson III and Dion Boucicault is usually considered the "definitive" staging of Irving's story; so great is Jefferson's association with this role that his biography is titled after Rip.[69] Interestingly, Jefferson and Boucicault's version of the story has more in common with Bristow and Wainwright's opera than Burke's play, at least in its poetic nature; Jefferson wrote as much in the introduction of the play, noting that, in the magical scenes, "it is a fairy tale, and the prosaic elements of [Rip] should be eliminated."[70] Those "prosaic elements" sound much like the characterization of Rip as a stage Yankee; there is no silly dialogue or willingness to take bribes in Jefferson's interpretation, and Jefferson even proudly declares that "the dialect [is not] an important element in the presentation of the character."[71] In this, the themes of exclusion—in this case, the removal of broad comedy that might have been enjoyed by lower-class audiences and its replacement with noble ideals—that Bristow and Wainwright used in their *Rip Van Winkle* continued throughout the nineteenth century.

As time passed in the nineteenth century, the problems of immigration began to be replaced with other pressing issues, including temperance, unionization, and women's suffrage. Jefferson himself provides proof of these shifting sentiments in a story about his insistence on Rip taking a flagon of beer at the end of the play, explaining, "Should Rip refuse the cup, the drama would become a temperance play; and I should as soon expect to hear of Cinderella striking for higher wages, or of a speech on Women's Rights from Old Mother Hubbard, as to

69. See Benjamin McArthur, *The Man Who Was Rip Van Winkle: Joseph Jefferson and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

70. Joseph Jefferson and Dion Boucicault, *Rip Van Winkle as Played by Joseph Jefferson,* ed. Cora Hamilton Bell (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1896), 17.

71. Ibid 19.

listen to a temperance lecture from Rip Van Winkle. It would take all the poetry completely out of it."[72] Jefferson's use of fairy tale and nursery rhyme characters is humorous, but it also lends credence to my argument of staged folklore as a vehicle for exclusion; by stating that such lore cannot be used by certain groups, Jefferson, implicitly or otherwise, claims that lore as the property of a particular class of people.

Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle* does the same: it takes Irving's story, which was itself exclusionary, and uses it to reify the native-born, upper-class individual as the "true" New Yorker and, by extension, the "true" American; in not addressing the changing spirit of New York City and instead escaping into its (apparently) more homogenized past, Bristow and Wainwright provided a certain portion of their audience with a sense of security and safety against the cultural transformation brought on by a rapidly-changing populace. Having established this quality in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle,* I will now turn to later Northeastern American folkloric operas to determine whether or not the genre is consistently exclusionary. This requires me to turn to 1937, when Irving's other great creations—a skinny schoolmaster named Ichabod Crane and a terrifying ghost called the Headless Horseman—saw their debut on the New York operatic stage.

72. Ibid 17.

Chapter Two

"More Suitable to Younger Voices":

Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Headless Horseman*

> WASHINGTON, Thursday—Last night my husband and I enjoyed very much the dinner which the Cabinet gives us every year. There were no changes in the Official family except for the three deaths which have come to men who have been in this group…my husband expressed the hope that in spirit all the people are still with us who have worked to make the Administration to serve the needs of the United States at this time. Miss Winifred Cecil who has a most lovely soprano voice sang for us after dinner and then we returned to the White House…[1]

This newspaper column, penned by First Lady of the United States Eleanor Roosevelt, was published on March 5, 1937, and details the Democratic Victory Dinner held for her and her husband Franklin Delano the previous evening. As evidenced by the last line of this citation, the First Lady and her husband were entertained during the dinner by an opera singer named Winifred Cecil, described as the "leading lady of the *Maxwell House Show Boat* program, heard each Thursday at 9:00 PM."[2] Coincidentally, the presence of an opera singer at the Victory Dinner on March 4, seems to foreshadow a major event in American opera: the next evening saw the premiere of *The Headless Horseman,* a one-act operetta based on a folk tale by Washington Irving. The work, by composer Douglas Moore and librettist Stephen Vincent Benét, opened at the Bronxville High School that night to mild press coverage; as cited in the Introduction of this thesis, the *New York Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* were among the papers that mentioned the opera's debut.

Before continuing, I wish to address the discrepancy that readers might notice in this chapter: how is it possible to compare a professionally-mounted nineteenth-century opera with

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1. Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day: March 5th, 1937." http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1937&_f=md054583

2. "Grand opera and radio concert soprano Winifred Cecil." J. Willis Sayre Collection of Theatrical Photographs. http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sayre/id/19062

one commissioned for teenagers almost a hundred years later? The two are exceptionally different, and other operas or opera-inspired pieces based on American folklore premiered throughout the remainder and beginning of the 1800s and 1900s, respectively.[3] However, the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* is among the only one of these works that is directly based on a piece of Northeastern American folklore, and as this thesis seeks to use microhistory to explore how operatic versions of that folklore have been staged throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it seems the ideal choice. By analyzing the text and, to a lesser extent, the production history of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman,* along with its history, operatic inspirations, and connection to the medium of radio broadcasting, I will discuss how the themes presented by Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle*, and especially the central theme of creating a homogenized folk in the face of multiple identities, manifest in the latter work.

Unlike the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle,* which had only a few scattered mentions in various newspapers during its initial run in 1855, there are several references to the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* in different print media in the years following its March 5 premiere; archivist Jerry L. McBride dutifully collects these references in his *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography*. Interestingly, the most useful of these descriptions come from an unexpected source: California's Stanford University, which staged a performance of *The Headless Horseman* in 1940. Stanford newspapers provide some of the only existing reviews of the operetta near its original premiere date; regretfully, there is no evidence of criticism regarding the piece in its 1937 debut, which is possibly the result of the work's status as a "school" opera. The 1940 Stanford review, though brief, describes the opera as "beautifully staged and costumed," a

3. Among these works are Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937); Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* (1910); and the Gershwin Brothers' *Porgy and Bess* (1935). See Elise K. Kirk's *American Opera: American Life* for more information on these works.

"delightful little piece…worth a repeat performance."[4] McBride cites (but frustratingly does not provide) another review of the same performance which "is positive overall but does not hesitate to point out shortcomings in both the composition and the performance."[5]

As was the case with Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* it is impossible to make sweeping statements about the state of opera in the late 1930s from single columns written on opposite sides of the United States. However, some factors can be hypothesized based not only on those columns, but even Eleanor Roosevelt's account of her daily life. There are three particularly important elements in understanding the genesis of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*: its status as a "school opera," its connection to the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, and the impact of the new medium of radio on the world of opera in the first decades of the twentieth century. I will analyze these elements in tandem with the lives of Moore and Benét as creators of American opera. By focusing on these contained elements, I will, as Peter A. Davis suggests, "focus on the particular, the specialized, the everyday, even the ordinary, to understand the agency of life on a smaller scale." Analyzing Moore and Benét's work and the factors that heavily influenced its creation will help to capture that "agency," and further suggest the use of American folkloric opera as a tool for the championing of certain identities at the exclusion of others.

The most interesting element of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* is its connection to various academies, and especially academies for young people. Indeed, the creation of the work is inextricably bound to education. McBride reports that *The Headless Horseman* "was commissioned by Willard Rhodes (1901-1992), the music director for the

4. Jean Nowell, "Audiences, Performers Rollic through 'Headless Horseman.' *The Stanford Daily,* Volume 97, Issue 52, 23 May 1940. http://stanforddailyarchive.com/cgi-bin/stanford?a=d&d=stanford19400523-01.2.9#

5. Jerry L. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography (*Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2011), 450.

Bronxville schools and later Moore's colleague at Columbia University"; Rhodes would later gain fame as an ethnomusicologist.[6] Historians David Garrett Izzo and Lincoln Konkle point out another important connection to this particular academy: namely, that "Moore's children were students" at Bronxville High School, where the opera premiered.[7] Rhodes himself wrote an article—"*The Headless Horseman:* An Experiment in American School Music"—on the subject of the opera:

> The Bronxville schools have a tradition of presenting Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, but it is useful to expand the high school students' knowledge of other kinds of music and to choose works that are more suitable to younger voices. Moore and Benét were approached with the challenge of writing a work for young students in order to give them an opportunity to work on a piece by an American composer who was not strictly a writer of popular music.[8]

The Stanford University review mentions similar concepts, reporting that "Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét designed their operetta primarily for college presentation both from the musical and technical standpoints."[9] This provides a helpful perspective for understanding the opera, but it also confirms that the genre of opera itself was shared with and studied by, and even created especially for, young people in the United States in the late 1930's, a trend that had existed in the nineteenth century as well; performance historian Marah Gubar writes as much in her discussion of "an all-child production of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's *H.M.S.*

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6. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 23.

7. David Garrett Izzo and Lincoln Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist for Stage, Screen, and Radio," in *Stephen Vincent Benét: Essays on His Life and Work,* eds. David Garrett Izzo and Lincoln Konkle (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 220.

8. Ibid 327.

9. Nowell, "Audiences, Performers, Rollic through 'Headless Horseman."

Pinafore" that won rave reviews when it premiered in Britain's Opera Comique in 1879.[10] Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman* used a similar device; a preview piece from Stanford notes that "seven grammar school children have been borrowed, trained, and will be utilized Wednesday evening as atmosphere."[11] These children were far from mere "atmosphere," as they sang several times throughout the opera.

The presence of children performing *H.M.S. Pinafore* is particularly important, as it leads to the second major element of Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman*: a connection to the work of lyricist William Schwenk Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan, an English duo. Their work, which includes 1878's *H.M.S. Pinafore,* 1879's *The Pirates of Penzance,* and 1885's *The Mikado,* was a departure from the serious strains of Wagner, Bizet, and Puccini in the mid-nineteenth century. Gilbert and Sullivan's works read as a parody of the well-made play and melodramatic plots of their predecessors; in *The Pirates of Penzance,* for example, the plot's conflict is settled at the last possible moment when a character reveals that the titular band of brigands (who are extremely bad at pillaging and pirating) are actually noblemen, a fact which has absolutely no foreshadowing anywhere in the previous scenes. Sullivan's music is often written *allegro,* with quick-moving arpeggios sung by full, rollicking choruses—"With Cat-Like Tread" and "Climbing O'er Rocky Mountain," both from *The Pirates of Penzance,* and "Carefully on Tiptoe Stealing," from *Pinafore,* are prime examples of this trend. Similarly, Gilbert's lyrics are known for their wordplay and ludicrous rhymes, as evidenced by what may be his most popular work, "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General," which contains

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10. Marah Gubar, "The Drama of Precocity: Child Performers on the Victorian Stage," in *The Nineteenth Century Child and Consumer Culture,* ed. Dennis Denisoff (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 70.

11. "Benét Satire Hits Education: 'Headless Horseman' to Play Wednesday." *The Stanford Daily,* Volume 97, Issue 49, 20 May 1940. *The Stanford Daily* Archive. http://stanforddailyarchive.com/cgi-bin/stanford?a=d&d=stanford19400520-01.2.21&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN-------#

the lyrics "About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o'news / With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse."[12] That is not to say that Gilbert and Sullivan's works are pure comedy—there are love songs and ballads in their operettas—but even these are often tinged with an element of satire (one male aria, "Oh, Is There Not One Maiden Breast," describes the "homely face and bad complexion" of the women the tenor is trying to seduce).[13]

There are numerous comparisons to be drawn between Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman* and Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operettas; while the specifics of the former will be analyzed later in this Chapter, it is worth mentioning the connections that Moore and Benét's reviewers themselves noticed during the initial runs of the opera. As cited above, the Bronxville schools, which commissioned the piece, were known for performing Gilbert and Sullivan's works, emphasizing a connection between the American and English operettas from the moment of *The Headless Horseman*'s conception. Dorothy Nichols, a reviewer from the *Daily Palo Alto Times* (the city wherein Stanford is located), "comments on the similarity in style to Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas" in her opinion on the 1940 debut at the university.[14] Moore himself made a comparison between his work and that of the Englishmen during an interview with the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 1962, describing that "operas have traditions that are difficult for Americans to accept, because the affectations of grand opera are easy to ridicule. Gilbert and Sullivan operettas are such satires."[15] As will be seen, Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman* certainly ridicules the "affectations of grand opera."

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12. William Schwenk Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance,* 88-89. New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 1986.

13. Ibid 57.

14. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 450.

15. Ibid 311.

Though Moore and Benét's parody succeeds, it seems surprising when compared to the major operatic works of the 1920s and 30s, which, as in the 1850s, were largely serious in tone and content. This list includes Alban Berg's 1925 *Wozzeck* and 1937 *Lulu,* both based on expressionist German plays by Georg Büchner and Frank Wedekind, respectively; Puccini's 1926 *Turandot,* a serious romantic piece; and Kurt Weill's 1928 *The Threepenny Opera*, which, though a comedy, derives its humor from biting social satire. Though comic operas certainly existed during this time, including Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf,* a 1927 "jazz opera," and Janacek's *The Cunning Litle Vixen,* a 1924 piece about Czechoslovakian animals, the majority of works centered on dark, serious themes; this was also true in America, with operas such as Marc Blitzstein's 1937 *The Cradle Will Rock* attacking corrupt corporations and George and Ira Gershwin and Dubose Heyward's 1935 *Porgy and Bess* focusing on poverty and drug use in the African-American population of the Southeastern United States. With such serious themes present in opera, and, as will be discussed in great detail below, extremely difficult financial situations plaguing both the Northeast and the entirety of the United States, why would Moore and Benét choose to return to a form of operatic satire utilized by British composers fifty years prior to their *Headless Horseman*'s debut?

