

Reflections of History on Literature: The impact of American Revolution and Benjamin Franklin on Washington Irving's “Rip Van Winkle”

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Abstract

The age of Enlightenment is the time of revolutions and the rise of the bourgeois. The two important revolutions of the 18th century are the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) which had a great influence on world history with the new ideas of equality, brotherhood and emancipation. These democratic ideals became a triggering force in the forging of nation-states of the 19th and 20th centuries. The American revolution was an idea and a political action against British colonialism. This important historical event became a topic for Washington Irving, who is regarded as the first American writer to achieve international fame. Although Irving's mother was English-born and his father a Scottish descendant, it is clear that he was influenced by the American Revolution as he blended German folktales with the spirit of the revolution. His famous story “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) sketches the funny adventure of Rip who had lived during the revolution. One day Rip falls a sleep and wakes up to a very different America after the revolution. As Benjamin Franklin becomes the hero of the Revolution, the slow and easy going Rip celebrates the counter-hero of America. In this paper, the focus of interest will be on how the American revolution started and the impact it had on Washington Irving's work.

Key Words: American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin as the hero of the revolution, Rip Van Winkle as a counter-hero.

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Özet

Aydınlanma Çağı dünya tarihi açısından, devrimlerin patlak verdiği ve burjuva sınıfının yükseldiği önemli zamanlardır. 18. yüzyılın iki önemli devrimi, dünyada eşitlik, kardeşlik ve özgürlük gibi yeni düşüncelerin öne çıktığı için tarihte önemli bir yeri olan Amerikan Devrimi (1776) ile Fransız Devrimidir (1789). Devrimlerin ortaya attığı demokratik idealler, 19. ve 20. yüzyıllarda kurulmakta olan başka ulus-devletler için tetikleyici bir güç olmuştur. Amerikan devrimi, İngiliz kolonyalizmine karşı bir siyasal eylem ve özgürlükler konusunda önlenemez bir dürtü olarak ortaya çıkar. Bu önemli tarihsel olay, ün kazanan ilk Amerikalı olarak kabul edilen Washinton Irving'in eserlerine konu olmuştur. Irving'in annesinin İngiliz doğumlu, babasının da İskoç kökenli olmasına rağmen, yazarın Alman halk hikayeleriyle harmanladığı öyküsündeki dönem ruhundan anlaşılacağı üzere, Amerikan devriminden çok etkilendiğini açıklar. Yazarın önemli hikayesi "Rip Van Winkle" (1819), Devrim öncesinde yaşadığı yıllarda, günlerden bir gün ormanda uyuyakalıp uyandığında Devrim sonrasında yaşamakta olduğunu ve aradan yirmi yılın geçtiğini keşfeden Rip'in komik hikayesini anlatır. Uyuşuk ve kılıbık Rip, Devrim kahramanı Benjamin Franklin'in alternatifidir. Bu makalede, Amerikan devriminin nasıl ve hangi koşullarda başladığı ile devrimin Washington Irving'in eserleri üzerindeki etkisi üzerinde odaklanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan Devrimi, Devrim kahramanı olarak Benjamin Franklin, bir karşı-kahraman olarak Rip Van Winkle.

I. Introduction: The establishment of the English North American colonies in the beginning of 1600s

After the exploration of the Americas, the Spanish, the French and the English competed to establish powerful colonies on the continent, but England was the most successful and powerful colonizer because of its political tactics and permanent colonies based on agriculture. During the 1600s, when the power of the British Empire had broadened immensely, the English settlers established two colonies named New England and Chesapeake in North America. These two colonies, New England in the north and Chesapeake in the south, progressed economically and socially in the following hundred years. However they both had different styles of progress, since New England developed a Puritan local culture, whereas Chesapeake established a transatlantic culture. Weather conditions and the different characteristics of the immigrants affected the difference of mentality and way of life. In due time, New England made its way towards the industrial North as Chesapeake turned into the rural and agricultural South. New England became the center of progress and of the American Revolution and functioned as the cultural environment for an intellectual hero like Benjamin Franklin. Yet Franklin's fame was counterbalanced with the anti-hero Rip van Winkle of American literature.

