

WASHINGTON IRVING'S THE SKETCH BOOK:  
A ROMANTIC EXCURSION INTO OLD WORLD TRADITION

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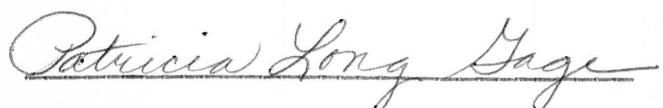


## PREFACE

In choosing to write on Washington Irving's The Sketch Book, my first thought was to analyze Irving as a literary diplomat between the Old World in England and the New World in America. Upon looking into The Sketch Book, I found that as Irving pointed out Old World treasures to Americans he did so in a particularly romantic fashion. Since Irving lived during a time when romanticism was flourishing in America, it is not surprising that this should affect his writing. Using the concept of a romantic excursion, I was able to complete the two-fold idea. In this paper, then, I have attempted to show Washington Irving's trip to the Old World as a romantic quest in which he attempted to bring two very similar cultures together.

Completion of this paper necessitates sincere thanks to my thesis director, Dr. Charles Bruce, for all of his encouragement and help. To Dr. Lavon Fulwiler and Dr. Judith McDowell who served on the thesis committee I wish to extend my gratefulness for their time and energies. This final step of the Master of Arts degree would not have been possible without the expert guidance of all of my teachers at Texas Woman's University, but

especially to three recently retired English professors I extend my gratitude. First of all, Mrs. Eva H. Mark, my freshman English teacher and friend, I thank for being the inciting force behind my choice of English as a major. My appreciation goes to Dr. Gladys Maddocks for her confidence and constant support of my own literary endeavors. And Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley I wish to acknowledge for her inspiration in choosing Irving's The Sketch Book as a thesis prospect. Finally, my most sincere thanks and love go to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. James C. Long, Jr., for their countless sacrifices for my education, and to my husband, Alan Gage, for his ever-present good humor in thesis-trying times.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patricia Long Gage". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Patricia Long Gage

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## CHAPTER I

### LIFE AND MUSINGS

I have no wife or children, good or bad, to provide for. A mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they play their parts, which methinks, are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene.

--Burton<sup>1</sup>

This brief extract appears on the frontispiece of a Signet Classic edition of Washington Irving's The Sketch Book. Burton's profession of a "spectator of other men's fortunes" seems to be the role which Irving takes in The Sketch Book. Throughout its pages, Irving continually plays the part of the avid observer of scenes, characters, and customs. Burton's "common theatre or scene" is the Old World to Irving. In the Old World, Irving's romantic outlook on life colors the impressions which he sends to America. He carefully notes the Gothic, the rustic, the simple, the antique, and the melancholy which run through the cities and countrysides of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup>Washington Irving, The Sketch Book, A Signet Classic (New York: New American Library, 1961), frontispiece. All subsequent references to The Sketch Book cited within the text are from this edition.

In his notation of these Irving presents to Americans hope that they will realize the vast worth of the culture of the Old World. This paper will analyze Irving's presentation of the material in The Sketch Book in light of the romantic influence. In four chapters, the paper will point out Irving's background which led to his romantic uncovering of the Old World for the benefit of the New, as well as the scenes, characters, and customs which he found in the Old World.

The United States of America was only a short time away from absolute freedom from rule by England on April 3, 1783, when Washington Irving opened his eyes to the world he was to influence so greatly. A perpetual reminder of the proximity of Irving's birth to the birth of the free nation is in the name of the country's first leader which Irving bore. An eventual culmination of this reminder was to come years later when Irving, home from his European travels, wrote the lengthy and widely acclaimed biography of George Washington.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps America would not have had the benefit of the heritage Washington Irving bequeathed to his native land had a young Scot and his Cornwall bride not decided to seek their fortunes in the New World. William and Sarah Irving

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Cargill, "Washington Irving," Collegiate Encyclopedia, 1st ed., IX, 438.

arrived in New York on July 18, 1763, where he began a mercantile career and she the business of mothering a brood of eleven,<sup>1</sup> the youngest of whom was destined to write of her love and devotion to him in one of the essays in his famed Sketch Book (pp. 105-112).

Irving seems to have enjoyed a happy family life somewhat colored by the strict Calvinist upbringing of his father.<sup>2</sup> Irving's formal schooling ended before he was sixteen; however, profuse reading kept up his literary capabilities. While finding himself as a young adult, Irving spent five not often serious and rather unsuccessful years (1799-1804) in a law office.<sup>3</sup> During this time of law study in his life, Irving experienced a first step in his personal sorrows that was to especially color his early European writings. His acquaintance with the Hoffman family began in 1802 when he was a clerk in the law office of Josiah Ogden Hoffman. Through this relationship, Irving ultimately met and became attached to the young daughter, Matilda. Her untimely death in the spring of 1809 left deep impressions in Irving's memory.

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<sup>1</sup>William Morton Payne, Leading American Essayists (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

It is probable that Irving had cherished the hope that Matilda would some day become his wife.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the speculation, her death at the tender age of seventeen darkened the world of her lover.<sup>2</sup> So great was the impact of her death on Irving that even years later, he wrote of his anguish over her loss: "It seemed to give a turn to my whole character, and throw some clouds into my disposition, which have hung ever since about it."<sup>3</sup> Thus, by the time Irving was in his early twenties he had been exposed to a rigid religion and an unfortunate love affair. He had always manifested an intellectual curiosity and a desire for foreign travel. These early factors are sufficient basis for considering the romantic vein in which much of his writings move.