Ethnomusicologist John Dizikes provides a possible answer to this return to the past; this answer also coincides with the concept of Northeastern American folkloric opera as somewhat exclusionary. Dizikes notes:

> In the 1880s and 1890s and after, the unquestioned dominance of Anglo-American culture was challenged by a tremendous influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The response of the part of the Anglo-American population was a deep longing for things English…the ancient ambivalence about England, dating from the Revolution—admiration mixed with dislike—now turned into a desire to identify with the "real," the "original" homeland. American colleges were modeled on Cambridge and

> Oxford…American literature was once more seen as largely part of an English tradition.[16]

The mention of "a tremendous influx of immigrants" is particularly resonant for this thesis; the 1850s saw a similar rise in the immigrant population of New York (especially among the Irish), which also had a hand in creating a strong sense of national pride and works, including Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* based on the identities of native, as opposed to foreign-born, citizens. Similarly, note the connection Dizikes makes between American colleges and their English counterparts, Cambridge and Oxford; both Stanford University (1885) and Bronxville High School (1922), the two academies with the strongest connection to Moore and Benét's operetta, were founded either during or after the period which Dizikes cites as the strongest influence of the English on American culture. As before, it is facile to state that these factors—an increase in immigrants and an emphasis on English education systems—directly led to the creation of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*; rather, it is clearer to say that they are among the factors that may have influence the composer and librettist in creating their work. As will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter, Gilbert and Sullivan's influence, and, on a larger scale, the connection between the Northeastern United States and England, continues the practice of American folkloric opera promoting certain identities as the expense of others.

The final key factor in this preliminary sociocultural analysis of New York City in 1937 is, interestingly, quite the opposite of exclusive, a cultural change so large and widespread that entire books have been dedicated to it. That change is the popularization of the radio, a device which significantly altered the landscape of the United States after its widespread debut in the

16. John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 206-207.

1920s.[17] The radio offered the American public news, serial programs, and the newest music of the day in the comfort of their own homes. No less than Eleanor and Franklin Delano Roosevelt quickly capitalized on the medium; the President became known for his "fireside chats," weekly radio addresses to the American people, while the First Lady commented on the use of radio in the same March 5 column cited at the beginning of this chapter:

> Yesterday afternoon I signed a radio contract with the Lamont, Corliss Company, makers of Pond's products. The money will be paid as usual to the American Friends Service Committee and will take care of numerous charitable interests. I am really looking forward to this work for I have not been on a regular radio program for some time and I enjoy both the working up of the programs and the feeling of contact with a great many people which comes about through the letters which I get after each broadcast.[18]

The medium of radio clearly altered the political atmosphere of the United States in the late 1930s, but how does it connect to the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*? McBride provides an answer when he writes that Moore oversaw "the radio broadcast performance of the work on WJZ [a New York station] on 22 August."[19] This is unsurprising, as Moore was a champion of the power of the radio on the world of music. In a 1943 editorial *The Saturday Review of Literature,* Moore wrote that "the phonograph and the radio [have] so multiplied our resources that music is available everywhere,"[20] and went so far as to claim that the creation of these devices had led to the serious study of "musical literature" at several "schools and colleges."[21] In

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17. For more on the radio's presence in America, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Also see *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922,* by the same author (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

18. Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day: March 5th 1937."

19. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 24.

20. Douglas Moore, "The Importance of Music in Wartime." *The Saturday Evening Review,* January 30 1943. http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1943jan30-00012?View=PDF

21. Ibid.

the same piece, Moore, like Bristow before him, argued for a greater emphasis on American musicians, pointing out that "the symphony conductor is a leader of public opinion…it might be useful if at least one or two of these privileged characters were Americans…when more Americans become capable of forming independent judgments and develop a mind of their own about the value of performances, compositions, or books about music, we shall have better music and shall enjoy it a lot more, because it will be more truly our own." Moore blames not a lack of talent, but rather the machinations of the "merchants of glamor," or radio managers, from keeping American conductors from reaching a privileged position.

What does this argument mean for the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*? Some of the connections, including a distrust of authority figures, will be made clear shortly, when the analysis of the operetta begins. For now, though, it is important to point out that Moore, like other American composers of his time,[22] was a firm believer in the power of music as a popular medium, able to influence opinion and even affect the morale of soldiers; in the *Saturday Evening Review* editorial, the composer cites a letter from a "marine captain" during World War II who derived great "satisfaction and consolation…[from] the thought of his phonograph collection." This statement provides helpful clues as to Moore's motivations for creating *The Headless Horseman*. By writing a piece especially designed for schoolchildren, the composer ensured that the study of opera would continue and thrive in the next generation; by borrowing heavily from the work of Gilbert and Sullivan, two highly recognizable operetta composers, he guaranteed that his piece would itself be popular. Moore even went so far as to allow a complete broadcast of his opera for free on WJZ Radio to connect to as widespread an audience as

22. John Philip Sousa, a composer of many patriotic marches, once stated: "Anybody can write music of a sort. But touching the public heart is quite another." Sousa, *Through the Year with Sousa: Excerpts from the Operas, Marches, Miscellaneous Compositions, Novels, Letters, Magazine Articles, Songs, Sayings, and Rhymes of John Philip Sousa* (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Co., 1910), 105.

possible. With the composer's motivations thus explored (though not confirmed), I now turn to a full examination of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman,* and mine its music, lyrics, and staging to gain a deeper understanding of both the themes presented by the work and how those themes reflect Northeastern American identities at the microhistorical moment of the United States on March 5, 1937.

"In Our Progressive School!": An Analysis of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*

An analysis of Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman* is simultaneously easier and more difficult than the previous analysis of Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle.* The more challenging aspects of this analysis include the greater content of Irving's novella and the lack of non-operatic adaptations of that work; however, Moore and Benét's own work is shorter and lacks the complexities of plot found in the 1855 *Rip Van Winkle* adaptation. I begin with a brief overview of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* the 1820 novella that inspired Moore and Benét's opera over a century after its original publication. As this date suggests, *Sleepy Hollow* was included in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon,* the same text which contained "Rip Van Winkle"; while there are some similarities between the two plots, including their idyllic setting and an emphasis on supernatural elements, the differences between the stories far outweigh them.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is set in a small hamlet nestled in the Catskill Mountains, a place where "a drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere."[23] That "drowsy, dreamy influence" imbues the inhabitants of the village with mild clairvoyance, as "they are given to all kinds of marvellous [sic] beliefs; are subject to trances and

23. Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* 294. In *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories; Or, the Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent,* ed. Alice Hoffman (New York: Random House, 2001), 294.

visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air."[24] The most powerful and dangerous of these supernatural influences is the legendary Headless Horseman, "the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon ball, in some nameless battle of the revolutionary war, and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk,"[25] endlessly searching for his missing body part. This fearsome spook inspired the name of Moore and Benét's opera, but his presence in Irving's novella is rather limited. The central plot of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a conflict between Ichabod Crane, the town's schoolmaster and music teacher, and Abraham "Brom Bones" Van Brunt, a rough-hewn farmer and outdoorsman. The two men are polar opposites: Crane is "tall…exceedingly lean," with "his whole frame [loosely] hanging together" and a small head with features that "[look] like a weathercock perched upon his spindle neck," while Brom has "a Herculean frame" and a "bluff, but not unpleasant countenance, having a mingled air of fun and arrogance."[26]

The story's conflict begins when both men catch the eye of Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of the richest and most prominent family in Sleepy Hollow. "Plump as a partridge; ripe and melting and rosy cheeked as one of her father's peaches; and universally famed, not merely for her beauty, but her vast expectations,"[27] Katrina has a difficult time deciding between her two vastly contradictory suitors; Ichabod woos her with private voice lessons, while Brom's "amorous toyings [are] something like the gentle caresses and endearments of a bear."[28] The central conflict of the story occurs on the night of a grand gala held by the Van Tassel family at

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid 295.

26. Ibid 297-299.

27. Ibid 299.

28. Ibid 299-300.

their palatial estate; it is at this party that Ichabod first hears the legend of the Headless Horseman from Brom himself. After leaving the party in a dejected manner (the narrator suggests that Katrina has refused Ichabod, but does not elaborate), Ichabod begins to ride through the woods to his lodgings, only to encounter the terrifying Headless Horseman. The two begin a wild chase that ends with the Horseman throwing what is implied to be his burning head at the schoolmaster; the following morning, Ichabod Crane has vanished, leaving behind only his hat and a shattered pumpkin. It is heavily implied that the specter was a disguised Brom Bones playing a trick on the schoolteacher, as he "[is] observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod [is] related, and always burst[s] into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin."[29]

Unlike the wholly invented story of "Rip Van Winkle," the unnerving *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is based, in part, on actual New York legends; Irving pieced the tale together while visiting the real Sleepy Hollow in 1817. While there, he heard various tales that influenced his own work, including that of Brom Bones, who bragged about "having once met the devil, on a return from some nocturnal frolic."[30] Similarly, Irving encountered a schoolmaster named Jesse Merwin "and an old-fashioned school"[31] that served as an inspiration for the character of Ichabod; H.A. Davidson reports that Irving later sent a letter to Merwin that named him "the original of Ichabod Crane."[32] These stories and personages, combined with "local traditions of the headless horseman and intimate knowledge from boyhood of the region lying between

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29. Ibid 302.

30. H.A. Davidson, ed., "Preliminary Note to *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*," in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., Together with "Abbotsford" and Other Selections from the Writings of Washington Irving"* (Boston, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1910.), 288

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

Sleepy Hollow and the Tappan Zee," an inland bay in New York, were the genesis of Irving's novella. However, the first stage adaptations of the story did away with this historical background, instead emphasizing the supernatural and mysterious elements of the author's original work.[33] Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman,* however, takes a different tack, mining the tale for comedy and satire on the sociocultural status of New York City in 1937 (though the tale presumably takes place in the early part of the nineteenth century), rather than serious or ghostly themes.

The lighthearted elements of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* begin with the Overture, which is played with *tempo allegro,* or fast-paced, with instruments striking various chords in both the treble and bass clefs.[34] This first page of music indicates the accuracy of Izzo Konkle's statement that "Benét did not so much adapt *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* as use it for the inspiration for his own story."[35] While Izzo and Konkle were referring to the plot of the opera when they wrote this statement—and as will be seen below, that plot is different from Irving's original gothic tale—the music, too, reflects the extremity of the departure from the source text. Irving's novella opens by describing the languid air that pervades the entirety of Sleepy Hollow; the Moore and Benét operetta is the polar opposite of this concept, filling the theatre with loud, rollicking music that seems designed to awaken the drowsy. This kind of energetic opening is another reminder of the traditions of comic operetta, especially the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. From its very beginning, then, the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* differs not only from its

33. Among these stage adaptations are a fascinating, and very loose, adaptation titled *Wolfert's Roost; or, a Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* See Gerald Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 141

34. Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta in One Act Based Upon 'A Legend of Sleepy Hollow' by Washington Irving,* (Boston, MA: E.C. Schrimer Music Co., 1937), 21.

35. Izzo and Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist," 221.

point of origin, but also the traditions of grand romantic opera that dominated the mid-nineteenth century.

The operetta opens with Katrina Van Tassel, here with a much larger role, busily sewing with her friends; though the song is initially played *largo,* or slowly, to allow the girls to express their pride in being "maidens of Dutch descent,"[36] their tune literally and figuratively changes when they transform into a "Gossiping Chorus."[37] The music becomes *allegro,* while the lyrics of their song transform into a kind of round, wherein the Sopranos and Altos sing alternating lines to suggest a group passing around the latest rumors from the village:

> Quilt and patch, patch and quilt, bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz!
> I said to him, he said to you, and don't you think he is?
> His eyes are black, his hair is brown,
> He's quite the nicest boy in town…
> We met beside the wishing well,
> We wandered homeward through the dell,
> I know, my dear, I shouldn't tell…[38]

This is quite a departure from the slow pace of life that pervades Sleepy Hollow in Irving's novella. Again we see the influence of Gilbert and Sullivan on Moore and Benét; the British duo's "How Beautifully Blue the Sky" and "Three Little Maids from School Are We" also feature choruses of women singing *allegro* about trivial topics. Like the Overture before it, "We're Maidens of Dutch Descent" establishes the comic tones of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman.*

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36. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 29.

37. Ibid 32.

38. Ibid 33-34.

After the opening song, Katrina abruptly begins to cry and reveals the opera's central plot; that plot confirms that Benét adapted Irving's source material quite freely. She confesses that the quilting bee is meant to serve as an engagement party, as her father Cornelius Van Tassel is forcing her to marry Ichabod Crane, the local schoolmaster. The confused girls attempt to console her—""Well, of course, he's not *very* handsome—Nor *very* young—/ And he talks about algebra all the time—And when he smiles…it reminds you of a hungry jack-o-lantern!"[39]—but Katrina explains that she has no agency in the matter, as a ludicrous family curse binds both her and her father: "The eldest Van Tassel daughter has to marry a schoolmaster, or else…she's carried away by a ghost and never heard of again!"[40] This seems to be a direct parody of Verdi's *Rigoletto,* which also features a curse on a beautiful young maiden; however, that curse is placed by a father angered at his daughter's abuse at the hands of men, while the *Headless Horseman*'s hex is apparently based on a trivial incident in the Van Tassel family's past. Gilbert and Sullivan used similar parodies in their own work; in *Ruddigore, or The Witch's Curse,* the Baronets of Ruddigore are cursed to commit a crime daily or perish, but the evils performed by the main character are less than impressive (at one point, he merely forges a will). By deliberately invoking mechanics used by Gilbert and Sullivan, Moore and Benét place their *Headless Horseman* firmly in accordance with the British pair's work.