II. The reasons behind the American revolution and its success

1. Economic reasons:

i. Mercantalism and navigation acts: After the colonization of North America by the British, the British attempts to control North American trade became crucial because they established the transatlantic economic system of the time. There were two main routes

of trade: the slave trade, and the trade of goods and valuables. This economic system can be viewed as a right angled triangle where Britain is at the top, always in control. According to this system, raw material flowed from North America into England. Fruit and wine came from West Africa via Spain and Portugal. North America and West Africa served as the labour force to produce the raw material to be sent to England. As for the slave trade, the slaves were supplied from West Africa, in order to supply free labour. In this economic trade system called mercantalism, the whole system was based on self-sufficiency in which the colonies supplied the mother country, i.e. England with raw materials, and served as markets for manufactured goods. Thus, England controlled the trade, in order to collect custom duties. The mercantalistic system of economy forced England to take restrictive steps in the colonies because the English merchants wanted to monopolize American trade. Therefore starting with mid-17th century they wanted the English Parliament to pass the Navigation acts, which were a series of laws. According to these laws:

- a. Only English or colonial merchants and ships could engage in the colonies.
- b. Certain valuable American products called enumerated goods could be sold in the mother country. The enumerated goods were “sugar, tobacco and certain dyestuffs made from New World flora and fauna” (McCuster/Menard, 1991: 47).
- c. All foreign goods destined for sale in the colonies had to be shipped via England and were subject to English import duties.

Some years later a fourth rule was added:

- d. The colonies could not make export items (such as wool clothing, hats and iron) that competed with English products.

Of course the American colonies, especially those in New England where shipping was a major source of income, resented the British control of commerce. However, this issue did not become a problem for the Americans for the next hundred years.

ii. The strategic and geographic location of New England: New England was the most important political and intellectual center at the time of the revolution and all revolutionary action was controlled and manipulated from New England. One of the leaders of the Revolution was Benjamin Franklin. During the 17th century, New England was becoming the most powerful colony and it dominated the colonies of British North America for several reasons:

- a. The climate was healthier in New England than in Chesapeake and as a result, New Englanders lived longer and had produced more children.
- b. Socially, Puritans had stronger family ties than in Virginia where many immigrants came only for short time to make money before returning to England.
- c. New England prospered economically, becoming the center of trade and shipping in the colonies.

- d. The Navigation Acts were directed primarily at New England, and this region soon became the center of all British political action in the colonies. The colonies that gathered around New England were resistant to England's attempt to control American trade.

2. Political reasons:

a. i. A foreign war on American soil: The seven years war was a turning point in American history because it directly affected the colonists, and hence provoked the revolution. At the end of the war, the colonies (America) wanted control over their destiny. The seven years war took place in North America between France and England and it had no importance or interest for the colonial Americans. Yet the results of the Seven- Years- War changed a lot in the colonies as follows:

- i) As a result of the Treaty of Paris (1763), England took control of North America from France. Spain had to give Florida to England.
- ii) The English sea-coast colonies no longer had to worry about the threat to their existence posed by the existence of the French in North American territories and the British gained control of the fur trade of the entire continent.
- iii) The French and the colonies were united against Britain.
- iv) As a result of the confrontations, the colonies began to hate the British soldiers.
- v) England wanted taxes for the war from the Americans.

ii. The idea of independence: The English colonies did not want independence at first. All they asked for was representation in the English Parliament. If the colonists were represented in Parliament, they could tell their problems to the Parliament directly. For that reason, they needed to develop theories of representation, because the "patriots", meaning the inhabitants of the American colonies that struggled for this cause, were paying tax but they were not given the right to be represented. With this concern and problem in mind, the colonists created a slogan which was "No Tax Without Representation." However, according to the English theory of government, the colonists had virtual representation. In other words, they were said to be virtually, if not actually, represented in the Parliament. The nature of representation was important for the colonists because according to Wood, "the English conception of virtual representation was hardening and laying the theoretical foundations for parliamentary sovereignty" (Wood, 1993: 162-188).

iii. No consensus for the war of independence: The revolutionary war was not wholly supported in the colonies. Americans did not rise up as one nation to oppose England. Various groups responded differently. The white population was divided into three groups: loyalists, patriots and neutrals. The loyalists who were the colonists that remained loyal to the mother country and who opposed independence during the revolutionary war were the British appointed government officials, some merchants, Anglican clergy,

former officers, etc. They either left for Canada and England or in some cases stayed in the colonies and secretly supported England. In American history, one of the first disagreements between the forces is the American loyalists. Mary Beth Norton states that “it is estimated today by historians that loyalists made up about one-fifth of the American population, so they were perhaps a minority” (quoted in Weinstein, 1980: 15). She also puts forth that before 1765 everybody in America was a loyalist because people were satisfied with their lives under British rule. She concludes “with loyalism there may be an element of inertia involved” (quoted in Weinstein, 1980: 17).