To discover the romantic in Irving, one must first examine his literary development. This development can be divided into three major periods: the New York period (1783-1815), the European period (1815-1832), and the New York return period (1832-1859). During this first division, Irving took on the guise of a gentleman of letters in his collaboration with James Kirke Paulding on the

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Salmagundi papers, a series of whimsical essays on life in New York. In 1809, Irving's Diedrich Knickerbocker made good-natured fun of Dutch settlers and leveled serious satire at the administration of Thomas Jefferson in A History of New York.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, three years later, the War of 1812 found Irving in the role of aide-de-camp to the Governor of New York.<sup>2</sup> The denouement of the war also saw an end to Irving's early New York period and opened the way to his European period, 1815 to 1832. Irving arrived in England at this time to help with his family's bankrupt hardware business. After the failure of the firm in which he was a nominal partner, he produced The Sketch Book (1819-1820), Bracebridge Hall (1822), and Tales of a Traveler (1824). In 1828, Irving, having gone to Spain looking for materials for his Life and Voyages of Columbus, became Secretary of the American legation there.<sup>3</sup> Other products of his stay in Spain are The Conquest of Granada (1829) and the famed Alhambra (1832).<sup>4</sup> The end of Irving's European period and the beginning of the New York return period did not terminate

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<sup>1</sup>Cargill, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



his travels abroad but merely marked the transition from major European topics to more American-oriented subject matter. On April 11, 1832, Washington Irving boarded the New York packet Havre at Havre de Grace to return to America.<sup>1</sup> He had lived seventeen years--more than one-third of his life--in Europe as a reluctant businessman, a minor diplomat, and a highly successful writer. Home at last, Irving was eager to see, to know, and to live in the land that the United States had become during his long years of absence. Almost immediately after his return to American soil, Irving made an extensive tour of the newly settled western frontier which had unfolded in his years abroad.<sup>2</sup> Irving's Tour of the Prairies (1835), followed by Astoria (1836) and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A. (1837) especially show his reaction to this adventure.<sup>3</sup> After the dawn of a new decade (1842), Irving once more found himself in an administrative governmental position as United States

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<sup>1</sup>Pierre Munro Irving, The Life and Letters of Washington Irving (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1867), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Washington Irving, The Western Journals of Washington Irving, ed. by John Francis McDermott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Cargill, p. 438.

minister to Spain, a post which he kept for the ensuing four years.<sup>1</sup> His last major literary effort, A Life of Washington, published in five volumes from 1855-1859, was perhaps meant to be his crowning glory of literary endeavors.<sup>2</sup> In character with the way he lived and wrote, Washington Irving died on November 28, 1859, on an elevation overlooking Sleepy Hollow and the river he loved, "amidst the scenes which his magic pen had made classic and his sepulchre hallows."<sup>3</sup>

The two writing genres which were most affected by Irving's genius are the short story and the essay. Irving himself had definite ideas on the direction of a story:

I consider a story merely as a frame on which to stretch my materials. It is the play of thought, and sentiment, and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly, yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life; the half-concealed vein of humor that is often playing through the whole,--these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed.<sup>4</sup>

To the form of the short story, Irving contributed

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<sup>1</sup>Cargill, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Dudley Warner, et al., Studies in Irving (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1880), p. 304.

<sup>4</sup>Payne, p. 131.

definiteness of locality, absence of didacticism, unity of atmosphere and time, humor, vivid characterization, and a finished style. Such qualities as these keep him alive despite his lack of deep insight into human nature, lofty ideas, or moral earnestness.<sup>1</sup> In his essays, Irving set a kind of fashion in narrative writing with brief stories of mingled humor and pathos which was followed for half a century.<sup>2</sup>

Numbered among the appraisals of Irving's works is his service to his country through writing. Irving himself makes clear his attempt to serve his country through literary achievement:

As far as my precarious and imperfect abilities enable me, I am endeavoring to serve my country. Whatever I have written has been written with the feelings and published as the writings of an American. How else can I serve my country? If I can do any good in this world, it is with my pen. . . . In remaining therefore abroad, I do it with the idea that I can best exert my talents, for the present, where I am.<sup>3</sup>

Irving continued this service to his country abroad and at home, making evident to Europeans what wealth in unexploited natural resources in settings and atmospheres

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<sup>1</sup>Bartholomew V. Crawford, Alexander C. Kern, and Morris H. Needleman, American Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1958), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Warner, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup>George S. Hellman, Washington Irving Esquire (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1925), p. 119.

lay at the foot of the Kaatskills and along the western trails, and making apparent to Americans the heritage of the Old World culture which he felt should not be forgotten in building their own.

That Washington Irving achieved greatness in literature is not to be doubted. His works served in his lifetime and for years to come as a bridge between the cultural, environmental, and social premises of the traditional Old World and the progressiveness of the New World. As a whole, or individually, Irving's works serve to point out specifically many of the basic differences to the people of both refinements. Perhaps the most representative of his endeavors in this vein belong to the European period from May 25, 1815, to April 11, 1832, the seventeen years which encompass his meridian period of literary achievement.<sup>1</sup> The first and, perhaps, finest, most acclaimed manuscript to come out of this productive millenium is The Sketch Book. Irving's objectives, point of view and introspective musings incorporated into this work create his intended dominant theme--that through a romantic excursion into Old World tradition, he could show to the New World their rich heritage across the ocean.