The girls suggest that Katrina's beloved Brom Bones do something about the problem; Moore and Benét use this opportunity to further poke fun at the convention of the romantic opera hero as a dashing, intelligent man who can solve any and all conundrums he encounters. Consider the hero Calaf, a prince in Puccini's 1926 *Turandot* who easily answers three riddles

39. Ibid 2-3.

40. Ibid.

set by the titular princess, a task that countless others have failed to do, and then turns the despotic ruler's heart to love and compassion. Brom is nowhere near as clever as Calaf, as Katrina confirms: You see, it took him three years to get through seventh grade."[41] Though she comments that this was "really Ichabod's fault," as the schoolmaster repeatedly failed Brom, it still establishes that Brom is something of a fool. As will be seen, the composer and librettist develop this trait later in the opera to make the initially strong, virile Brom a parody of traditional operatic heroes such as Calaf.

This parodic nature continues in the next set of songs, when Brom enters with his roving gang of friends to good-naturedly annoy the women of Sleepy Hollow; after the Choruses depart, Brom and Katrina are left alone onstage to sing a duet that both reveals their pasts and serves as a pastiche of the grand romantic opera convention of love at first sight. Again, *Rigoletto* and *Turandot* provide useful contrasts: in the former, main female character Gilda falls instantly in love with a duke after meeting him once in a church, while in the latter, Prince Calaf sees Turandot as she prepares an execution and immediately declares his affection for her. Gilbert and Sullivan parodied this trend in their own work; in *The Pirates of Penzance,* for example, the ingénue Mabel walks onto the stage and, without any provocation, launches into a song about her love for Frederick, a man she has quite literally met seconds ago. Moore and Benét provide a similarly silly impetus for Brom and Katrina's love, as the girl sings, with utter earnestness, "I knew when you dipp'd my braids in ink / That our true love nought could sever!"[42] There is even a connection to be drawn between *The Headless Horseman* and the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle*; Alice Van Winkle and Edward, her lover, used words similar to "nought" in their

41. Ibid 4.

42. Ibid 57.

own, sincere love duet; here, such elevated language is used comically. Izzo and Konkle acknowledge this trend when they remark that "the plot of superstition-crossed lovers resembles not that of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* but rather that of *Romeo and Juliet* or, even better, *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*"[43]

Cornelius Van Tassel, Katrina's father, undergoes a similar transformation, moving from the gentle-spoken sage of Irving's tale to a blustering, pompous, and idiotic windbag. In his own song, he presents himself as a grand figure by boasting "…Van Renns'lers and such are extremely Low Dutch / Compared to the name I proclaim! / For I am Cornelius Van Tassel!"[44] But the rest of the text shows that Cornelius is far from a powerful figure: the stage directions indicate that he repeatedly stamps his foot when he does not get his way, and his speech is peppered with vaguely Dutch-sounding words, including "Potztausend, donnerwetter! What is this?...donder und blitzen!"[45] Cornelius reads as a parody of another character type in grand romantic opera: the sagacious, elderly man (and often father) who provides wisdom and insight for youthful lovers. Puccini's *Turandot* fills this role with the character of Timur, the elderly former king of Tartary and Calaf's father; Timur counsels his son and later serves as a mouthpiece of the gods, warning that they will punish the unjust. The whining Cornelius, while also a father and supposed counselor, has less connection to Timur and more in common with Gilbert and Sullivan's Major-General Stanley, another foolish man with a vast vocabulary, from *The Pirates of Penzance*. As before, there is even a connection between Cornelius and a character in Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle*: namely, Rip himself, who, in the third

43. Izzo and Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist," 221.

44. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 63.

45. Ibid 7, 8.

act, uses his age and wisdom to help and bless the young lovers. By repeatedly mocking typical operatic characters, Moore and Benét firmly establish themselves in a parodic tradition.

The next character to enter the scene is Ichabod himself, who travels with the "Small Fry," or a group of children from the village school; presumably, these are the roles that the "seven grammar school children" who were "borrowed and trained" for the 1940 Stanford production played. The children herald Ichabod's coming with another humorous song which offers mock-praise of the schoolmaster: "Hail his look of cold molasses!... / Hail his ruler and his switches! / When he dusts the bad boys' britches, / How it sets us all in stitches!"[46] As the reviewers and essayists cited through this chapter suggest, the music for these children is the simplest in the entire opera, as almost the whole number is sung in unison; the only harmony in the piece is found on the last note, which is a simple chord. I argue that this is another parody of earlier romantic opera: in Puccini's 1896 *La bohème,* a similar group of children enter a scene in an identical manner and sing genuine praises for Parpignol, "the popular vendor of toys" whom they love.[47] Here again we see Moore and Benét's interest in mocking grand romantic opera; the major characters of *The Headless Horseman,* and even the chorus of schoolchildren, seem to be parodies of recognizable European opera characters.

Ichabod himself is another humorous character, which departs from Irving's characterization of the schoolmaster, and even bears some connection to characters in *Turandot*: namely, the ministers Ping, Pang, and Pong, three pompous statesmen who mock the princes who try to answer the princess's riddles. Though often cruel, Ping, Pang, and Pong also have

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46. Ibid 74.

47. Giacomo Puccini, *La bohème,* trans. Ruth Martin (New York: G. Schirmer Opera Score Editions, 1986), 46.

moments of tenderness, and reveal in a song of their own that they genuinely dislike watching so many young men die.[48] Ichabod lacks such complexity in the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman*; their Crane is a dandified, pedantic, and thoroughly annoying fop who, intentionally or otherwise, seems rude and condescending. His first lines confirm this condescending personality as he comments, "I'm sorry not to have been able to join in your innocent revels ere now. But a very interesting point in Latin grammar detained me—perhaps I can explain it to you, after supper. Tell me, Katrina dear, what were you and your little friends doing before my arrival?"[49] Crane's usage of the phrase "little friends," combined with the term "innocent revels," suggests a deliberate exaggeration of simple concepts. Later, Ichabod and Katrina perform a duet, "Not with a wistful sueing." As the title implies, the language Ichabod uses is deliberately exaggerated: ""Free from the mortal flaws that / Blemish our floral race, / While we discuss the laws that / Govern the Dative Case!"[50] To cement the song as a parody, Katrina sings the exact same lines as Ichabod in perfect unison no less than three times[51]; while this musical styling indicates the suitability of the tune for "younger voices," it also pokes fun at the concept of two individuals marking their compatibility through song, a trend used by Puccini in another of his serious operas, 1904's *Madama Butterfly*; in that work, main characters Cio-Cio San and Pinkerton confirm their love for one another with a lengthy, beautiful ballad in four parts.[52] In that piece, the main characters sing of their dedication and love for each other; here, Katrina flatly echoes Ichabod's opinions, suggesting a mockery of the popular love duets found in

48. Giacomo Puccini and Franco Alfano, *Turandot,* trans. R.H. Elkin (Milan: Ricordi, 2005), 147.

49. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 10.

50. Ibid 95-96.

51. Ibid 97.

52. Giacomo Puccini, *Madama Butterfly: Opera in Three Acts* (New York: Ricordi, 1905), 117.

nineteenth and early twentieth century grand romantic opera.

The next aria in the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman,* "O sun, be quick to bow your head!", is another deliberate send-up of grand romantic opera conventions: namely, the "mad aria," a take on the famous "mad scenes" of Early Modern theatre. The most famous mad aria scene is "Il dolce suono" from *Lucia di Lammermoor,* an 1835 grand romantic opera; in that piece, the titular character, having just murdered her husband in an attempt to marry Edgardo, the man she truly loves, enters disheveled and singing insanely about her future with Edgardo.[53] Again, there is a connection between Lucia and the works of Gilbert and Sullivan: the pair's *Ruddigore* features a character literally named Mad Margaret, whose entire presence in the work is a joke on women driven insane by love. Katrina evokes the spirit of Mad Margaret when she laments her situation and considers suicide: "I'd rather lie within [Brom's] arms / Beneath the churchyard mould, / Than have an education, / And live to be old!"[54] To mark the apparent seriousness of the piece, Moore writes that the orchestra is to play *andante ritardo,* or "moderately, slowly."[55]

The notion of a brokenhearted woman choosing suicide over life without her love is a common grand romantic opera convention; consider Cio-Cio San's cutting her throat in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly,* Tosca's throwing herself from the battlements of a castle in the same composer's 1900 *Tosca,* and even Alice Van Winkle, who, determined to be with Edward, declares, "Should I find my Edward dieing [sic] / On the field of carnage lieing [sic], / In death

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53. Gaetano Donizetti and Salvadore Cammarano, *Lucia di Lammermoor,* trans. Natalia MacFarren (New York: G. Schirmer, 1898), 190. For more on this famous mad scene, see Mary Ann Smart, "The Silencing of Lucia," *Cambridge Opera Journal,* 4.2 (July 1992), 119-141.

54. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 101.

55. Ibid 99.

his bride by his side, / I will gladly share his grave."[56] But unlike these women, Katrina decides on a most ridiculous method of death: ""I'll eat a poison'd toadstool, / And perish tonight!"[57] Moore instructs the orchestra to play *molto ritardo,* or "very slowly," as if to suggest the importance of Katrina's choice. But the extremity of Katrina's situation, and the abrupt shift in tone from cheerful to overly mournful, suggests that the entirety of "O sun, be quick to bow your head!" is a parody of Lucia's "Il dolce suono," Cio-Cio's "Con onor muore," and all anguished declarations of love found in earlier operas.

The parody of opera conventions continues in the next scene, which is marked as "Melodrama," which, due to the exaggerated actions of the characters within it, seems to be evoke the adjective "melodramatic" more than the genre of drama popular in nineteenth century America. Surprisingly, the music in the scene is remarkably serious: as Cornelius Van Tassel attempts to give a speech betrothing Katrina to Ichabod, an ominous sound of hoofbeats begins to echo in the orchestra in an intense pattern of octave intervals (B natural to B natural) in the bass clef.[58] The music becomes ever eerier as the hoofbeats sound louder and louder; a "Phantom's yell" is heard while the orchestra plays the eerie sound of an eleventh interval (F natural to G natural to F natural) marked with a curved line, which indicate a flowing, and therefore non-notated and wild, playing style.[59] The hoofbeats and frightening music mark the arrival of the Headless Horseman, who, upon entering the mansion, triggers the orchestra to play a swirling pattern of notes: in the treble clef, a high D is played, followed by a rushing arpeggio

56. Bristow and Wainwright, *Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera,* 190.

57. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 101.

58. Ibid 105.

59. Ibid 107.

system that repeatedly runs down and up the scale; in the bass clef, an eerie chord (D, F sharp, A, D) is followed by a pattern that swoops upward.[60] McBride notes that this one of the few moments in the work that seems serious, writing that this sequence is "the dramatic climax of the opera."[61]

While the scene's music is certainly intense and powerful, its seriousness is undercut by the words and actions of the characters within it. Ichabod, who had previously boasted of his fearlessness of ghosts, sputters excuses as to why he cannot defeat the Horseman, claiming "I have a very bad headache. I—I want to lie down."[62] Cornelius Van Tassel is similarly useless; rather than fight to protect his daughter or her friends, he "dives under the table" to hide, indicating that the bravery suggested by his opening song is more braggadocio than actual courage. [63] When the Horseman actually enters the room, Ichabod shows his own complete lack of virtue when he "dives through the window," an acrobatic feat that may have prompted laughter, rather than fear, in the audience. [64] It is after this departure that the horror of the scene ends: the Headless Horseman reveals himself to be none other than Brom Bones in disguise! This is a departure from Irving's tale, which only implied that Brom was the ghost; here, there truly are no spirits, and to mark that disappearance of the supernatural, the orchestra returns to a more conventional playing pattern.

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60. Ibid 111.

61. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 23.

62. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 16.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid 17.

With the climax of the piece concluded, Moore and Benét again emphasize their operetta's status as a parody with a truly ridiculous revelation that concludes the plot so cleanly that it can only be read as a mockery of the well-made play. Cornelius points out that despite Ichabod's flight from Sleepy Hollow, the Van Tassel family curse still demands that Katrina marry a schoolmaster. At this point, Brom announces that he fits that qualification, as he has become a schoolmaster himself. He explains, "As soon as I first heard of the Van Tassel tradition, I started taking extension courses at King's College. My lessons arrived each week by canal-boat, and I sent back the answers by the same means. I wanted to keep it a secret until I got my degree, so I always studied at night, and let Sleepy Hollow believe I was training for a career of piracy."[65] Beyond Katrina mentioning that Brom has been spending time at the river at night early in the operetta, there is absolutely no mention or foreshadowing of this fact. The whole notion is so convenient as to be contrived, and therefore parodic; compare the totally unexpected presentation of Brom's degree with the genuinely heroic moment of Rip revealing his contract to stop Herman Van Slaus in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle*. Cornelius immediately accepts Brom and gives him Katrina, just as Major-General Stanley, upon learning that the Pirates of Penzance are actually noblemen, cheerfully asks their forgiveness and offers them his own daughters.[66] By invoking, incidentally or otherwise, Gilbert and Sullivan's conclusion to one of their works, Moore and Benét establish themselves as part of the parodic tradition of twentieth-century operetta.

