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bocker himself admitted that the old man was only "perfectly rational and consistent on every other point."

What sort of character was Rip? Irving's numerous sexual images and puns suggest a rogue. Rip may have been a "great favourite among all the good wives of the village" because of his eagerness to attend to their "business." His pursuit of "his favourite sport of squirrel shooting" and his decision to rest in what Dawson describes as a "womb-like glen" were Irving's way of saying that Rip ran off for a 20-year "frolick." But liberation's consequences, Irving implied, were unhappy—as joyless as Hendrick Hudson's bowling crew's "melancholy party of pleasure." Cutting familial, communal, or national ties meant a loss of identity. "I can't tell what's my name, or who I am," cried a confused Rip, whose return may have been prompted partly by incapacity, his "gun" having grown rusty.

In "Rip Van Winkle," Dawson concludes, Irving was subtly trying to remind his readers of "the connection between liberty and libertine." Still, Rip's life did end happily, as he settled back into the village without Dame Van Winkle. This, says Dawson, may reflect Irving's growing affection for independent America, despite his fears.

Lost in the Dark

"'The Great Dark': Invisible Spheres, Formed in Fright" by James C. Wilson, in *The Midwest Quarterly* (Winter 1982), Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kans. 66762.

"The Great Dark," an unfinished manuscript by Mark Twain (1835–1910), has often been dismissed by critics as little more than the rantings of a despairing old man. But Wilson, a University of New Mexico doctoral student, contends that the moody tale reflects growing doubts about mankind's possibilities, shared by other writers of the 19th century.

In the story, Henry Edwards and his daughters peer through a microscope at a drop of water; he shortly falls asleep and in a dream is transported with his family to a lost ship, sailing an uncharted ocean (the drop of water) under an always dark sky (most of the drop is outside the microscope's "luminous circle"). He learns that his dream is reality and that his erstwhile reality was but a dream, and his Yankee curiosity turns to despair. The terrifying voyage continues; a giant squid attacks and then furiously stalks the ship. A mutiny threatens, and the captain pleads for reason and then for faith. Here the manuscript ends, but Twain's notes take up the story: After various intrigues, Edwards's infant son and the captain's daughter are separated from their fathers and are aboard a second ship, which is hunted for 10 years and at last found in the region of the Great White Glare (the light shining from the microscope's reflector through the slide). The children are long dead from the heat; those aboard the first ship also die from it. Edwards wakes up and is with his family again, as at the start.

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When Mark Twain wrote this in 1898, he was 62 years old and sunk in gloom, his fortune gone and his beloved oldest daughter dead. But Wilson argues that Twain was not simply indulging his grief. Henry Edwards exemplifies the plight of 19th-century rational man lost in the irrational universe. Other similarly "lost" fictional characters include Arthur Pym in Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851)—all searchers after knowledge of the world.

In "The Great Dark," Mark Twain suggests the inability of reason to comprehend the universe. We humans, Henry Edwards somberly reflects, take great pride in our powerful "mental equipment," but, in lucid moments, "we see that intellectually we are no great things" and that "our best-built certainties are but sand-houses."

Canvas Con Man

"Gilbert Stuart's Portraits of Thomas Jefferson" by David Meschutt, in *The American Art Journal* (Winter 1981), 40 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828), the foremost American portrait painter of his day, was something of a con man. One of his victims, writes Meschutt, of the Frick Art Reference Library in New York, was Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson sat for Stuart several times, the first in 1800 in Philadelphia when he was Vice President. He paid the artist \$100 for an oil-on-canvas bust but never got it. In early 1805, Stuart wrote Jefferson that he was "not satisfied" with the painting, and Jefferson, then President, agreed to sit for him again, in Washington. Stuart did not tell Jefferson the real reason for his request: America's new minister to Spain, James Bowdoin, had commissioned Stuart (who probably no longer had his 1800 Jefferson painting) to make a half-length portrait of the President. Stuart promised to send Jefferson the 1805 work after making an engraving of it.

But only after repeated attempts was Jefferson finally—in 1821—able to get what he took to be the 1805 portrait. Jefferson's daughter, however, reportedly noticed that the paint was fresh when it arrived at Monticello. Historians since have had their doubts, too. The painting Jefferson received is on a mahogany or walnut panel, but Stuart did not begin using wooden panels regularly until 1807, when the Embargo Act cut off the supply of imported canvas. Moreover, the painting's size (26¼ x 21¾ inches) and its impressionistic style link it not to Stuart's Washington period but to his later years in Boston. The work Jefferson got was probably a late replica, hastily painted about 1821.

Stuart kept Jefferson's \$100, but, instead of giving him the 1805 portrait, Meschutt contends, he sold it to James Madison. (Selling a portrait to two different buyers was a bad habit of Stuart's.) Later, the artist sent Jefferson the inferior version. Stylistically, Madison's *Jefferson* is similar to portraits Stuart did of Madison and his wife in 1804;