Before expounding upon Irving's genius in constructing

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 63

this collection of English and American sketches, one must look at him during the influential months before the before the actual writing and publication of The Sketch Book. In doing so, one is able to see the romantic influences in his life which gave the book this twist. The exact details of Irving's life during 1817 are somewhat sketchily drawn from a few references in The Sketch Book which may or may not be linked occasionally with definite dates and happenings during 1817.<sup>1</sup> Irving had come to England in 1815 ostensibly to be near his favorite brother, Peter, and to assist in his business in Liverpool; however, his letters during this period show an increasing impatience with his heretofore purposeless life in America.<sup>2</sup> In 1817, at thirty-four, Irving, not yet distinguished in the world of letters, had not developed his creative writing talents to the point of allowing his literary labors to express this impatience. Helpful experiences during this time, such as his friendship with Scott, a tour of the Highlands, and his intimacy with literary London and Edinburgh, were later to influence the romantic vein of his writings.<sup>3</sup> After the commercial agony of an unsuccessful

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley T. Williams, The Life of Washington Irving, I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

business attempt and two months of hesitation and misgivings, Irving settled down to his first serious attempt at literary work after his arrival in Europe. The outcome was the first number of The Sketch Book.<sup>1</sup>

As his distinct objective in writing The Sketch Book, Irving tried for the most part to effect a sympathetic description of the Old World for the benefit of the New one across the Atlantic. Whereas he had often played the representative role of American diplomat to various European countries, Irving served influentially as one of the first cultural ambassadors of the New World to the Old.<sup>2</sup> Americans were so estranged from England after the rupture of the Colonial Period that they were ignorant of the country, and its traditions had lost their hold on them. The spirit in which Americans regarded England was misunderstood and misinterpreted, and there was a good deal of bad blood that was a result only of ignorance and prejudice.<sup>3</sup> Irving set out as a one-man crusader whose personal mission was to join the two worlds in a spirit of ecumenism. In doing so, Irving created a new form of art, the story-essay, and revealed to England, as no foreigner

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Cargill, p. 439.

<sup>3</sup>Warner, p. 44.

had ever done, the soul of England.<sup>1</sup> While showing England to England, Irving at the same time was showing England to America, his foremost intention. English traditions and virtual endowments for American posterity are seen in the variety of legendary, sentimental, autobiographical, critical, and interpretive papers contained in The Sketch Book.

Closely correlated with Irving's sympathetic description and affectionate interest in his objectives in writing The Sketch Book is his established point of view. Irving's romantic sympathy with humanity, coloring whatever he wrote, is especially manifested in The Sketch Book. This romantic concern for humanity is seen in his sympathy with the simple man and his medieval belief in chivalry:

He liked good women, little children, and a pure life. He had faith in his fellow man, a kindly sympathy with the lowest without any subservience to the highest. He retained a belief in the possibility of chivalrous actions, and did not care to envelope them in a cynical suspicion. His books are wholesome, full of sweetness and charm, of humor without any strain. Their more solid qualities<sup>1</sup> are marred neither by pedantry nor pretension.

In The Sketch Book, Irving combines American enthusiasm with British wit and polish for a mixed outlook on life. Irving's tolerance of everyone and his strong

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<sup>1</sup>Warner, p. 303.

feeling for local place and custom fitted him into the mold of an ideal observer. His adversities were cumulative with the loss of his sister, father, mother, and betrothed. Beneath a convenient elegance, many of the essays in The Sketch Book are attuned to his feelings at this time.<sup>1</sup> With this feeling in mind, a reader may detect in The Sketch Book many covert allusions to Irving's personal grief. Irving's choice of the pseudonym "Geoffrey Crayon" serves further to establish him as a man of letters. Irving uses this idea of the artist-writer concept suggested in the word crayon to convey his romantic message of heritage. The name is symbolic of those qualities of artist and writer in his nature which made him a citizen to whom his country owes a great and often insufficiently appreciated debt.<sup>2</sup>

In establishing his point of view in the first chapter of The Sketch Book, entitled "The Author's Account of Himself," Irving pictures himself to his readers as comparable to a wandering artist:

I have wandered through different countries, and witnessed many of the shifting scenes of life. I cannot say that I have studied them with the eye of a philosopher, but rather with the sauntering gaze with which humble lovers of the picturesque stroll from the window of one print shop to another

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Hellman, p. 67.



caught sometimes by the delineations of beauty, sometimes by the distortions of caricature, and sometimes by the loveliness of the landscape. As it is the fashion for modern tourists to travel pencil in hand and bring home their portfolios filled with sketches, I am disposed to get up a few for the entertainment of my friends. When, however, I look over the hints and memorandums I have taken down for the purpose, my heart almost fails me at finding how my idle humor has led me aside from the great objects studied by every regular traveler who would make a book. I fear I shall give equal disappointment with an unlucky landscape painter, who had traveled on the continent, but, following the bent of his vagrant inclination, had sketched in nooks and corners and byplaces. His sketch book was accordingly crowded with cottages and landscapes and obscure ruins, but he had neglected to paint St. Peter's, or the Coliseum; the cascade of Terni, or the bay of Naples; and had not a single glacier or volcano in his whole collection. (p. 15)

Like the roving sketcher to whom Irving has likened himself, Irving's sketch book is filled with the ostensibly insignificant nooks and byways which a traveler like Geoffrey Crayon might encounter. Unlike the wandering artist, however, Irving does not neglect to paint the obvious and more established romantic relics of Old World tradition, such as those seen in his visit to Westminster Abbey. In doing so, Irving constantly points out the romantic characteristics in a scene, a character, or a custom. The reader can be certain that whatever catches Irving's comment, the description which follows will definitely add to the profundity of the work as a whole.