Until this point, Moore and Benét's humor is, like Gilbert and Sullivan's before it, dedicated to lighthearted mockery of opera; however, the final number of their *Headless*

65. Ibid.

66. Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance,* 231.

Horseman, "In Our Progressive School," marks a surprising shift from simple parody to outright satire by poking fun at ideas for education in the United States in the early twentieth century. As the title suggests, Brom and Katrina decide to form a new, "progressive" school in Sleepy Hollow for all of the children. The word "progressive" is not simply an adjective; in 1919, a group of education reformers gathered to establish the "Progressive Education Association" to create a new paradigm of rules for educators.[67] Reuben R. Palm, writing on the origins of this organization, notes that the group worked to define progressive education "as a forward movement toward greater freedom and interest and joy in school life and as an alliance between the sciences and idealism, the expression of a new attitude toward childhood and youth."[68]

Palm goes on to describe the influential work of Madame Albertine Necker de Saussure on the field; Madame de Saussure "warned against intruding too roughly and too readily on the child's mental life and against interfering with his interests or exercise of the imagination. Rather, a chance should be given for him to exercise his scope for invention and creative activity."[69] It is appropriate that the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* comments on the state of education in late 1930's America; Willard Rhodes, the music director of the Bronxville schools, commissioned the work; it premiered at Bronxville High School, which Moore's children attended; many of the extant reviews of the piece came from a performance at Stanford University in 1940. There is an inextricable connection between *The Headless Horseman* and education, and as such, Moore and Benét use the operetta's final song not to praise school

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67. Reuben R. Palm, "The Origins of Progressive Education," 442. *The Elementary School Journal,* 40.6 (Feb. 1940), 442.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid 443. For more on Madame de Saussure, see her *Progressive Education, Commencing with the Infant.* Mrs. Willard and Mrs. Phelps, trans. Boston, MA: William D. Ticknor, 1835. No further evidence of "Mrs. Willard and Mrs. Phelps" is given.

systems, but to mock them; this mockery comes as something of a surprise, as it halts the parody of grand romantic opera to offer more pointed social criticism.

The central point of the satire found in the song "In Our Progressive School" center on Madame de Saussure's notion of "exercising invention and creative activity," which Benét deliberately exaggerates. Brom comments that if a male student is "good with ball and bat, / Why, he can say the earth is flat. / We're not responsible for that / in our progressive school!"[70] This reflects the principles found in Madame de Saussure, who "urged that some time be set aside each day for bodily exercise of some rigor and in the open air if possible."[71] Katrina agrees with her fiancé, remarking that facts will have no place in her classroom: "And, should a pretty maiden say, / That Shakespeare lived in Baffin's Bay, / We always mark the paper 'A' / In our progressive school!"[72] This too coincides with Madame de Saussure's notes; the educator believed that a teacher should "exercise tact, set a worthy example to be followed, and love and understand children…[she or he] must keep careful watch and be ready to give the child help, advice, and encouragement when needed."[73] While these are certainly noble goals and useful for children, Moore and Benét mock the concepts Madame de Saussure sets forth, suggesting that teachers will offer "help, advice, and encouragement" in the form of coddling and accepting every answer given.

Moore and Benét conclude their opera by taking the notions of progressive education to its most ludicrously logical extreme. Brom and Katrina outright state that in their new academy,

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70. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 118-119.

71. Palm, "Origins of Progressive Education," 444.

72. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 118-119.

73. Palm, "Origins of Progressive Education," 443-444.

"Lessons never will get done,";[74] in response, the children happily sing another rendition of "Hail our teacher, hail!", praising Brom and Katrina for completely doing away with any kind of real education in Sleepy Hollow. In a moment of particular humor, both the children and the adults of the cast sing these final lines in perfect unison, suggesting that total happiness and peace has come at last to their village; Ichabod, who actually educated and corrected, has been removed, and from now on, there will be no more wrong answers. The opera's conclusion, while certainly happy, also has a rather satirical edge, as it does away with simply joking about the melodramatic conventions of grand romantic opera and instead offers criticism of the very institutions that had commissioned the opera in the first place. There is no evidence regarding the opinions of Rhodes, Moore, and Benét regarding progressive education, but given the intensity of their collaboration's comments on it, it is likely safe to say that they did not support the juncture.

Having determined some of the factors that influenced the creation of the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman,* including the renewed popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan and the newly-formed concept of progressive education, I now ask the question I raised in the first chapter of this thesis: namely, how the opera itself reflects its sociocultural moment. The first part of the question relates to the humorous tone of the piece; can any statement be made as to why satire and parody were so popular in this time period? It is easy to guess that a desire for laughter and joy were ever-present in the 1930s, a time known as the Great Depression. Another possibility lies in the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a man who used his executive powers to make enormous changes to the nation's various institutions, including banking, farming, and even education; in an address regarding "American Education Week" in September

74. Moore and Benét, *The Headless Horseman: An Operetta,* 127.

of 1938, Roosevelt stated that "schools play a part in the preservation and promotion of democratic life…to prepare each citizen to choose wisely and to enable him to choose freely are paramount functions of the schools in a democracy."[75] Moore and Benét's opera predates this address, but it certainly makes satirical comments about the nature of citizens "choosing freely," as the children of Sleepy Hollow are free to choose any answer they like and still receive praise and good grades. From its opening notes on the stupidity of Brom to the conclusion of the entire idea of truth being negated in favor of celebration, then, the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* provides humorous, and at times biting, commentary on the state of affairs in the Northeastern United States in 1937.

What might have inspired such satire and good-natured mockery as the 1930s drew to a close? It is easy to imagine that the Great Depression, an event which nearly destroyed the entirety of America's industries and led to millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet, would have sparked a desire for humorous and escapist theatre; a night at the opera might provide, at least temporarily, respite from the harsh realities of the outside world, a point that becomes especially important considering that the premiere of Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman* was offered free to the public, and that a later broadcast was made available to all those individuals and families who owned a radio. More interesting, though, are President Franklin Roosevelt's attempts to overcome the Depression with sweeping changes in federal government. Roosevelt used his executive abilities on an unprecedented scale to combat the Depression, creating new agencies and extending the power of centralized government in ways

75. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Message for American Education Week," September 27, 1938. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "The American Presidency Project". http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15545

never before seen in the United States.[76] Though Roosevelt's actions ultimately proved successful in easing the strain of the Depression, many were wary of Roosevelt's extension of his abilities, creating tension between those that supported Roosevelt and those who criticized him.

The concept of tension and distrust between groups recalls the underlying themes of exclusion found in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle*; I argued that that work, inadvertently or otherwise, codified Washington Irving's tale and in so doing declared it the sole property of a certain group of Americans: namely, native-born individuals. Having analyzed both the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* and the time that created it, I make the same argument for that opera, as it too creates a class of individuals who recognize the conventions used at the expense of those who are not in on the joke and thus cannot understand the work. The original story, though set in a Dutch village, does not require familiarity with any particular Dutch cultural tropes in order to understand it; the themes of a love triangle and supernatural forces are not the provenance of any particular group. It might even be said that *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is more accessible than "Rip Van Winkle," as the latter relies on knowledge of the Englishman Henry Hudson, and his connection to the Dutch East India Company of the Netherlands, to fully understand the spirits that Rip encounters in the mountains; the former simply refers to the Horseman as the ghost of a Hessian soldier in the Revolutionary War, which seems to be a more widely-understood character type. These factors suggest that *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is, in general, a ghost story that can be understood by individuals from multiple cultures, not merely those of Dutch descent.

76. For more on Roosevelt and the Depression, see Elliot A. Rosen, *Roosevelt, the Great Depression, and the Economics of Recovery* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

While Moore and Benét's work is certainly humorous and accessible, it lacks the capacity to be broadly understood by audiences across New York City, and instead divides audiences into those who understand it and those who do not. While Gilbert and Sullivan were certainly popular composers, it is impossible to say that everyone in New York was familiar with the work of the pair; only those who had some familiarity with the duo's operettas would recognize the links between them and *The Headless Horseman*. This is even more apparent when considering the parallels to other early nineteenth and twentieth century operas, including *Lucia di Lammermoor, Madama Butterfly,* and especially *Turandot,* described above. I say "especially *Turandot*" as that opera had its premiere in 1926, only eleven years before *The Headless Horseman* debuted; it is possible to argue that Puccini's earlier work, along with *Lucia di Lammermoor* and the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, had had more time to disseminate among the public and were thus better-known. Further proof of the necessity of knowing opera convention connects to the Astor Place Riots and their aftermath, which had effectively created a barrier from the lower classes enjoying opera in the opera house itself. Those classes, as mentioned in chapter one, heard popular arias and songs out of context and thus lacked knowledge of staged operatic convention; that understanding is crucial to understanding the parodic devices Moore and Benét use in their *Headless Horseman*.

The last evidence for my argument lies in the finale of Moore and Benét's work, which derides progressive education; the progressive movement itself, though remembered as a time of advancement for the populace of the United States, often excluded certain subsets in the name of that advancement. This is apparent in the name of the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which social scientist Andrew Gyory describes in a text on the subject; Gyory points out that this law, "which barred practically all Chinese from American shores for ten years, was the first

federal law that banned a group of immigrants solely on the basis of race or nationality."[77] In the book, Gyory notes that fear of "possible Chinese treachery" led to politicians' deciding to ban immigrants from that country from the United States.[78] But it was not only Chinese individuals who saw themselves banned from America; the early twentieth century saw another huge upswing in European immigrant populations, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Such a large increase led to distrust and fear among native-born Americans, a theme Robert F. Zeidel explore in his *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927*. Reviewer Hans Krabbendam notes that "Southern and Eastern Europeans…were associated with the social evils of crime, urban congestion, radicalism, physical inferiority, and labor unrest..."[79] These associations may have led to artists attempting to create a form of entertainment that these "evil" immigrants would not be able to understand. Dizikes's quote, cited earlier in this thesis, offers credence to this argument: "In the 1880s and 1890s and after, the unquestioned dominance of Anglo-American culture was challenged by a tremendous influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The response of the part of the Anglo-American population was a deep longing for things English."

Gilbert and Sullivan's works are certainly "things English"; by connecting a Northeastern American folktale with English satirists, Moore and Benét, intentionally or otherwise, sealed off that folktale from individuals—and especially those from eastern and southern Europe—who were not familiar with the conventions of English parodic operas. That is not to say that those immigrants could not have read the tale themselves; however, viewing theatre is a public act,

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77. Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), iv.

78. Ibid 144.

79. Hans Krabbendam, "Review: *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics*," *Journal of American Ethnic History,* 24.3 (Spring 2005), 98.

which in turn creates a group that, through its understanding of the jokes onstage, forms a bond. The Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman,* then, creates such a bond among its audience by deliberately invoking tropes, themes, and character types that only those familiar with certain operatic conventions would be able to appreciate and enjoy. Thus, and as was the case with Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* the genre of Northeastern American folkloric opera is used to emphasize a folktale once available to all as something understood as belonging to a select group of individuals. The extremely small sample pool of this thesis makes it impossible to state whether or not this exclusionary element in the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* and the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* is a trend or simply a coincidence; the latter seems more likely when considering the eighty years that separate the premieres of the two pieces. To remove this complication, I turn to *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* the final opera analyzed in this thesis; while this final analysis will not determine whether or not Northeastern American folkloric opera is an inherently exclusive genre, it will provide further evidence for the debate, especially as it premiered only two years after *The Headless Horseman* and was created by the same composer and librettist that put Ichabod, Brom, and Katrina on the operatic stage.