About 2/5 of the white population were the active patriots who were the groups that dominated the colonial society politically. The patriots were yeoman farmers, Chesapeake gentry and local merchants. Quite a few colonists remained neutral during the war, but many Americans, about % 40 of the population, became active patriots and fought against the English. Some were the ordinary soldiers, and others were the leaders in the cause of independence. The remaining 2/5 of the population, like the pacifist Quakers, tried to avoid taking sides. The native-Americans and African slaves had different views about the revolution. Although British officials had won the trust of the natives, just a few years earlier, the British had pushed the southern boundary with the natives forward and by the time of the revolution, the natives were angry and resentful about the white Americans’ aggressive pressure on their lands. For this reason, the natives supported Britain, because they did not want the colonists to go any further west. Some native-Americans fought alongside the British against the colonies. The slaves faced a dilemma at the beginning of the revolution. They made different decisions. Some joined the revolutionaries, but for most an alliance with the British appeared more promising. All shared a common idea which was to assist the British in return for freedom.

3. Cultural reasons:

i. Enlightenment: The most important intellectual development to effect colonial culture was the Enlightenment which made Benjamin Franklin flourish intellectually. The Enlightenment, which stressed reason and scientific knowledge over religion, was centered in France. The philosophers of the time owed a large debt to Isaac Newton’s “Mechanics” and to John Locke’s “Political Theory.” Newton’s demonstrations of the order of natural law greatly encouraged the idea that the mind is the source of individual being. On the other hand, Locke’s *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1691) had a huge influence on the formation of the ideology of the American revolution. According to Locke, government was created to serve man. Therefore, it could be altered, even overthrown if necessary. The government in mind was to resemble a democratic consensus like that of the Greeks which would consist of the voice of the majority. Because this idea was acclaimed in the colonies, the most important political development in the colonies was the creation of the assemblies which served as a forum for political discussions and organizations. The rise of the assemblies was a very important intellectual awakening for the American colonists, because it created esteem for unity and for an American identity.

The colonial political leaders sought to increase the powers of the elected assemblies relative to those of the governors and other appointed officials and in this way, and assemblies began to claim privileges associated with the British House of Commons. The assemblies made the colonialists very different from the English because the forums of debate were very democratic and egalitarian. One of the many visitors who realized that America was different from Europe was Alexis de Tocqueville who concluded after his tour of America in 1831 in the introduction to his great study, *Democracy in America*, that nothing had struck him more forcibly than the general equality of condition in the United States. To this view, he added the paradoxical self-reliance and powerlessness of the individual in America. He believed “America, then, exhibits in her social state an extraordinary phenomenon. Men are there seen on a greater equality in point of fortune and intellect, or, in other words, more equal in their strength, than in any other country of the world, or in any age of which history has preserved the remembrance” (Tocqueville, 1990: 53).

The logic of rebellion was provoked by the ideas of the Enlightenment. Bernard Bailyn summarizes this process as follows: “Power created legitimately by those voluntary compacts which the colonists knew from Lockean theory to be logical and form their own experience to be practical, power in its legitimate form inherited naturally in government and was the possession and interest of those who controlled government, just as liberty, anyways weak, always defensive, always as John Adams put it, ‘skulking about in corners... hunted and persecuted in all countries by cruel power,’ inherited naturally in the people and was their peculiar possession and interest. Liberty was not, therefore, for the colonists, as it is for us, professedly the interest and concern of all, governors and governed alike, but only of the governed” (quoted in Bailyn, 1992: 59).

ii. Emergence of an elite class with the foundation of universities: The Enlightenment, which emphasized the powers of the mind, had a spreading influence in the colonies. However, the colonial culture (folk culture) was still mostly oral and local. The common people, in other words, the ordinary folk, could not read and write but they received their news and information from church sermons and tavern gossip. There was however an elite class, men like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin who belonged to the transatlantic culture of the 18th century and who were recognized in Europe. By 1770, there were ten colleges in the colonies. The well-to-do graduates of the American colleges, along with the others educated in Great Britain, formed the core of the genteel culture in the colonies. However, the socio-economic gap between the elites and immigrants developed during the period of 1720-1740. The rich were the urban merchants, large landowners, factory owners, slave traders and native born elites. The poor were the slaves, indentured servants, small land farmers and women.