Publication of The Sketch Book was not immediate. Irving took his material to John Murray, who civilly declined it on the stand that, at this point, the public of America and England would not likely buy a series of sketches by an author of no established reputation in either community.<sup>1</sup> So, encouraged by Sir Walter Scott, who predicted its success, Irving then undertook the publication at his own risk.<sup>2</sup> The first number of The Sketch Book contained among its four essays one of the greatest and most appealing of legendary figures in American literature, Rip Van Winkle. Irving's ungrounded fear of public rejection on sending out The Sketch Book was reflected in his comment, "Should it not succeed--should my writings not acquire critical applause, I am content to throw up the pen and take to any commonplace employment."<sup>3</sup> Ebenezer Irving and Henry Brevoort, close friends and advocates of Irving's talent, attended to the publication and to the correction of the proof sheets. Two thousand copies at seventy-five cents apiece were issued simultaneously in London, New York, Philadelphia, Boston

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<sup>1</sup>Warner, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Hellman, p. 103.

and Baltimore.<sup>1</sup> The book sold in England as it did in America. The last installment was completed in America in September, 1820. Shortly before sending out his first installment, Irving wrote to Henry Brevoort whom he had chosen as a literary representative:

I have attempted no lofty theme, nor sought to look wise and learned, which appears to be very much in fashion among our American writers at present. I have preferred addressing myself to the feeling and fancy of the reader rather than to his judgment. My writings, therefore, may appear light and trifling in our country of philosophers and politicians; but if they possess merit in the class of literature to which they belong, it is all to which I aspire in the work. I seek only to blow a flute accompaniment in the national concert, and leave others to play the fiddle and French horn.<sup>2</sup>

Irving naturally was overwhelmed with his unexpected success. He created a sensation in America, and the echo of it was not long in reaching England. The publication of The Sketch Book made Irving "the most fashionable fellow of the day" in England, and literary men as well as Hyde Park society eagerly sought his company.<sup>3</sup> Early critical praise declared that Irving "revealed a talent for leisurely description and reminiscence, refined humor and delicate pathos, exploitation of the sentimental

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Payne, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Walter A. Reichard, Washington Irving and Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 13.

possibilities of their varied themes which had not been exemplified before in American literature" in The Sketch Book.<sup>1</sup> Irving's sympathetic description of what was attractive in Englishmen, their country, ways, and customs, revived a faded and romantic interest in an old home as perhaps no book had ever done. The Sketch Book became a great mollifying and civilizing influence of the age as far as kindred people were concerned. It created for Americans an affectionate interest in England, even in the breasts of those who still disliked the mingled hauteur and condescension of the islanders, thus achieving one of Irving's primary wishes in creating The Sketch Book.

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 67.

## CHAPTER II

### AN ARTISTIC PORTRAYAL OF ROMANTIC SCENES

#### AT HOME AND ABROAD

In analyzing his deserving of the good will of his countrymen, Irving compares his literary endeavors to the roles of a flutist and a wandering artist. Like a flutist, he says, "I seek only to blow a flute of accompaniment in the national concert, and leave others to play the fiddle and the French horn."<sup>1</sup> Irving purposely makes this conscious reference to a romantic idea. The tender note of the flute was the call of the shepherd of old. Its voice is reminiscent of the pastoral note and the romantic return to the pleasures of the simple life. The music of the flute is clear and limpid, much like Irving's style.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reference, Irving's analogy provokes speculation. His role as the wandering artist is much clearer in its romantic overtones. The very title of The Sketch Book suggests a pictorial concept, and the pseudonym of

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Hellman, pp. 104-105.

"Geoffrey Crayon" suggests an artist rather than a writer. Irving's wandering artist returns home from a trip covering several countries with a sketch book crowded with "cottages and landscapes, and obscure ruins" (p. 15). Geoffrey Crayon's Sketch Book exemplifies this romantic notion of the beauty of the simple life, while manifesting, at the same time, to Americans their European heritage of massively built Gothic castles and churches.

To Irving, the artist, the Old World was one of romance and enchantment. Irving in The Sketch Book tells of the hold which the anticipation of his travels abroad had on him:

But Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen, the masterpieces of art, the refinement of highly cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every moldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement--to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity, to loiter about the ruined castle, to meditate on the falling tower, to escape, in short, from the commonplace realities of the present and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past. (p. 14)

Some associates regarded Irving as having been seduced away from his American loyalties by the romantic charms of Europe. True, these charms had a powerful appeal to bookish Irving who wrote in 1822, "My mind was early filled with historical and poetical associations, connected

with places and manners, and customs of Europe."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, his essays on England quenched momentarily the thirst for romance of the Old World which Americans beheld so seldom with their own eyes.<sup>2</sup>

As the narrator of The Sketch Book, Geoffrey Crayon, embarks on his oceanic journey to Europe, he comments, "As I saw the last blue line of my native land fade away like a cloud in the horizon, it seemed as if I had closed one volume of the world and its concerns, and had time for meditation before I opened another" (pp. 16-17). Crayon seems to feel throughout the voyage that a sea crossing is full of subjects for meditation. Among one of the more frightening experiences that Crayon feels is that of a storm at sea. Naturally, Irving capitalizes on the romantic association of danger and possible death with the onslaught of the gale. He has added this anxiety to the novice traveler's fear of the unknown. Crayon describes his feelings:

When I retired to my cabin, the awful scene still followed me. The whistling of the wind through the rigging sounded like funeral wailings. The creaking of the masts, the straining and groaning of bulkheads as the ship labored in the weltering sea were frightening. As I heard the waves rushing along the sides of the ship and roaring in my very ear, it

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, Washington Irving: Moderation Displayed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, p. 189.

seemed as if Death were raging around this floating prison, seeking for his prey; the mere starting of a nail, the yawning of a seam, might give him entrance. (p. 18)