Chapter Three

"An Attractive Stage Version of a Delightful American Tale": The Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét *The Devil and Daniel Webster*

On Thursday, May 18, 1939, a group of excited New Yorkers were given a set of small buttons that read "LET'S GO! 'Asbury Park Day.'"[1] The button—a small souvenir with red, white, and blue coloring—seems somewhat out of place for New Yorkers; Asbury Park is a city in New Jersey, almost sixty miles from the Big Apple. And yet there is a perfectly good reason for the button's printing: May 18 1939 was "Asbury Park Day" at the New York World's Fair, at the time the biggest and brightest exposition of technologies in the history of the United States. The fair, which heralded what its creators called "The World of Tomorrow," showcased exciting new ideas and concepts for tens of thousands of people. On that same evening, some of the New York citizens may have traveled into the entertainment district of the city to move from the future to the past. At Broadway's Martin Beck Theater, a new American opera had its premiere: Douglas Moore and Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, an opera set in 1840s New Hampshire.[2]

Information and critical reviews about *The Devil and Daniel Webster* are plentiful. Robert A. Simon, the chief writer of "Musical Events" for *The New Yorker,* had this to say about the piece:

> The reviewer informs the reader that *The Devil and Daniel Webster* doesn't use "any standard operatic formulae; [Moore and Benét] used music whenever it seemed to build up a situation, and the result is an attractive stage version of a delightful American tale." The combination of spoken dialogue, dialogue underscored by music, and full arias

1. New York State Fair 1939 World's Fair Pin, "Asbury Park Day" LET'S GO. http://www.antiquesnavigator.com/d-1336455/new-york-state-fair-1939-worlds-fair-pin-asbury-park-day-lets-go.html

2. Izzo and Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist," 224.

> allows the "music to melt into the drama." The performances of the singers and the work of the producers and directors are all successful.[3]

Presumably, Simon's remark about "standard operatic formulae" refers to the scores of such works as *Turandot* and *Porgy and Bess,* which are wholly sung-through; operettas, such as the works of Gilbert and Sullivan and even Moore and Benét's *The Headless Horseman,* are exempt from this classification. An anonymous reviewer's opinions, as printed in *Time* Magazine on May 29, were similar—if slightly more critical—to Simon's, commenting that the piece "is well staged and occasionally rises above self-conscious Americanism."[4] Not all of the reviews were positive; as cited at the beginning of this thesis, George Jean Nathan accused the work as "wholly dramaless" and Moore's music as "generally impotent."[5] However, praise of the opera outweighed complaints against it, which provided credence for both Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and the company that premiered it: the American Lyric Theatre.

Though the American Lyric Theatre was based in New York City, the *Chicago Tribune* offers the most succinct summary of its work; there is no indication as to why this would be the case, as the opera only had six performances in its initial run despite its positive reviews.[6] In an article dated May 7, 1939, a columnist penned the following lines regarding the A.L.T.:

> Two ideas dominate the formation of this new producing unit: The encouragement of American drama, music and ballet; and the attempt to discover a medium of entertainment between commercial musical comedies and straight grand opera. With this in mind, the attractions staged will be in English and generally the creations of native

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3. Robert A. Simon, "Musical Events: Speaking of the Devil; World's Fair Sounds." *New Yorker,* 27 May 1939, 82-83, in McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 435.

4. "Music: Lyric Theatre." *Time,* 29 May 1939, 40, in McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 431.

5. George Jean Nathan, "Theatre Week: The Eagle Lays Two Eggs." *Newsweek:* 5 June 1939, 34. Quoted in McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 431.

6. "The Devil and Daniel Webster." Internet Broadway Database. http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=12453

> artists. Exceptions will be made in the case of rare but suitable works. In degree of seriousness they will lie somewhere between 'Hellzapoppin' and 'Tristan and Isolde.'[7]

Musicologist Arthur Mendel, in a piece titled "Music in America," agreed with the *Tribune* columnist, noting that the American Lyric Theatre was "dedicated particularly to the presentation of experimental new forms in the association of drama and music. 'The Devil and Daniel Webster,' a 'folk-opera' by the poet Stephen Vincent Benét and Prof. Douglas Moore, of Columbia University is to be the Lyric Theatre's first venture…"[8] Mendel's prophecies came true when other American musical artists of both the past and the present had their music shared with a new audience through the A.L.T.; those artists include popular nineteenth century songwriter Stephen Foster of "Camptown Races" and "Beautiful Dreamer" fame and Virgil Thomson, who would famously collaborate with American author and humorist Gertrude Stein on *Four Saints in Three Acts,* a noted opera.[9] More interesting, though, is the *Tribune* writer's discussion of "the attempt to discover a medium of entertainment between commercial musical comedies and straight grand operas," which refers to the medium of musical comedy and its rising presence in the Northeast in the first half of the 1900s.

By 1939, the tradition of American musical theatre as a plot-based form of entertainment was well-established; the glittering revues of the likes of Florenz "Flo" Ziegfeld had famously given way to Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern's 1927's *Show Boat* (a musical which Ziegfeld himself produced), which addressed the serious themes of miscegenation and alcoholism and brought a new genre of musical to the theatres on the street known as

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7. "American Lyric Theater Makes Debut May 18." *Chicago Tribune,* May 7, 1939. http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1939/05/07/page/92/article/american-lyric-theater-makes-debut-may-18

8. Arthur Mendel, "Music in America," 544. *The Musical Times,* Vol. 80, No. 1157 (Jul. 1939).

9. Ibid.

Broadway.[10] This time period also saw more frequent collaborations between some of the first great creators of the American musical, including Hammerstein, Kern, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart, a group who fashioned seven of the twelve pieces which musicologist Geoffrey Block lists as the "Broadway Canonic Twelve."[11] Some of Broadway's most famous stars and songs had also begun to appear by 1939; Ethan Mordden notes that Porter had already begun working with some of the biggest names on Broadway, including Ethel Merman, Bert Lahr, and Mary Martin, while the team of Rodgers and Hart had written some of their most popular songs, including "Johnny One Note," "Where or When," and "The Lady is a Tramp," before that year.[12]

Similarly, the relatively newborn film industry in Hollywood had begun producing popular musicals of its own in the 1920s; 1927's *The Jazz Singer* was not only a musical, but the first all-heard dialogue, or "talkie," motion picture, while legendary choreographer Busby Berkley debuted his famed dancing girls in 1933's *42nd Street.* 1939 would also see the release of one of the most well-known American movie musicals: in August of that year, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer released *The Wizard of Oz*, which featured Broadway-trained stars including Ray Bolger,

10. For more on Ziegfeld and his influence on the history of the American musical, see Ethan Mordden, *Ziegfeld: The Man Who Invented Show Business* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008). For more on *Showboat,* see Gerald Bordman, "Jerome David Kern: Innovator/Traditionalist," *The Music Quarterly,* 71.4, 1985.

11. Geoffrey Block, "The Broadway Canon from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story* and the European Operatic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology,* 11.4 (Autumn 1993), 532. The seven musicals mentioned above are Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat*; Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940); Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The King and I* (1951); and Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948).

12. Ethan Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre,* 149. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Jack Haley, and Bert Lahr.[13] These new genres of entertainment did not destroy the Northeastern American public's interest in opera, but they did affect it, which explains why the *Tribune* author cited above lists the A.L.T.'s mission as an "attempt to discover a medium of entertainment between commercial musical comedies and straight grand operas." Moore and Benét were certainly familiar with, and able to parody, the latter, as their 1937 *Headless Horseman* attests. But their collaboration with the American Lyric Theatre suggests that the composer and librettist were not only interested in lighthearted mockery of Gilbert and Sullivan; they wanted to produce more serious works as well. Benét revealed as much when he commented that he wanted his and Moore's work to be "something without the pretensions of grand opera but something which, if we were lucky, could use American speech and American folk-music and do it with sincerity."[14] The use of the word "sincerity" suggests that this piece, unlike *The Headless Horseman,* was not a parody.

The disparity between Moore and Benét's *Headless Horseman* and *Devil and Daniel Webster* is surprising: the works premiered only two years apart from one another, and yet use the medium of opera for two completely disparate purposes: satire of grand romanticism in the genre and a genuine attempt to place American tales within that genre, respectively. It can be similarly argued that *The Devil and Daniel Webster* spoke to a different aspect of the experiences of New Yorkers in the United States in 1939: the struggle against, and eventual overcoming of, of seemingly insurmountable odds through the help of a great political figure. Similarly, there is a strong sense of Northeastern pride throughout the opera (indeed, a recurring phrase is "New England's pride!"); that pride manifests not only in the content of the opera, but also how it

13. For more on Hollywood film musicals, see *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader.* Steven Cohan, ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Also see Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.

14. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 25.

adapts the characters of its source material—namely, the European Faust legend—through a decidedly American lens. By making *The Devil and Daniel Webster* into a serious story about American greatness overcoming the forces of evil, Moore and Benét suggest that Northeasterners of this time shared a sense of national heritage, and were proud to use that heritage to defeat tyrannical forces that threatened their own existence.

Moore proves *Daniel Webster's* serious tone in an extensive interview given to the *New York Herald Tribune* in April of 1939. Moore's opinions about writing the opera are worth quoting in full:

> Mr. Benet [sic] and I…have classified 'The Devil and Daniel Webster' as a folk-opera because it is legendary in its subject matter and simple in its musical expression. As a matter of fact, this particular legend is a fiction…and the music makes no conscious quotation from folk-tunes. The exact category into which it falls finds no convenient label. We have tried to make an opera in which the union of speech, song, and instrumental music will communicate the essence of the dramatic story, enhanced but not distorted. We hope that, presented in terms of the contemporary theatre…it will appeal to the ordinary theater public as well as to lovers of the traditional opera.[15]

There is much to say about Moore's quotation, as it is one of the only intact opinions on an American folkloric opera by the very composer of one of those works. Moore's comment that the opera "finds no convenient label" reflects both the intention of the American Lyric Theatre, which hoped to "discover a medium of entertainment between commercial musical comedies and straight grand operas," and also the paucity of American folkloric operas themselves. While this thesis has proven that such operas—including one penned by Moore himself—certainly existed, those operas had not permeated the public consciousness in a way that melodramas, such as Joseph Jefferson's interpretation of "Rip Van Winkle," had. Such an absence was only further

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15. Lawrence Gilman and Douglas Moore, "Daniel Webster Set to Music." *New York Herald Tribune:* April 9, 1939. http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktribunefull/docview/1243036324/14652E2927744002PQ/4?accountid=147304

complicated by the growing presence of musical theatre as a genre, a complication suggested by Moore's distinction between "the ordinary theater public" and the "lovers of traditional opera," a division that, as I argued in chapter two, Moore inadvertently helped to create by requiring a firm understanding of grand romantic opera convention for the audiences of his and Benét's *Headless Horseman*. From a musical standpoint, Moore's remark that his music for the opera "makes no conscious quotation from folk-tunes" is significant, as it creates a distinction between folk music and folk opera; they are different genres, despite sharing the word "folk" in their titles. A full analysis of the music, provided later in this chapter, will provide further proof of this statement.

While Moore's reflection on the technical aspects of his and Benét's opera are incredibly useful, the first part of his quotation regarding the "legendary subject matter" of the work is equally important. As mentioned above, Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is an American retelling of the Faust legend, which dates to sixteenth-century Germany and was famously dramatized by England's Christopher Marlowe: both feature individuals who are so talented that they border on the superhuman, and both involve striking deals with the forces of evil.[16] Johann Wolfgang van Goethe provided a Germanic version of the tale in the nineteenth century which added new elements, including a wager between God and Mephistopheles, one of the seven princes of Hell, and a love story between Faust and a pure-hearted girl named Gretchen. France's Charles Gounod adapted this version into an opera of his own by working with Michel Carré, a playwright who had dramatized Goethe's story. Though this work originally premiered in the 1880s, it maintained a popular presence in the United States well into

16. For more on adaptations of the Faust legend, see Lorna Fitzsimmons, ed., *International Faust Studies: Adaptation, Reception, Translation* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008). For stage-specific versions of the tale, see Francis Magyar, "English Faust Plays on the New York Stage." *The German Quarterly,* 16.3 (May 1943), pp. 153-156.

the twentieth century; indeed, a film version of the opera appeared in 1934.[17] Faust and his demonic deal, then, were well-established in the American popular imagination in the 1930s, which may explain why Benét chose to work on a new story based upon during that time.

While the Faustian legend served as Benét's inspiration for his tale, he was determined to retell the story through an American perspective. As is the case with Moore's reflections on his opera, Benét's own thoughts on the story survive, and are quoted at length by biographer Charles A. Fenton:

> It's always seemed to me…that legends and yarns and folk-tales are as much a part of the real history of a country as proclamations and provisos and constitutional amendments… "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is an attempt at telling such a legend…I couldn't help trying to show [Webster] in terms of American legend; I couldn't help wondering what would happen if a man like that ever games to grips with the Devil—and not an imported Devil, either, but a genuine, home-grown product, Mr. Scratch.[18]

I will address Benét's comments about "a man like that"—that is, Daniel Webster, a real political figure—shortly; at present, though, it is more important to address the author's comments on the importance of folklore. The author's comments mirror those of Irving as cited in Chapter One, who sought to "illustrate [New York's] local humors, customs, and peculiarities" and create a "convivial currency" for the state's people. In this quotation, Benét seems to suggest an expansion of that Irving's "convivial currency." Benét does not mention any particular region of the United States in his remarks, instead saying that "legends and yarns and folk-tales are as much a part of the real history of a *country* as proclamations and provisos and constitutional amendments…I couldn't help trying to show Webster in terms of *American* legend."

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17. Philip Hart, *Fritz Reiner: A Biography,* 85. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 85.

18. Charles A. Fenton, *Stephen Vincent Benét: The Life and Times of an American Man of Letters* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1978), 295.

As described in the introduction of this thesis, the idea of choosing a single folktale to represent the entirety of America is impossible; each of the regions of the United States has its own particular folklore which would seem out of place if transplanted to another location. That is not to say that the tales themselves cannot be enjoyed and understood by people of different regions: Northeasterners could easily enjoy the tales of Western heroes Pecos Bill and Slue-Foot Sue, while Southerners might take pleasure in the Midwestern tales of Paul Bunyan. However, enjoyment does not equal identification, and as such, no one tale can be said to accurately summarize the experience of the many different peoples of the United States. However, Benét's statement suggests that he was attempting, in some way, to create a tale that would resonate with a large majority of those peoples; he does not say he wishes to create a hero for Northeasterners alone, but the whole of the country.