Since the elite were a minority, the constitution written after the revolution was for the few people and for that reason, there was a class power in early America. Michael Parenti claims “Adam Smith’s views of the importance of government were shared by

men of substance in the late eighteenth century including those who lived in America. During the period between the Revolution and the Constitution, the rich and the wellborn set the dominant political tone in the United States. Far from keeping a distance between themselves and the state, they were much involved in shaping public affairs” (Parenti, 1980: 53).

During the first half of the 18th century, there was a great growth in population but also in ethnic and religious diversity. The newcomers were assimilated into the colonial and ethnic cultures. The basic unit of the colonial society was the household and more than % 90 of all colonial families lived in rural areas. There was a fairly clear sexual division of labor according to genders and thus, the men were farmers and women took care of the houses and their homes. The American Revolution was a promise of prosperity, a vision of classlessness and a principle of hope. As Appleby states “the very stability and well-being of the great majority of the colonists permitted resistance to turn into rebellion and rebellion to revolution. Without the fear of social upheaval, the elite itself splintered, loyalists breaking off from Whigs as Antifederalists later would from federalists and Jeffersonians from supporters of the Washington administration” (Appleby, 1984: 13).

iii. Change in religious worldview:

During the revolution years, Deism had emerged, to replace Calvinism as the religious manifestation of the Enlightenment and of the ideas of the natural law philosophers. In contrast to Puritanism, with its ideas of original sin and predestination, the new theological thinking of the Enlightenment was optimistic and progressive. Natural law philosophy held that God created nature. Nature is good. Man is part of nature, therefore man is good, and God is beneficial. According to this view, man could shape his own destiny and understand his own world through “self-evident” truth.

This movement prepared its counter argument. From the late 1730s through 1760s, America faced waves of religious revivalism. The country was ripe for religious renewal in the mid-century. Orthodox Calvinists were eager to combat with the rationalism of Enlightenment. Consequently, the first sign of the Great Awakening appeared in western Massachusetts led by Reverend Jonathan Edwards. It was an emotional release. The awakenings were important for America, because they became an emotional and intellectual release and a cultural and political outlet for women and African-Americans in the 19th century. Richard Bushman explains as follows: “Thus the man affected by the Awakening possessed a new character, cleansed of guilt and joyful in awareness of divine favor. Unfortunately for the social order, however, their personal redemption did not save society. In making peace with themselves, converts inwardly revolted against the old law and authority, and as time was to show, they would eventually refuse to submit to a social order alien to their new identity. Conservative suspicions of the revival were confirmed when reborn men set out to create a new society compatible with the vision opened in the Great Awakening” (Bushman, 1980: 195).

4. Social and intellectual reasons:

The formation of American identity: Since the mid-1600s, the English had been occupied with European affairs and domestic politics and hence had been neglecting the American colonies while at the same time trying to tighten economic control via navigational acts. In the meantime, the colonies had grown and diversified. Much of the rapid population growth of the 1700s was due to natural increase and by the time of the revolution (1770s), the English descendants in the colonies had arrived in America approximately 150 years before which means they had been living in the colonies for almost five generations. Although there were intellectuals of the transatlantic culture like Benjamin Franklin, many Americans had never been to England, nor did they think of themselves as English. By the 1760s, the colonists had developed a sense of identity as Americans. Many of them had also developed a deep resentment because of England's tightening economic and trade policy.

5. The two triggering events of the war:

The idea of the revolution had begun in the minds of people like Benjamin Franklin by 1770s, but the immediate reasons for the revolutionary war were not there yet. However two very important historical events, the Boston Massacre and Boston Tea Party, quickened the road to war. These events provoked the colonists and made them take further steps for independence and emancipation.

i. Boston Massacre: This was an incident which started with no evil intention but in a very short time it became one of the saddest and most tragic events of the revolution days. The incident of children throwing snow balls at the British officers turned into a massacre in a very short time.

ii. Boston Tea Party: During night time, patriots clad as natives climbed secretly up British vessels and dumped the tea that was to be sold. This was an incident planned to provoke and agitate the British officials and British rule.