Surviving this common happening of a voyage, Irving's narrator soon finds himself sailing up the Mersy with feverish excitement as he espies for the first time the cottages, grassplots, and ivy-laden churches of the north-western coast of England. Finally, Irving's narrator is able to disembark and begin his travels through the romantic past:

All now was hurry and bustle. The meetings of acquaintances--the greetings of friends--the consultations of men of business. I alone was solitary and idle. I had no friend to meet, no cheering to receive. I stepped upon the land of my forefathers--but felt that I was a stranger in the land. (p. 21)

Culminating his first voyage to the wonders of the Old World, Irving probably felt like his narrator--solitary and alone.<sup>1</sup>

The sketches of the English scenes which Irving draws are a curious blend of fact and fiction. Irving realized dreams of his childhood in observing first hand the historic scenes in the land of his fathers.<sup>2</sup> True to the paradoxes of romanticism, Irving ignores wretched poverty engendered by the increasing conflict between

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Reichard, p. 32.



new industrialism and an established agrarian economy and fixes his mind's eye on the subdued elegance and glamour of the historical past, on such things as the patriarchal setting of a squire's country hall.<sup>1</sup>

The artist's fondness for architecture, sculpture, paintings, and picturesque landscapes are all found in scenes of The Sketch Book. These romantically portrayed scenes are means for showing his fellow Americans the richness of their European background. Unlike some of his romantic predecessors, Irving's romantic experiences in England never involved living in a hamlet. He was not altruistic or pious or bitter about the sufferings of the poor. He was a foreign mendicant. However sympathetic with a tavern or cottage, he beheld them as an inquisitive stranger, imagining a glamorous past. Old stories, old pictures, or old memories of England, bequeathed him in his childhood by his mother, rose in his mind and gilded every scene.<sup>2</sup>

More than half of the material in The Sketch Book is British, telling of the author's Westminster Abbey experience, his Stratford-on-Avon visit, English Christmas festivities, and village stories. Perhaps one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Reichard, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, p. 180.

reasons for this emphasis on England and the English way of life was his regret at "the literary animosity daily growing up between England and America," expressed in "English Writers on America" and the announcement of his determination to combat it (p. 56). In turning to places of historical interest, Irving hoped to spark a pride in Americans for their European heritage. Irving's devotion to the great cathedrals all over Europe urged him to write to Madame D'Oubril from Seville:

The cathedral of this city is a noble edifice, and with its Gothic gloom and mystery rivals, in some measure, the classic splendor of St. Peter's. The melancholy grandeur of these Gothic temples seems more analogous to the solemn and majestic nature of our faith; and accord wonderfully with the ceremonies of this festival which celebrates the awful and affecting story of the sufferings and death of our Savior.<sup>1</sup>

Here already Irving shows his romantic preference for the ancient Gothic over classical Roman.

The great Westminster Abbey had a singular effect on Irving. The first mention of this church comes in "The Mutability of Literature," a sketch in which Geoffrey Crayon seeks the solitude of the Abbey's library where he has an imaginary encounter with the great books. Crayon's visit to the library creates a three-fold romantic view. His personification of the books show his romantic imagination at work. The solitude of the place

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 158.

conjuges his romantic desire for meditation. He describes it as seeming fit for the quiet study being buried deep within the massive walls of the abbey and shut up from the tumult of the world. His eye for the romantic Gothic design of the medieval and antique catches every detail of this arrangement. He speaks of the lofty antique hall, the Gothic windows, and ancient pictures of dignitaries (p. 28).

Irving begins his sketch of the abbey by acting as though the idea of touring Westminster Abbey was merely a filler for an otherwise lonely afternoon. An aspect of romanticism, the preoccupation with melancholy, comes in the type of day during which Irving chooses to tour the abbey. This could be suggestive of what he will find there--the graves of famous literary and historical personages:

On one of those sober and rather melancholy days, in the latter part of autumn, when the shadows of morning and evening almost mingle together and throw a gloom over the decline of the year, I passed several hours in rambling about Westminster Abbey. (p. 169)

As he embarks on this solitary procession through the edifice, he reveres the solemnity of the framework:

The approach to the abbey through these gloomy monastic remains prepares the mind for its solemn contemplation. The cloisters still retain something of the quiet and seclusion of former days. The gray walls are discolored by damp and crumbling with age; a coat of hoary moss has gathered over the inscriptions of the mural monuments and obscured

the death's heads and other funeral emblems. The sharp touches of the chisel are gone from the rich tracery of the arches; the roses which adorned the keystones have lost their leafy beauty; everything bears marks of the gradual dilapidations of time, which yet has something touching and pleasing in its very decay. (pp. 169-170)

Irving's interest in the decayed remains is purely romantic as well as his mention of "the solemn contemplation" which he will undergo in the abbey. Irving's description of the afternoon sun beaming into the abbey romantically implements his Gothic portrayal:

The sun was pouring down a yellow autumnal ray into the square of the cloisters, beaming upon a scanty plot of grass in the center and lighting up an angle of the vaulted passage with a kind of dusky splendor. From between the arcades, the eye glanced up to a bit of blue sky or a passing cloud, and beheld the sun-gilt pinnacles of the abbey towering into the azure heaven. (p. 170)

The pomp and decor of the Henry VII Chapel is seen through the eyes of Crayon as being elaborately beautiful in Gothic detail. He describes the magnificent arch and the great gates of richly and delicately wrought brass which led up to the entrance to the chapel. Grotesque Gothic decorations ornament the stalls of the Knights of Bath along the sides of the chapel. The helmets and crests of the knights are affixed on the pinnacles of the stalls, and their banners, emblazoned with armorial bearings, are suspended above them. Their bright colors of gold and purple and crimson contrast with the romantically simple, cold, gray fretwork of the roof (pp. 174-175).