There is, of course, some irony in Benét's wish to connect with disparate American identities: his story, though based on a real individual, is not only wholly the work of his own mind as opposed to a tale shared by the different peoples of the United States, but it heavily borrows on a piece of Germanic folklore (which is especially surprising considering that by the time his and Moore's *Devil and Daniel Webster* premiered in 1939, Germany had already begun the military processes that would lead to World War II) that had further filtered through a French artistic lens. Regardless of this irony, though, Benét's quotation does indicate that his work will provide a possible answer to one of the central questions of this thesis: is it possible for a single tale, or an operatic adaptation of it, to be inclusive as opposed to exclusive? I have argued that the Bristow and Wainwright *Rip Van Winkle* and the Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* create, intentionally or otherwise, a division among audiences: the upper classes which are versed in opera and its devices and the lower classes that, though aware of operatic melodies, do

not hear or see them in their intended place of spectatorship. Does Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* do the same, or does it offer another possible use for Northeastern American folkloric opera as something to be comprehended and shared by multiple identities in that region? I will address these questions in my analysis of *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* which offers insight into the stuff of American—or at least Northeastern American—legend in the spring of 1939.

"We'll Drive Old Scratch Away!": An Analysis of the Moore and Benét *The Devil and Daniel Webster*

As described above, Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is a retelling of the German Faust legend, but the central part of both tales—the actual Faustian bargain—is decidedly changed in the American version. While the original Faust is a brilliant scholar who sells his soul to the demon Mephistopheles in exchange for unlimited magical power, the bargainer in "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is a meek farmer named Jabez Stone who, after a particular string of bad luck, shouts "I vow…I vow it's enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil! And I would, too, for two cents!"[19] This cry summons Mr. Scratch, "a soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger…in a handsome buggy,"[20] who makes a deal with Stone, granting him ten years of prosperity in exchange for the farmer's immortal soul. When the day of reckoning draws near, the panicked Stone travels to the one man who can help him: Daniel Webster, the famous New Hampshire orator, lawyer, and statesman who the narrator proudly calls "the biggest man in the

19. Stephen Vincent Benét, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," 13.(Toronto, Canada: HarperPerennial Classics, 2013).

20. Ibid.

country."[21] Webster agrees to take the case, and manages to arrange a trial for his client; not to be outdone, Mr. Scratch summons a jury of the damned, consisting of twelve wicked souls from American history, along with a judge who provided over the Salem Witch Trials. Though at first intimidated, Webster delivers a powerful speech regarding manhood and American pride, which sways the black hearts of the jurors. They find in Stone's favor, remarking that "even the damned may salute the eloquence of Mr. Webster."[22] Webster makes Mr. Scratch swear to never return to New Hampshire again, and the tale ends happily, with Stone, and all who live in his state, saved from damnation.

As the above summary suggests, "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is only loosely based on the Faust tale; more interestingly, Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* makes even more changes to the story which simultaneously distance and connect the work to not only the source material, but to Goethe's and Gounod's own theatrical adaptations of the legend. Unlike the short story, *The Devil and Daniel Webster* opens long after the central bargain has been struck; it is now Jabez Stone's wedding day in the 1840s, and he is to marry a new character, the beautiful Mary. More interestingly, the opera opens with no overture; rather, the people of Cross Corners, New Hampshire are simply discovered chatting and commending Stone on his recent bout of fortunate luck. This lack of an overture is the first indicator that *The Devil and Daniel Webster* is unlike its predecessors in the United States; the majority of operas, and even some musicals, have overtures. Such evidence also evokes the statement made by Moore, who remarked that his and Benét's opera "finds no convenient label"; it is not wholly sung through as most operas are, but it is not light operetta nor musical theatre, either. This liminal

21. Ibid 12.

22. Ibid 17.

state continues throughout *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* and does not only indicate the opera's complexity, but demonstrates the maturation of Moore and Benét's work from the purely comic *Headless Horseman.*

After a short speech from Stone which promises that Daniel Webster has agreed to come to the wedding party, the statesmen himself appears, prompting the crowd to scream and cheer for their hero. Such a laudatory welcome is certainly appropriate, given Webster's status as a kind of American demigod. In the short story, Benét provides a description of Webster that elevates the orator to mythic proportions:

> You see, for a while he was the biggest man in the country. He never got to be President, but he was the biggest man. There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty, and they told stories about him and all the things that belonged to him like the stories of patriarchs and such. They said, when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out in the sky, and once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground. They said, when he walked the woods with his fishing rod, Killall, the trout would jump out of the streams right into his pockets, for they knew it was no use putting up a fight against him; and, when he argued a case, he could turn on the harps of the blessed and the shaking of the earth underground.[23]

This description of Webster is the material of "American legend" that Benét hoped to achieve in the operatic adaptation of his story. What is particularly interesting, though, is that unlike Rip Van Winkle or Ichabod Crane, Daniel Webster is a fictionalized version of an actual individual.

While the real Daniel Webster certainly lacked the power to charm and control the forces of nature, he was a powerful speaker and well-known figure in the mid-nineteenth century. James Parton, a historian in the late 1800s, wrote that "Fidgety men were quieted by his presence, women were spellbound by it, and the busy, anxious public contemplated his majestic

23. Ibid 12.

calm with a feeling of relief, as well as admiration."[24] Parton even goes on to say that for the people of the Northeast, Webster was the "one solid thing in America" during the "flighty politics" of his era.[25] Biographer Robert W. Remini, in his *Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time,* offers similar praise, remarking that Webster's Rockingham Memorial (a document arguing for, among other things, the importance of protecting New England's commerce and freedom in government) is "the definitive statement of New England Federalism."[26] Webster's gifts for oratory, politics, and swaying popular opinion saw him serve as a lawyer arguing cases before the Supreme Court, a Senator for New Hampshire, Secretary of State for Presidents William Henry Harrison and Millard Fillmore, and the editor of his own publication, the *Massachusetts Journal.*

Despite these astounding achievements, Remini also points out that Webster was far from perfect: he mishandled several important foreign policy cases and infamously advocated for the Fugitive Slave Act, a controversial law which mandated that slaves attempting to escape to freedom to be returned to their owners for severe, and often fatal, punishments. These choices, which occurred late in Webster's career, stained his reputation and lessened his stature in the public eye. However, his gifts clearly resonated with Stephen Vincent Benét, who chose Webster as the perfect opponent to argue a case against the Devil himself. As will be seen at the end of this chapter, there is another possibility as to why Benét revived the character of Webster in 1937; for now, though, I will analyze Webster's character in *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* and explore how that characterization illustrates Moore and Benét's definition of an American hero.

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24. James Parton, *Famous Americans of Recent Times,* 57. Boston: 1873. Quoted in Irving H. Bartlett, "Daniel Webster as a Symbolic Hero," *The New England Quarterly,* 45.4 (Dec. 1972), 484.

25. Ibid.

26. Robert W. Remini, *Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 16.

Webster's solo aria in *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* "I've Got a Ram, Goliath," describes his charmed life on his New Hampshire farm. The song, which plays in a pulsing 4/8 beat[27], is a simple but powerful declaration of Webster's amazing abilities. He sings, "I've got a bull, King Stephen, / A bull with a rolling eye. / When he stamps his foot, the stars come out / And the lightening [sic] blinks in the sky… / But he acts like a sucking turtledove / When I go into his stall."[28] Jerry L. McBride notes that this aria "is a blustering, confident song of pride and virility in the same spirit" as "For I Am Cornelius Van Tassel!," a solo aria from *The Headless Horseman.*[29] But while Cornelius Van Tassel's song, and indeed his entire character, was largely played for comedy, the serious lyrics of Webster's aria and the baritone voice required for the part suggests a genuinely wise and kind individual, an American King Timur (of *Turandot*) rather than a parody of one. "I've Got a Ram, Goliath" ends with the statesman repeatedly declaring his determination to protect Jabez Stone: "And he'll fight ten thousand devils / To save a New Hampshire man!"[30] That devotion to the folk is a sign of the American legend that Moore and Benét hoped to create: though powerful and even superhuman, Webster does not forget his roots, and offers kindness to those less fortunate than himself.

Though "I've Got a Ram, Goliath" is a rousing number, it pales in comparison to Webster's closing argument against the jury of the damned during Stone's trial; this piece, the climax of the whole work, deserves special attention, as it addresses not only Webster's character, but Moore and Benét's personal opinions about their collaboration. Izzo and Konkle

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27. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster: A Folk Opera in One Act* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943), 49.

28. Ibid 50-51.

29. McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 23.

30. Ibid 52-53.

point out that writing Webster's concluding remarks was a challenge for Benét, as "much of [the short story's] effect is dependent on the narrator's summation of speech and action…in the opera, Webster's oratorical genius would have to be conveyed through Webster himself."[31] Benét was certainly able to complete this challenge, as Webster's argument to the jury proves:

> It is not for [Stone] that I speak. It is for all of you. There is a sadness in being a man, but it is a proud thing too. There is failure and despair on the journey—the endless journey of mankind. We are tricked and trapped—we stumble into the pit—but out of the pit we rise again. No demon that was ever foaled can know the inwardness of that—only men, bewildered men. They have broken freedom with their hands and cast her out from the nations—yet she shall lives while man lives. She shall live in the blood and the heart—she shall live in the earth of this country—she shall not be broken. When the whips of the oppressors are broken and their names forgotten and destroyed I see you, mighty, shining, liberty, liberty! I see free men walking and talking under a star! God bless the United States and the men who have made her free![32]

This speech is so powerful that it takes precedence over music, one of the defining characteristics of opera; the pages in the score that normally delineate the orchestrations for the scene are blank, with only the words "Music follows [Webster's] dialog but in as strict tempo as possible,"[33] suggesting that Webster has commanded the entire opera to make his point. More interesting, though, is the fact that this particular moment is not sung; rather, it is a kind of *Sprechstimme,* or "speech-singing," that places music behind the spoken word. Benét himself provides an explanation for these choices: "Throughout, in both verse and music, we have tried to stick to the rhythms and salty character of American speech…we have tried to keep away from the pretentious, the over-operatic and the aria delivered straight at the audience's teeth."[34] McBride agrees, arguing that "Webster's speech accompanied by music would not have had the same

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31. Izzo and Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist," 223.

32. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* 75-79.

33. Ibid 74.

34. Quoted in McBride, *Douglas Moore: A Bio-Bibliography,* 25.

dramatic impact had it been sung."[35] This is a surprising choice for Moore and Benét; traditionally, and even in *Rip Van Winkle,* moments of great passion are sung rather than spoken. By deliberately shying away from conventional operatic practices, the composer and librettist seem to be making a statement about the nature of how American opera might differ from its European counterparts.

It may seem rather that Moore and Benét went to such lengths to show Webster, and even his style of singing, as a pure-blooded American, given that the plot of his and Moore's opera is based on a French adaptation of a German play about a Germanic folk legend. However, that irony is precisely the point: by deliberately avoiding possible European influences on their work, Benét and Moore did not only offer the Northeast a folkloric opera, but demonstrated how their own folklore differed from those of the countries that preceded it. Two other main characters—Stone's wife Mary and Mr. Scratch himself—are further evidence of this phenomenon, as they are more directly linked on Germanic characters and so provide more explicit comparisons of how Benét and Moore adapted European figures to make them into Northeastern Americans. Mary, for instance, is a parallel to Gretchen (called Marguerite in Gounod's opera). Essayist Robert Combs, in his analysis of Benét's work, remarks that "Mary…[takes] on the aura of Goethe's Gretchen in her association with nature and simple country life."[36] As Combs suggests, Gretchen is an original character in Goethe's interpretation of the Faust legend: a pious girl loved by the title character who is eventually impregnated by him and, despite drowning her child

35.Ibid 26.

36. Robert Combs, "Waking from Nightmares," in *Stephen Vincent Benét: Essays on His Life and Work,* eds. David Garrett Izzo and Lincoln Konkle (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 159.

when Faust abandons her, remains pure of heart and prays for mercy, which results in her soul being spared.

Mary has much in common with her German counterpart. She takes vows and oaths seriously; when Stone expects her to leave him after his dealings with Mr. Scratch are revealed, she replies, "Are you telling me to run away from you, Mr. Stone?...We made some promises to each other. Maybe you've forgotten them. But I haven't. I said it's for better or worse. It's for better or worse. I said in sickness or health. Well, that covers the ground, Mr. Stone."[37] Similarly, it is revealed that Stone's desire for wealth and prosperity was largely motivated by love for Mary, just as Faust attempts to use Mephistopheles's magic to win Gretchen's heart. Unlike Gretchen, however, Mary responds by telling Stone that he did not need riches to woo her: "If you'd only said—if you'd only said! / You must have thought me a featherhead! / If you'd only told—if you'd only told! / I'd have kept your house in the mire and cold… / I'd have fed the chickens and stroked the cat, / And seen that you wiped your shoes on the mat. / I wouldn't have asked for more than that!"[38]

While Mary's willfulness and love for a damned man certainly connect her to Gretchen, it is her piousness and prayerfulness that form the strongest link between the two. When the trial is about to begin, Webster urges Mary to "Pray, madam—you can help us with your prayers. Are the prayers of the innocent unavailing?"[39] Mary is dissatisfied with Webster's suggestion—"A woman's more than a praying machine, whatever men think"[40]—but ultimately agrees,

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37. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* 37.