III. Benjamin Franklin as the hero of the revolution

The American Revolution was made possible by revolutionary leaders. These people were mostly lawyers, merchants, planters and writers. They believed that they should rebel for their rights and emancipation. They all shared the thought that they should protect their natural rights which were life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Thus, they had a prominent role in the organization of the idea. The main leaders who tried to spread the idea were Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine and John Adams. Besides these well known names, there were a lot of local leaders who were middle class revolutionaries, supporting the American Revolution. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was one of the revolutionary leaders and also the most important character of the revolution. He was present in all the stages of the revolution and he was chosen as a representative to the Second Continental Congress, then he served on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence.

Franklin's fame grew in time and "Puritan Boston shaped Franklin's character, but Quaker Philadelphia shaped his career. Pennsylvania had been founded in part as a refuge for Quakers persecuted in England, and by the time of Franklin's arrival, the colony was thriving economically but also experiencing sharp political conflicts. Franklin dissented from the Quaker party in politics, but he embraced the Quaker ideal of equality before God, moral self-restraint, and humanitarian reform. A city bustling with workers, Philadelphia nonetheless lacked the skilled artisans and equipment needed for a flourishing entrepot. As both contemporaries and memoirs testify, Franklin came quickly to dominate the printing business in the city" (Masur, 1993: 3).

Franklin was active in the accomplishment of all the national tasks that were realized after the revolution. He mainly participated in the political and ideological task which consisted of the prerevolutionary organization. After the war, he took part in the diplomatic task because the patriotic leaders knew that they needed international recognition and aid in order to win independence. With this idea in mind, they asked for international support and assistance, particularly from France. From the time the Declaration of Independence was signed, France had been neutral. The French government had been eager for reprisals against England ever since the defeat of France in 1763. Moreover, enthusiasm for the American cause was high because of the new emerging democratic ideals. For example the French traveller Alexis de Tocqueville had praised America for the application of class equality, in his work on democracy. The French intellectuals at the time were in revolt against feudalism and class privilege. That's why they were in favour of the revolution. Nevertheless, although France had welcomed Benjamin Franklin to the French court and had given the American colonies aid in the form of ammunition and supplies, she had been reluctant to risk direct intervention and open war with England. Franklin, who was appointed minister to France, negotiated skillfully the Franco-American alliance of 1778, and was able to secure a treaty of commerce and alliance.

Benjamin Franklin was the hero of the 18th century and the Enlightenment. Apart from his diplomatic missions, he was a philosopher and a writer, an expert printer, a scientist who ardently worked on sound, vapors, earthquakes and electricity. What is most important is his being a self-made American and a cult hero. He was the son of a candlemaker and after meager schooling, he became an apprentice in printing business and ran away from home at a very early age. However he was always remembered with his successes and was associated with all the values of American capitalism and individualism, like prudence, diligence, industry, sobriety, frugality.

IV. Rip Van Winkle as a counterhero and an anti-Franklinian American

The story of Rip Van Winkle is a tale about a funny fantastic incident that happened during the American Revolution. As the image of Benjamin Franklin became very important during the American Revolution, he was applauded as "the American" and "the hero of American history." Lewis Leary sums up his success as follows: "In speaking about anything American, Benjamin Franklin is a good man to begin with. Years before

the United States existed, he started things of which his countrymen continue to be proud, like libraries, civic clubs, volunteer fire departments, effective street lighting, and, not least, the use of humor as a practical device. For Franklin was solidly American, ingenious, practical, ambitious, and successful. His *Autobiography* testifies that his feet were on the ground, and that he did not stand still. No man of his time went so far, and few since have gone further. But because he not only started things, but also let it be known that he did, Franklin may sometimes be credited with more than he deserves. That is why he stands confidently at the head of any native literary procession. Talking about himself, he produced his country's first masterwork" (Rubin, 1982: 33). Yet, Theodore Hornberger comments that Benjamin Franklin's "fame rests less upon authorship than upon other things. Printer, scientist, statesman and promoter of schools, libraries, hospitals, insurance companies, savings banks, and the post office" (quoted in Paul, 1970: 13).

Benjamin Franklin was the perfect hero of America. However, for those who could not identify themselves with this exceptional person, Washington Irving (1783-1859), who was born during the last days of Franklin's life, created another character named Rip Van Winkle. Rip was a good hearted but lazy American who functioned as the laughable anti-Franklinian American or the counterhero of the republican days. Rip's story was some kind of a release for those who could not live up to be Ben Franklins.