From the monuments and graves of various members

of the royal lineage, Irving moves Geoffrey Crayon to the Poet's Corner where he spends considerable time musing over the inscriptions of men he seems to admire a great deal. Irving especially notices the romantic simplicity in these monuments over those of royalty:

I passed some time in Poet's Corner, which occupies an end of one of the transepts or cross aisles of the abbey. The monuments are generally simple, for the lives of literary men afford no striking themes for the sculptor. Shakespeare and Addison have statues erected to their memories, but the greater part have busts, medallions, and sometimes mere inscriptions. . . . A kinder and fonder feeling takes the place of that cold curiosity or vague admiration with which they gaze on the splendid monuments of the great and the heroic. They linger about these as about tombs of friends and companions, for indeed there is something of companionship between the author and the reader. Other men are known to posterity only through the medium of history, which is continually growing faint and obscure; but the intercourse between the author and his fellow man is ever new, active, and immediate. He has lived for them more than for himself; he has sacrificed surrounding enjoyments and shut himself up from the delights of social life that he might the more intimately commune with distant minds and distant ages. Well may the world cherish his renown, for it has been purchased, not by deeds of violence and blood, but by the diligent dispensation of pleasure. Well may posterity be grateful to his memory, for he has left it an inheritance, not of empty names and sounding actions, but whole treasures of wisdom, bright gems of thought, and golden veins of language. (p. 171)

In this passage, Irving seems to compare the literary medium with the historical medium for keeping alive intercourse between the past and posterity. Although one of Irving's purposes in writing The Sketch Book is

to serve as a historical medium between the Old World and the New, his position here appears to be that while history grows faint and obscure literature increases its bonds between yesterday and today. Seeing the effect of literature over history, Irving seems to be overtly stating that he hopes to be remembered as a writer rather than a historian. One of the most profound effects which the abbey has on Irving results from its soundlessness:

The sound of casual footsteps had ceased from the abbey. I could only hear, now and then, the distant voice of the priest repeating the evening service, and the faint responses of the choir; these paused for a time, and all was hushed. The stillness, the desertion and obscurity that were gradually prevailing around gave a deeper and more solemn interest to the place. (p. 176)

Here a literary meditation in the silence of antiquity can be appreciated. Geoffrey Crayon, the artist, is a lonely, solitary figure experiencing an inspirational moment. Irving, the historian, however, is an envious figure in the quiet abbey. It was this solitary historian and others like him who cause Americans one-hundred and fifty years later to revel so greatly in their heritage that a modern American traveler must see the impressive Westminster Abbey with an intimate crowd of five thousand.

Washington Irving apparently found it equally important to sketch the homes of the famous historic and literary personages in addition to their final

resting place. Hence, his description of Windsor Castle preserves the memory of what has gone before and the freshness of present life. According to Crayon, the very external aspect of the proud old pile is enough to romantically inspire high thought. The loftiness of the irregular walls and massive towers is romantic in its architectural tendency to vertical effects suggesting aspiration. Crayon seems romantically taken with the rows of portraits of lords and ladies of the past which deck the long galleries of the castle (p. 85). Loyal to the cause of the romantics, most of Irving's discussion of the Castle centers around the romantic poet James I.

A true romantic loyalty to the great bard William Shakespeare is seen in Geoffrey Crayon's pilgrimage to Stratford-on-Avon. Irving's mention of the simple dwelling of the sexton, Edmunds, at Stratford prefaces Crayon's approach to the home and burial place of the author. He describes it as a picture of the neatness, order, and comfort which pervade the humblest dwellings in the country. A carefully scrubbed low white-washed room with a stone floor served for parlor, kitchen, and hall. The pewter and earthen dishes, the family Bible, an ancient clock, a bright warming pan, the old man's horn handled Sunday cane, and the deep fireplace represent the romantic

rudiments of the simple man's life (p. 256). After a tour of the home of Shakespeare, where he finds relics of the great man's past, Crayon walks the short distance to Trinity Church where lie the relics of the great man. The description of the Gothic architecture in addition to the mention of the elements of nature near the church show the influence of the romantic in Irving:

We approached the church through the avenue of limes, and entered by a Gothic porch, highly ornamented, with carved doors of massive oak. The interior is spacious, and the architecture and embellishments superior to those of most country churches. There are several ancient monuments of nobility and gentry, over some of which hang funeral escutcheons, and banners dropping piecemeal from the walls. The tomb of Shakespeare is in the chancel. The place is solemn and sepulchral. Tall elms wave before the pointed windows, and the Avon, which runs at a short distance from the walls, keeps up a low perpetual murmur. (pp. 257-258)

Irving finds romantic notions in the Gothic porch of the church as well as in the simplicity of the monument:

A flat stone marks the spot where the bard is buried. There are four lines inscribed on it, said to have been written by himself, and which have in them something extremely awful. If they are indeed his own, they show that solicitude about the quiet of his grave which seems natural to fine sensibilities and thoughtful minds.