38. Ibid 41-42.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid 42.

beginning a song known as "Mary's Prayer." The simple song, with its gentle, flowing melody, is taken from the Biblical Book of Ruth, a story of the devoted love of a pious woman: "Now may there be a blessing and a light betwixt thee and me, forever. / For as Ruth unto Naomi, so do I cleave unto thee."[41] She continues by quoting from the Book of Psalms: "Set me as a seal upon thy heart, / as a seal upon thine arm, / for love is strong as death. / Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."[42] In a later scene, Mary echoes her prayer from offstage, while the jury of the damned gleefully parodies her words, crying, ""'A seal, ha ha, A burning seal… / Death is stronger than love."[43] This is almost an exact replica of a scene between Gretchen and Mephistopheles in Goethe's telling of the legend: while the girl prays in prison—"Judgment of God! I give myself to thee," the demon evilly declares, "She is judged!"[44] Such parallels prove that Mary is a kind of American Gretchen; however, unlike her tragic counterpart, Mary survives the events of the opera, and even joins in Webster and Stone's capture of Scratch at its finale. This cheerful ending, coupled with Mary's willfulness and determination to help her husband however she can, provides further insight into Moore and Benét's conception of an American female opera hero: unlike the powerless, doomed maidens of Europe, including Lucia of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Cio-Cio San of *Madama Butterfly,* and the characters who parody them, such as Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance* and Katrina in *The Headless Horseman*, Mary is able to provide some assistance against evil powers while demonstrating courage and conviction.

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41. Ibid 54-55.

42. Ibid 55.

43. Ibid 72.

44. Johann Wolfgang van Goethe, *Faust,* trans. Bayard Taylor, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1870), 216. I have chosen this nineteenth-century translation as it may have been read by Moore and Benét.

The final reinterpreted individual in the Moore and Benét *Devil and Daniel Webster* is its second title character: Mr. Scratch, the polite but villainous demon who collects souls. Like Mary and Gretchen, there are connections between Mr. Scratch and not only Mephistopheles, but other European devils. In his first appearance, the demon is described as "a New England devil, dressed like a rather shabby attorney, but with something just a little wrong about his clothes and appearance"[45]; contrast this with Mephistopheles's first appearance before Faust, in which the prince of Hell is described as being dressed "in the costume of a Travelling Scholar."[46] In this scene, Scratch uses his evil power to break a local fiddler's instrument, then takes it up himself; Konkle points out that this "ties into folk stories about the devil as a fiddler."[47] Indeed, in Gounod's operatic adaptation of Goethe's drama, Mephistopheles sings "Vous qui faites l'endormie," or "You who are pretending to be asleep" as he plays a mandolin[48]; in Moore and Benét's opera, Mr. Scratch performs a similar trick, taking up the fiddle he has broken and singing the wicked "Listen to my doleful tale," a tune about lovers torn apart by sin.[49] These elements suggest a connection between Mr. Scratch and his European forebears.

Despite Scratch's links to Europe, however, he is still, to use Benét's words, "a genuine, home-grown product." Mr. Scratch proudly allies himself with the United States; in the original short story, he takes offense to Webster calling him a "foreign prince," explaining,

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45. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* 27.

46. Goethe, *Faust,* 53.

47. Lincoln Konkle, "American Reincarnations: 'The Devil and Daniel Webster' from Fiction to Drama to Film," in *Stephen Vincent Benét: Essays on His Life and Work*, eds David Garrett Izzo and Lincoln Konkle (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 181.

48. Charles Gounod, *Faust,* (Paris, France: Choudens, 1860), 390.

49. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* 28.

> Foreigner?...And who calls me a foreigner?...When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck. Am I not in your books and stories and beliefs, from the first settlements on? Am I not spoken of, still, in every church in New England?...I am merely an honest American like yourself—and of the best descent—for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don't like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours.[50]

The operatic adaptation contains a similar speech, along with evidence of Mr. Scratch's extensive legal knowledge:

> WEBSTER: This precious document [Jabez's soul contract] isn't worth the paper it's written on. The law permits no trafficking in human flesh.
>
> MR. SCRATCH: Oh, my dear Mr. Webster! Courts in every State in the Union have held that human flesh is property, and recoverable. Read your Fugitive Slave Act. Or should I cite Brander versus McRae?[51]

It is, of course, ironic that the devil should directly cite the Fugitive Slave Act as one of his legal weapons, considering that the real Webster advocated for that law himself. More important, though, is the fact that Mr. Scratch, in both the short story and its operatic retelling, associates himself with various social ills, including slavery and mistreatment of Native Americans; this differentiates him from Mephistopheles and his European brethren, who are more closely associated with a fall from Heaven and the temptation of Adam and Eve than any particular evil action. It is this practice of linking Mr. Scratch's villainous heart to specific events and deeds in history of the United States that allows Moore and Benét to claim their devil as a "genuine, home-grown product" that Daniel Webster must overcome.

The conclusion of the Moore and Benét *The Devil and Daniel Webster* is a final departure from both European convention and their earlier parodies of such convention in *The*

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50. Benét, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," 15.

51. Moore and Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* 58. There is no evidence of the case of "Brander versus McRae" occurring in the United States; Moore and Benét seem to have invented the case to allow Mr. Scratch a victory in the scene.

Headless Horseman. After Webster wins the case, he, Stone, and Mary rush forward and grab Mr. Scratch, declaring, "Neighbors! Neighbors! / Come on and see what sort of a slab-sided / lantern-jawed, fortune-telling note shaver / I've got by the scruff of the neck!"[52] At the trio's urging, the entire village of Cross Corners "[rushes] in, beating pans, firing guns, making the hideous, merry racket of a shivaree [sic]."[53] The populace binds together and sings a song in a 6/8 tempo, shouting, "We'll drive him out of New Hampshire! / We'll drive old Scratch away!...I don't say about Massachusetts, / Vermont I do not say, / But he can't come for his holidays / We're onto the devil and all his ways / And we'll drive him out of New Hampshire we'll drive old Scratch away."[54] It is not only Webster, then, who serves as the hero of this tale; everyone, man and woman, rich and poor, joins in the banishment of the devil and the resulting protection of New Hampshire from the forces of evil.

With Mr. Scratch routed, the Chorus sings, in a beautiful A, D, F-sharp, and A chord, "New England's pride!" in praise of Webster as the orchestra flourishes.[55] Compare this to the conclusion of *The Headless Horseman,* wherein the villagers of Sleepy Hollow sang "Hail our teacher, hail!" to laud Brom Bones; however, in that instance, their exultation was a parody, given the shallowness of Brom's conception of education. Here, though, the people of Cross Corners are genuine in their celebration of Webster, as suggested by the lyrics of the scene and the simple yet powerful music behind those lyrics: though the orchestra and Chorus is certainly triumphant and resonant, it lacks the overblown qualities of the *Headless Horseman*'s finale,

52. Ibid 83-84.

53. Ibid 86.

54. Ibid 85-89.

55. Ibid 93-94.

suggesting Benét's wish to "do the opera with sincerity." The opera thus concludes with praise for a hero who, despite being "New England's pride," possesses qualities that might be shared by a leader in any part of the United States: a love of the folk, a strong knowledge of American history, a gift for oratory and speech, the strength to fight for the common man and especially the poor, and the capacity to rally others to aid in the defeat of wickedness.

While this list of heroic traits is certainly applied to Daniel Webster, it is also possible that Moore and Benét saw them in another living figure in 1939: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Izzo and Konkle note that "[during] the late 1930s Benét, just as many other Americans, was alarmed by the tragedy of fascism in Asia and Europe. He took seriously his role as national spokesperson…"[56] President Roosevelt was a strong opponent of this fascism, and possessed many of the same qualities that Moore and Benét gave Webster. Roosevelt was famed for his oratorical gifts and the use of those gifts to reach the entire populace of the United States; as mentioned in Chapter Two, the president's weekly "fireside chats" were a highlight of his three terms in office. As discussed in Chapter Two, Roosevelt also combatted the Great Depression, which had especially affected the poor and lower classes, with sweeping changes and laws to banks, agriculture, and public works projects, thus giving laborers the chance to return to work and be paid by the government.

Finally, Roosevelt certainly used his words to rally the American people in attempts to fight what he perceived as evil actions. In perhaps his most famous radio address, delivered after the Japanese attack on the Hawaiian port of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, the president

56. Izzo and Konkle, "Benét as Dramatist," 225. It is not clear exactly what "fascism in Asia" is referring to, as Japan, the nation which allied with the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, was not itself a fascist state during the late 1930s. This suggests that Izzo and Konkle are either speaking of another country, or (inaccurately) applying the idea of fascism to all of the Axis Powers during World War Two.

declared "The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation. As commander in chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense."[57] Note that in this speech, Roosevelt, rather than simply declaring war on Japan (and, soon after, Germany), invokes the spirit of the American people as his support, just as Webster, in the finale of Moore and Benét's opera, gathers all of the citizens of Cross Corners to join in the fight against Mr. Scratch. In a sense, the fictionalized Webster, who supports the common man, rallies against evil forces, and speaks brilliantly, is a kind of staged version of Franklin Roosevelt, suggesting that Moore and Benét saw the president as the epitome of an American folkloric hero in 1939. While there is no evidence of Moore having a personal connection with the President, Benét was linked to the office; art historian Donna Cassidy counts Benét as "an active supporter" of Roosevelt,[58] a claim backed by the fact that Archibald MacLeish, Roosevelt's Librarian of Congress, commissioned Benét to write a meditation for the president to use as the conclusion his 1942 Flag Day radio address.[59]

Having finished the analysis of Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* I argue that, unlike the pair's *The Headless Horseman* and Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle,* the piece is not exclusionary. While it is certainly true that the conclusion of the opera ends with the possibility of Mr. Scratch visiting Vermont and Massachusetts, the villagers sing not "New Hampshire's pride," but "New England's pride," claiming Webster as a hero for the

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57. F.D. Roosevelt, "A Date Which Will Live in Infamy," 1941. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5166

58. Donna Cassidy, *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).

59. Suzy Platt, ed. *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989), 1463.

entire region. The fact that all of the villagers—men and women of multiple classes and ages—perform this finale adds further credence to the inclusionary nature of the opera; everyone in Cross Corners plays a part in banishing Mr. Scratch from their state, which differs from Webster legally barring the Devil with a contract that he draws up alone, as happens in Benét's story. Furthermore, the qualities listed above, including skilled oratory, willingness to help the less fortunate, a determination to fight injustice, and knowledge of American history, are not exclusive to Northeastern men; any number of men and women from multiple regions of the United States, including escaped African slaves Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, Native Americans Chief Joseph and Geronimo, Midwestern suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt, and "muckraking" Northeastern journalists Ida Tarbell and Nellie Bly, possessed these traits and used them to better society.

I thus conclude that the Moore and Benét *Devil and Daniel Webster* is an inclusive Northeastern folkloric opera, able to be understood by a widespread audience and relating to general beliefs about the American spirit, as opposed to the conventions of grand romantic opera and the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. This inclusivity is rather ironic, given the work's direct connections, including the characters of Mary and Mr. Scratch in relation to Gretchen and Mephistopheles, to the Germanic Faust tale; however, it is possible that the reliance on a widely-recognized folk legend from another country allowed Moore and Benét to take European character types and completely recast them through an American lens. *The Devil and Daniel Webster*'s music functions in a similar way, as it deliberately shuns the conventions of European grand romantic opera and light operetta and replaces them with a style that, as Moore observed, "unifies speech [the scenes of the opera], song [the work's arias], and instrumental music [the orchestrations played under Webster's concluding argument] to communicate the essence of the

dramatic story, enhanced but not distorted." In this thesis, then, *The Devil and Daniel Webster* also contradicts the themes of exclusion found in *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Headless Horseman.* But these contradictions are an inherent part of microhistory; as quoted in the Introduction to this work, "Microhistorians have concentrated on the contradictions of normative systems and therefore on the fragmentation, contradictions and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open." Having observed this fragmentation and plurality of viewpoints, I turn now to my own time—the twenty-first century—to briefly observe how the field of Northeastern American folkloric opera has continued today, and how questions of American identity are still addressed, answered, and troubled in that genre.

Conclusion

"Of Thee I Tweet": Contemporary Northeastern Folkloric Opera and American Identity in the Twenty-First Century

In 2009, nearly two hundred years after Washington Irving first published *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon,* three individuals created two brand-new operas about *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* The first, a doctoral thesis titled *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow: An Opera in One Act,* was published by William Withem with a libretto by Melanie Helton; the piece draws strongly, in the pair's own words, from an "American idiom." The second, *The Headless Horseman,* is a work by Robert "Bob" Milne, who is best known as a ragtime composer and pianist; ragtime, a distinctly American genre of music, influences the entirety of the opera. Though these operas have remained unpublished, the creative minds behind them have kindly given me full copies of their works to analyze. My findings from that analysis will be briefer than that of the previous three chapters, but it still seems appropriate to conclude a thesis about the expression of Northeastern American identities via folkloric opera with contemporary selections from that genre. These operas are, presumably, the expression of my own culture as a twenty-first century Northeastern American, and it will be fascinating to turn the lens of microhistory onto my own age.