As Benjamin Franklin was the pride of the new country, Washington Irving was the figure of the American nationalism who tried to promote genteel nationalism among American readers. Leary comments: "Like Franklin also, he was the last child born in a large family but without forebears deeply rooted in colonial America, as Franklin's had been" (Paul, 1970: 52). Irving had common interests, like frontier narratives, as his contemporaries but "unlike Cooper, Irving did not use frontier material as a basis for fictitious romance, but developed the inherent romance of the facts which he gathered from journals of exploring expeditions, from interviews with friends, Mr. Astor and Captain Bonneville, and from his own excursions of a month to the hunting grounds of the Pawnees" (quoted in Hazard, 1961: 117).

Irving's Rip Van Winkle attacks, representative democracy for destroying the political aspects of the republican character. Walter Sondey summarizes the writer's time as follows: "Washington Irving (1783-1859) began his career in the midst of the national identity crisis prompted by the transition from Federalist republicanism to Jeffersonian democracy. During the first decade of the nineteenth century Americans found themselves at odds over conflicting elitist and populist, public and private conceptions of the masculine persona representative of American nationality" (quoted in Pickering/Kehde, 1997: 52).

Washington Irving was writing about the wilderness and the people of his country, and at the same time establishing a new genre called the short story. Henry Pochmann explains as follows: "It may be doubted that when Irving wrote 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' he was fully aware that he was inventing a new genre:

but once it was done, he was not slow to realize what he had done or to understand the techniques of his storytelling art. Thenceforth, as he said, 'I have preferred adopting a mode of sketches short tales rather than long works, because I chose to take a line of writing peculiar to myself, rather than fall into the manner or school of any other writer... I believe the works I have written will be oftener re-read than any novel of the size I could have written.' And with true Irvingesque whimsicality he could point out that 'if the tales I have furnished should prove to be bad, at least they will be found short.'" (quoted in Gohdes, 1967: 72).

The story of its comical character, Rip Van Winkle is narrated by a gentleman called Dietrich Knickerbocker who was an old man from New York. According to the sketch, this tale was found among his papers after his death. At the end of the story, Dietrich Knickerbocker, the omniscient narrator of the story, assures the reader that Rip's story is a true one, adding that in fact it really sounds like a hilarious fantastic tale. Knickerbocker guarantees the truth of the story in the following lines: "The story of Rip van Winkle may seem incredible to many, but nevertheless I give it my full belief, for I know the vicinity of our old Dutch settlements to have been very subject to marvellous events and appearances. Indeed, I have heard stranger stories than this, in the villages along the Hudson; all of which were too well authenticated to admit of a doubt. I have even talked with Rip Van Winkle myself, who, when last I saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every other point, that I think no conscientious person could refuse to take this into the bargain; nay I have seen a certificate on the subject taken before a country justice, and signed with a cross, in the justice's own handwriting. The story, therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt" (Baym 2003: 992).

The narrative time of the story starts just before the American revolution. It is during the days of colonial America and the time of Peter Stuyvesant, the last governor of the Dutch province of New Netherlands. The story is told in a humorous fairy tale style and the main character Rip is introduced as follows: "In that same village, and in one of these very houses (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time worn and weather beaten,) there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of great Britain, a simple good natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle. He was a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina. He inherited, however, but little of the martial character of his ancestors. I have observed that he was a simple good natured man, he was moreover a kind neighbour, and an obedient, henpecked husband" (982). So we learn that he is lazy and slow but a good natured fellow. He loved to assist and help his friends and neighbours and he was useful to all, except himself. His wife Dame Van Winkle was a dominant woman who nagged all the time and criticized her husband for being idle and lazy. The lazy but cheerful Rip was attached to his dog Wolf who "was as much henpecked as his master" (983). Rip's "long walk into the hills one lovely day is a retreat from a woman who is the antithesis of the motherly figure in 'The Wife,' the preceding piece in the book. Retreat to what? To nature, a nature which is not the

West of frontier adventures but a region of fantasy, a benign, if half-wild, landscape that throughout the nineteenth century was to feed starved American imaginations” (Hedges, 1965: 137/138).