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here.  
Blessed be he that spares these stones,  
And curst be he that moves my bones. (p. 258)

Not leaving his mention of the bard to mere descriptions of the historical spots associated with the man, Irving has Geoffrey Crayon muse romantically as he



wanders the countryside of Stratford-on-Avon as Shakespeare himself must have done. Here, Irving shows his romantic interest in the person rather than in the institution, in the personal rather than the typical. This spirit of sentiment, of romance, was his, and his keenness of observation was in the direction of the picturesque, not the philosophically analytical.<sup>1</sup> The course of the scenographic description of the countryside which banked the Avon River is both detailed and imaginative as Irving speculates as to the very instance or spot which inspired certain of the poet's lines. Irving romantically describes the verdant English scenery as inspiring and animating in its first awakening of Spring. This rebirth of nature seen in the moist, mellow earth beginning to put forth the green sprout and the tender blade and the bleating of the newdropped lamb heard from the fields (pp. 261-262) seems to represent the romantic theme of a primitive closeness to nature. The sights and sounds observed by Irving in the returning foliage and flower, and the lively notes of the robin and the lark recall to his mind the little song of the lark and winking mary-buds in Shakespeare's Cymbeline (p. 262). Combined with his own musings, Irving recalls

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 21.

that some Shakespearean commentators suppose that Shakespeare derived his noble forest meditations of Jacques, and the enchanting woodland pictures in As You Like It in this region (p. 264). The lonely wanderings through such scenes in which the mind drinks deep but quiet drafts of inspiration stirred Irving's romantic imagination to speculate that Shakespeare in a similar mood composed his little song which "breathes the very soul of a rural voluptuary":

Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me,  
And tune his merry throat  
Unto the sweet bird's note,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither.  
Here shall he see  
No enemy,  
But winter and rough weather. (p. 264)

Irving's poetic descriptions are so moving as to provoke saying that "the England that Irving saw and described is, whether in its country life, or in its international characters, an England seen through the eyes of a poet and gentleman, rather than a scholar and a gentleman."<sup>1</sup> In retrospection over the visit to Stratford-on-Avon, Irving has Crayon make this romantic observation on individualism: "What would a crowded corner in Westminster Abbey have been, compared with this

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 105.

reverend pile, which seems to stand in beautiful loneliness as his sole mausoleum" (pp. 270-271). In a sense, Irving is speaking not only of the grave itself, but of the lovely countryside as "soul mausoleum." In this statement following his wanderings in the trappings of the bard, Irving has created a play on words with "sole." Having experienced the same feelings of nature that Shakespeare did as he searched the meadows and forests for inspiration, Irving might have chanced upon the "soul" mausoleum of the poet. His recall of various of Shakespeare's poetic lines could have been but the romantic "spontaneous overflow of emotions recollected in moments of tranquility."<sup>1</sup>

Irving's interest in Shakespearean works prompts a visit to Eastcheap and a sketch on the old Boar's Head Tavern made famous by the madcap revelry which took place within its confines during Henry IV:

A thought suddenly struck me: "I will make a pilgrimage to Eastcheap," said I, closing the book, "and see if the old Boar's Head Tavern still exists. Who knows but I may light upon some legendary traces of Dame Quickly and her quests; at any rate, there will be a kindred pleasure in treading the halls once vocal with their mirth, to that the toper enjoys in smelling to the empty cask once filled with generous wine." (p. 118)

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<sup>1</sup>William Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 365.

After sufficiently viewing the present day tavern, the romantic disappointment that things have changed hits

Geoffrey Crayon:

How sadly is the scene changed since the roaring days of Falstaff and old Stoes! The madcap roister has given place to the plodding tradesman; the clattering of pots and the sound of "harpe and sawtrie" to the din of carts and the accursed dinging of the dustman's bell; and no song is heard save, haply, the strain of some siren from Billingsgate, chanting the eulogy of deceased mackerel. (p. 118)

As Irving purported in his preliminary sketch, "An Author's Account of Himself," his interest was not merely in the historical or literary "name" places of interest but also in the homes, taverns, inns, and churches of insignificant personages or happenings, which still reflect their aura of the romantic past. In order to provide background and material for several of his ensuing sketches, Irving allows a chance meeting between Geoffrey Crayon and an old traveling companion Frank Bracebridge. The latter extends to Crayon a warm invitation to pass a few days of the Christmas holiday season at his family mansion to which he is presently bound (pp. 191-192). Crayon eagerly accepts his offer and they set out immediately for Bracebridge Manor which they reach later that same night.

Coming into view of the mansion, Crayon notices the architecture of different periods in the irregular

building. Romantically, he notices the ancient wings with heavy stone-shafted windows jutting out and overrun with ivy from among the foliage. Small diamond-shaped panes of stained glass, romantic emblems of mystery, glittered with the moonbeams (p. 196). The Gothic fascination of the old structure impresses the romantic guest immensely, especially in the grotesque faces of heavy carved work on the paneled cornices of his room (p. 203). In Crayon's description of the Bracebridge Chapel the romantic occupation with the past is seen in his emphasis on details of antiquity and simplicity:

The interior of the Bracebridge church was venerable but simple; on the walls were several mural monuments of the Bracebridges, and just beside the altar was a tomb of ancient workmanship, on which lay the effigy of a warrior in armor, with his legs crossed, a sign of his having been a crusader. I was told it was one of the family who had signalized himself in the Holy Land, and the same whose picture hung over the fireplace in the hall. (p. 210)

Irving describes John Bull's mansion in his treatise on John Bullism. In the description of this home, Irving pays close attention to the architecture and relics of another day and time. This mansion, too, has been erected in various tastes and ages with traces of Saxon architecture in the center. Romantically obscure passages, intricate mazes and dusky chambers fill its walls. In spite of having been altered and romantically simplified at various periods, the chapel still has a

look of solemn religious pomp. Monuments of John's ancestors are stored within its walls, romantically befitting his tribute to the past (p. 304).