The Withem and Helton *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is an interesting interpretation of the tale: the work is, for the most part, lighthearted and perhaps even self-aware of the differences between Irving's time and its own. The cheerful nature of the opera is apparent from its Overture, which is played in many different styles, including a clarinet solo played "like a folk tune," while a group of other woodwinds is told to perform *cantabile,* or smoothly, and

"humorously."[1] Later, these instruments become the sounds of nature: a flute is "the murmur of the brook as it glides"; an oboe represents a "quail's whistle"; and "woodpecker taps" are struck on castanet-like claves.[2] That is not to say that the opera is wholly joyous; the descriptions of the Headless Horseman are accompanied by "dramatic, frightening" melodies that play in intensely repeated patterns.[3] But humor and fun are the primary emotions of the opera, save where the Horseman himself appears; in this, Withem and Helton's work, unintentionally or otherwise, evokes the memory of Moore and Benet's own retelling of the legend in their *Headless Horseman.*

Unlike Moore and Benet's work, however, Withem and Helton's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is not a parody of any kind. It is better to consider the work more a full light opera rather than a mockery of the work of Gilbert and Sullivan; I say "full opera," as opposed to operetta, because the work is completely sung-through. The characters are largely depicted with their traits humorously exaggerated. Ichabod first appears "clearing his throat Ad lib. with humor," and ends his initial song by singing in a silly falsetto; Katrina, far from the doomed heroine of *The Headless Horseman,* is instead a spoiled brat who demands only the best from her suitors ("My father's rich, he owns this land. / A lucky man will win my hand. / He must be strong; / He must be fine. / His life with me will be divine");[4] Brom Bones, initially a dashing hero, is a narcissistic, self-aggrandizing fool who, like Cornelius van Tassel in Moore and Benet's work, throws temper tantrums when he does not get his way. This characterization of Brom may

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1. William Withem and Melanie Helton, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow: An Opera in One Act,* 2-3. Unpublished work.

2. Ibid 8-9.

3. Ibid 13.

4. Ibid 116.

explain why Withem and Helton's sympathies seem to lie more with Ichabod: when the two men compete in song to woo Katrina, Brom thinks only of the wealth the match will provide, while Ichabod is more romantic, promising the girl "music," "poetry," and "stories." This sympathetic interpretation continues throughout the opera; snobbish women sing a chorus mocking Ichabod's appearance ("He's so thin that when he's sideways we can't see him"), and during both his initial walk through the haunted woods and the chase of the Headless Horseman, the schoolmaster is genuinely terrified as the orchestra plays in an eerie, frenetic manner, with crashing cymbals, a "scraped gong," and rapid time-signature shifts from 4/4 to 5/4 to 4/4 to 3/4 to 4/4 meter.[5] This is certainly a departure from Moore and Benet's depiction of Ichabod as a prudish pedant who comes across as a condescending fop, and provides a clue as to the changes in Northeastern identity in the twenty-first century.

More interesting than this new characterization of Ichabod, though, is Withem and Helton's use of meta-theatrical practices throughout *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, a decision that seems inspired by the Modern era's emphasis on deconstructing the "fourth wall" that separates audiences from the action onstage. The three earlier operas studied in this thesis did not contain these fourth-wall breaks, and all three were created before the work of Modernists became prominent, suggesting that twentieth-century practices heavily influenced Withem and Helton. The clearest example of meta-theatricality in the pair's *Sleepy Hollow* is the presence of a mysterious Narrator, who directly addresses the audience to introduce the opera; his song even poses questions to them directly as he asks "Do you know the Headless Horseman? / Is he real?"[6] Such direct address to the audience occurs throughout the work; as mentioned above,

5. Ibid 137.

6. Ibid 14.

both Katrina and Brom stride onto the stage and boast of their own personality traits for their first solos in the Withem and Helton *Sleepy Hollow.*

Withem and Helton's work even concludes with a final riddle for the audience, as the Narrator reenters, once again demands to know if they "know the Headless Horseman,"[7] and reveals a terrifying surprise to conclude the piece: he himself is the Horseman, as he removes his high-necked cloak to show that he has no head! This twist ending leaves the audience quite literally questioning what they have seen: though the Horseman that chases Ichabod was clearly Brom Bones in disguise (the brutish farmer happily declares "I've a surprise in store!" for Ichabod earlier in the piece[8]), the revelation that the looming Narrator is an actual spirit suggests that there are genuinely supernatural elements found in the village. There is no such ambiguity in Moore and Benet's *Headless Horseman,* which concludes with a clear parody of progressive education.

What is to be made of this ambiguous ending, and indeed Withem and Helton's overall changes to Irving's original short story? Before offering any theories, I wish to provide a similarly brief analysis of Robert Milne's *Sleepy Hollow,* as the two pieces contrast each other. Milne's work, which is far longer than Withem and Helton's, ironically has more in common with Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle* and Moore and Benét's *Devil and Daniel Webster* than the latter pair's *Headless Horseman.* The Milne is much larger and grander than either their *Headless Horseman* or even *The Devil and Daniel Webster*; at one point in the piece, the cast sings in no less than sixteen-part harmony over full orchestration[9], a complexity not

7. Ibid 161-162.

8. Ibid 83-84.

9. Robert Milne, *The Headless Horseman,* 130-133.

typically found in contemporary opera. Milne himself expresses disdain for the Modern era that heavily influences Withem and Helton's piece: "I'm aware that today's operas use a keyboard, maybe two keyboards, and three other instruments. Not for me. That's music for the banker's budget, nothing else."[10] Though the Withem and Helton *Sleepy Hollow* uses far more than just "three other instruments," it does contain Modern influences, including atonality, that Milne consciously avoids in his own work. As such, it is best to say that Milne's *Headless Horseman* is a kind of echo of the nineteenth century in contemporary times.

Despite Milne's decided musical efforts to keep his opera free of contemporary influences, the plot and characterization he provides were not present in popular operas from the 1800s. Milne's work is proudly philosophical, with poetic musings on the nature of time, death, and the afterlife; at one point, Katrina, standing a forest where spirits clearly exist, remarks "If time became a page, / invisible in air, / then a thousand pages hang between me and over there / If the pages turn like books, / then they turn where your eye looks, / but if not then they float everywhere in the air, / Do they start where books leave off, or end before they start?"[11] The characters, too, are far more complex than any previous interpretation. Ichabod is not merely a quiet schoolmaster or even a pedantic fop in Milne's *Sleepy Hollow*; instead, he is an outright villain wholly lacking in redeemable qualities, sneering at everyone and everything in Sleepy Hollow and mocking anything other than his own beliefs. Upon hearing Katrina's remarks on time, he nastily remarks "Of all the sweet nonsense I've heard in my years, / there's none as

10. Robert Milne in conversation with the author, May 19 2015.

11. Milne, *The Headless Horseman,* 114.

ridiculous standing right here… / A niche in time? / Tick, tock, tick, tock, brrrrpptt!"[12] But Brom Bones, though slightly more likeable than Ichabod, is similarly negative: when he sees Katrina dancing with the schoolmaster at the Van Tassel party, Brom flies into a near-murderous rage, screaming, "You maniac, I'll kill you! / May a curse come down upon you! / And the curse will be me!"[13]

With both protagonists given such negative traits, who is the true hero of the Milne *Sleepy Hollow*? The answer is, surprisingly, "no one," with an emphasis on the "one"; rather, the entire community of Sleepy Hollow instead takes the role of protagonist, working together to save their town and defeat the villainous Ichabod, which echoes the communal bonds seen at the end of Moore and Benét's *Devil and Daniel Webster*. Such themes are present throughout the work: early in the opera, Katrina's friends Maria and Stefana arrive to rescue the girl from a private (and sexual) singing lesson with Ichabod;[14] the community joins in prayer before a local feast; and during the violent party, Maria and Stefana soothe Brom's anger, local scalawag Joeri demands a dance with Katrina to keep her from Crane, and even Katrina's father Baltus, sensing his daughter's unease with the schoolmaster, politely but deliberately refuses to entertain the notion of Ichabod asking for Katrina's hand in marriage by repeatedly changing the subject ("there's roast duckling on the table, just for you"[15]).

When Ichabod's power becomes too great and Brom begins to lose his temper, the community grows even larger via the prayers of Maria, Stefana, and Joeri, who beg, ""Three of

12. Ibid 113. The "brrppptt!" sound is indicated as "Crane giving the raspberries," or making a rude noise by putting his lips and tongue together.

13. Ibid 205-206.

14. Ibid 22.

15. Ibid 202.

us can't hold him, / so spirits please control him, / bring peace to our valley, / bring peace once again!"[16] Such an invocation puts the Headless Horseman in a wholly new light: he is no longer a demonic figure but instead a kind of archangel, rising in response to prayer and destroying the wicked. Such a strong interpretation is certainly different from Irving's original description of the ghost as a fictitious entity, and Moore, Benét, Withem, and Helton's own depictions of that ghost. By giving power to not only the Horseman, but the entire community of Sleepy Hollow, Milne continues the trend begun by Moore and Benét in their *Devil and Daniel Webster*: it is again old and young, male and female, and rich and poor who triumph over negative forces that threaten to destroy community. The Moore and Benét *Headless Horseman* does this as well—Ichabod, the outsider, is ultimately ousted from his position as schoolmaster—but his departure in that piece is ultimately the fodder for jokes rather than a serious statement on the identities of the Northeastern United States, and how those identities might come together to solve their problems (note too that it is Brom, and only Brom, who orchestrates the plot against Ichabod in *The Headless Horseman*).

The connections between Milne's community of heroes and the finale of Moore and Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* leads me to argue that the former is another example of what I call inclusive folkloric opera, a form of the genre which appeals across audiences rather than creating divisions among them, as *The Headless Horseman* and Bristow and Wainwright's *Rip Van Winkle* do. The Withem and Helton opera is harder to classify among this binary: while it does not require any advance knowledge of Dutch lore or grand romantic opera conventions to understand its plot, it also lacks the deliberately communal elements found in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and the Milne *Sleepy Hollow*. This difficulty in classification coincides with the

16. Ibid 210-211.

field of microhistory, which "concentrates on the contradictions of normative systems and therefore on the fragmentation, contradictions and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open." Northeastern American folkloric opera is such a system. In some cases, it creates a bond among certain members of the populace—those familiar with grand romantic opera tropes, for instance, or native-born New Yorkers—at the exclusion of the other, in this case those unversed in opera or immigrant populations. In other cases, it instead appeals to a broader range of traits, such as collaborative efforts to overcome negative forces or a connection with the past, to instead offer the audience an overall sense of connection as opposed to dividing it.

The genre of folkloric opera is especially suited for these different possibilities, and all those that lie between them. Theatre in general a form of public entertainment, as opposed to the private act of reading; opera's long-standing association with upper class audiences in the United States allows for either reinforcement or subversion of that association; folklore is told and retold, with every telling reflecting the particular qualities of its time (for instance, Irving's original *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* has been recast as everything from a 1949 animated feature created by Walt Disney to a 1999 slasher horror film to a 2013 fantasy TV series featuring Ichabod as a muscular Revolutionary War soldier transported to contemporary times to fight various evil creatures). By combining these three factors, Northeastern American folkloric opera is able to use each of their unique qualities to create a richer and more detailed exploration of the moments that generated the works. Those moments, and the identities that they encapsulate, will doubtlessly only become more complex as the racial, gendered, sexual, and class identities of the Northeastern United States continue to change. With microhistory, future scholars will respond to these challenges by focusing on the highly specific ways that those identities manifest in everything from painting to literature to, as I have written, folkloric opera. It is impossible to

know if Rip Van Winkle, Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman, and Daniel Webster will ever appear in opera again; if they do, though, I hope that those who study those operas will look to this thesis for an understanding of not only those folkloric characters, but the people they represent: the people of whom they sing.

Appendix:

A Partial List of Northeastern American Folkloric Opera.

-*Rip Van Winkle: A Grand Romantic Opera in Three Acts.* Composer: George Frederick Bristow. Librettists: J.W. Shannon (original) and Jonathan Howard Wainwright. 1855.

-*Rip Van Winkle, A Romance of Sleepy Hollow.* Composer: Robert Planquette. Librettists: Henri Melihac and Philippe Gille. Translator: Henry Brougham Farnie. 1882.

-*Rip Van Winkle: A Folk Opera in Three Acts.* Composer: Reginald De Koven. Librettist: Percy MacKaye. 1919.

-*Ichabod Crane, Or, the Legend of Sleepy Hollow: A Comic Opera in Two Acts.* Composer/Librettist: Stanley R. Avery. 1909.

-*The Headless Horseman: An Operetta in One Act.* Composer: Douglas Moore. Librettist: Stephen Vincent Benét. 1937.

-*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* Composer: William Withem. Librettist: Melanie Helton. 2009.

-*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* Composer/Librettist: Robert Milne. 2009.

-*The Devil and Daniel Webster: A Folk Opera in One Act.* Composer: Douglas Moore. Librettist: Stephen Vincent Benét. 1943.

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