In this small village, there was an inn that Rip used to visit quite often, with a portrait of King George III on the wall. Rip would go and meet his friends there or at other times sit at the foot of a tree and play with Wolf in order to run away from his nagging wife and avoid the labour on the farm. One autumn day, as he was thinking about Dame Van Winkle, he met a “short square built” man “with thick bushy hair, and grizzled beard” (985) who asked him to help him with his load. As the two men walked silently, they entered the vast area of an amphitheater and saw there some strange people. Rip and his companion approached these people and they drank the liquor offered. After a while Rip fell asleep.

On awaking, Rip starts thinking fearfully about his wife who would be furious for his absence and looks around for his dog and gun in vain. As he walks about, he notices that the landscape is different and had changed a lot. When he approaches his village, he realizes that the clothes of the townsfolk are different. He sees that the village had altered and the names over the doors and the faces at the windows are all strange. When he arrives at his own house, he expects to hear his wife’s shrill voice, but to his surprise, he only sees that their house had been decayed. He even notices that the dog is different. As he rushes to the good old little village inn, he is flabbergasted by the new wooden building that stand in its place. He is more shocked about the traces of liberty of the revolution as follows: “Instead of the great tree that used to shelter the quite little Dutch inn of yore, there now was reared a tall naked pole, with something on top that looked like a red night cap, and from it was fluttering a flag, on which was a singular assemblage of stars and stripes—all this was strange and incomprehensible. He recognised on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe, but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of the blue and buff, a sword was stuck in the hand instead of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON” (988).

The people of the village become curious as they see this man with old fashioned clothes. They wonder about his political party allegiance, but that is another strange concept for Rip. He would not have imagined political parties being established in the colonies. As a foreigner, Rip draws hostility and at last it comes out that eighteen years had passed. When nobody remembers him, he realizes the impact of the transformation of time. He then comes across his daughter and her son who is named after Rip. To his surprise, he learns that his wife had passed away because she broke a blood vessel in a fit of passion at a New-England pedlar. When the peasants start talking about the elections, which is something Rip can not understand, Rip’s daughter takes him home to take care of her father and to live with him ever after. The end of the story comes with a reference

to the revolution and a criticism of the new government as follows: "Having nothing to do at home, and being arrived at that happy age when a man can do nothing with impunity, he took his place once more on the bench, at the inn door, and was revered as one of the patriarchs of the village, and a chronicle of the old times 'before the war.' It was some time before he could get into the regular track of gossip, or could be made to comprehend the strange events that had taken place during his torpor. How that there had been a revolutionary war - that the country had thrown off the yoke of old England - and that, instead of being a subject of his majesty George the Third, he was now a citizen of the United States. Rip, in fact was no politician; the changes of the states and empires made but little impression on him. But there was one species of despotism under which he had long groaned, and that was-petticoat government. Happily, that was at the end; he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony, and could go in and out whenever he pleased, without dreading the tyranny of Dame Van Winkle. Whenever her name was mentioned, however, he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and cast up his eyes, which might pass either for an expression of resignation to his fate, or joy at his deliverance" (991). "If in the end the story remains comic rather than tragic, it is because Rip is able to parlay his loss into a positive asset, to make a success of inadequacy or failure. He acquires a new identity as a result of having a tale to tell. True enough, in this story the reader cannot altogether rejoice in the losing of oneself that becomes a finding. Yet Irving's village loafer proves to have a permanent appeal to the American flair for irresponsibility, a trait which compensates the nation for its often unflagging puritanism" (Hedges, 1965: 140).

V. Conclusion

Although it has aesthetic concerns, literature conveys a medium for communication and imparting ideas. In his short story "Rip Van Winkle," Washington Irving sets a funny story over a historical platform which was still on the agenda with its further arguments. This historical time was the American Revolution. The idea of American Revolution was realized because of the resentment and unrest of the British navigation acts that were imposed on the North American colonies and because of the idea of independence for the newly constructed American identity. One of the most influential colonial leaders was Benjamin Franklin who became the important figure of the revolution but was sometimes criticised for being the shrewd American who knew how to make his way to wealth. Nevertheless, he was the example of a proud, clever and independent nature. As opposed to Franklin, Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle became the funny counter part of the serious and wise Benjamin Franklin and served as the naive and hilarious common man from the countryside who had difficulties in getting accustomed to the events of the revolutionary times. With his humor and wit, he became the twin of the intellectual and transcultural American.

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