That Irving declares his narrator of The Sketch Book to be an antiquity hunter in itself shows the work to be a romantic search into the fascinating past of a people whose descendants walked the shores of a new and distant land;

I am somewhat of an antiquity hunter, and am fond of exploring London in quest of the relics of old times. These are principally to be found in the depths of the city, swallowed up and almost lost in a wilderness of brick and mortar, but deriving poetical and romantic interest from the commonplace prosaic world around them. (p. 232)

As an antiquity hunter, Geoffrey Crayon happens upon Gothic architecture in a public building and a chapel while wandering the streets of London. He finds himself before a Gothic gateway of moldering antiquity opening into a spacious quadrangle forming the courtyard of a stately Gothic pile. Meeting no one to oppose his intrusion, he continues on until he finds himself in a great hall with a lofty arched roof and oaken gallery, all of Gothic design (p. 232). In addition to the romantically influenced structure of the place, it affords to Crayon an air of monastic quiet and seclusion which add its mysterious charm (p. 232). The chapel is ancient in Saxon design containing the tombs of soldiers of the

Faith who had been crusaders to the Holy Land (pp. 233-234).

Another of the scenes of The Sketch Book is Irving's description of the "Little Britain" section of London which he has Crayon stumble upon during his antiquity hunting. This sequestered spot is one of the few places in the country which totally preserves the old customs and ways of the past. Lying in the center of the great city of London, it consists of a cluster of narrow streets and courts of very venerable and debilitated houses. Here, the family of a petty tradesman may be found among the relics of such antiquated finery as spacious and lordly Gothic mansions (pp. 238-239).

Perhaps while musing in London town, Irving came across many typical taverns like the one which Crayon describes in this scene:

It is one of those little taverns which abound in the heart of the city and form the center of gossip and intelligence of the neighborhood. We entered the barroom, which was narrow and darkling, for in these close lanes but few rays of reflected light are enabled to struggle down to the inhabitants, whose broad day is at best but a tolerable twilight. The room was partitioned into boxes, each containing a table spread with a clean, white cloth, ready for dinner. This showed that the guests were of the good old stamp, and divided their day equally, for it was but just one o'clock. At the lower end of the room was a clear coal fire, before which a breast of lamb was roasting. A row of bright brass candlesticks and pewter mugs glistened along the mantelpiece, and an old-fashioned clock ticked in one corner. There was something primitive in this medly of kitchen, parlor, and hall that carried me back to earlier times and pleased me. The place, indeed, was humble, but everything had that look of order and neatness which bespeaks the superintendence



of a notable English housewife. (p. 123)

The primitive humility of the tavern impresses Irving's romantic mind.

Leaving the confines of the city, Irving describes the rural scenes of the countryside. The common practice of stopping at an English Inn, whether for late afternoon tea or an overnight stay, while roaming the countryside prefaced Irving's sketch of a kitchen in one such place:

I entered, and admired for the hundreth time that picture of convenience, neatness, and broad honest enjoyment, the kitchen of an English Inn. It was spacious in dimension, hung around with copper and tin vessels highly polished, and decorated here and there with a Christmas green. Hams, tongues, and flitches of bacon were suspended from the ceiling; a smokejack made its ceaseless clanking beside the fireplace, and a clock ticked in one corner. A well-scoured deal table extended along one side of the kitchen, with a cold round of beef and other hearty viands upon it, over which two foaming tankards of ale seemed mounting guard. Travelers of inferior order were preparing to attack this stout repast, while others sat smoking and gossiping over their ale on two high-backed oaken settles beside the fire. Trim housemaids were hurrying backward and forward under the directions of a fresh, bustling landlady, but still seizing an occasional moment to exchange a flippant word and have a rallying laugh with the group around the fire. (p. 191)

In still another example, Irving has captured the romantic simplicity of the common people in his description of the inn's kitchen.

In the course of an excursion through one of the remote counties of England, Crayon tells of a village he had struck into while taking a more secluded way of a



crossroad. He romantically speaks of it as having an air of primitive simplicity about its inhabitants, not to be found in the villages which lie on the coach roads (p. 311).

One of the most inspirational scenes of the English countryside is in an old village church. Irving speaks of the antiquity of the place as well as the nature-like holy repose which it affords. Crayon tells of one of these "rich morsels of quaint antiquity which gives such a peculiar charm to English landscape" (p. 99). It stood in the midst of a country filled with ancient families and contained, within its cold and silent aisles, the congregated dust of many noble generations. The romantic notion of the past is brought up here along with the Gothic architecture of the mysterious stained glass windows (p. 99). The solitude and repose which such a church affords is compared to the same romantic feeling in nature. The shadowy aisles, the moldering monuments, the dark Gothic oaken paneling, all seem to fit the church for solemn meditation (pp. 105-106).

The romantic emphasis on the common man is seen in Irving's descriptions of the rustic, simple, abode of this common man:

After turning from the main road up a narrow lane so thickly shaded with forest trees as to give it a complete air of seclusion, we came in sight of the cottage. It was humble enough in its appearance for the most pastoral poet, and yet it had a pleasing rural look. A wild vine had overrun one end with

a profusion of foliage; a few trees threw their branches gracefully over it, and I observed several pots of flowers tastefully disposed about the door and on the grass plot in front. A small wicket gate opened upon a footpath that wound through some shrubbery to the door. (p. 35)

Irving's love of nature is one of the romantic tendencies which he demonstrates fully in his many descriptions of the beauties and solemnity of natural surroundings. This has already been seen in his musings in the countryside of Stratford-on Avon. In this love, too, Irving, the artist, manifests his talent in his prosaic delineations of nature in The Sketch Book. Just as the oil painter first sketches his landscape in charcoal, so, too, Irving first outlines the expanse which his descriptions will encompass:

The stranger who would form a correct opinion of the English character must not confine his observations to the metropolis. He must go forth into the country; he must sojourn in villages and hamlets; he must visit castles, villas, farmhouses, cottages; he must wander through parks and gardens; along hedges and green lanes; he must loiter about country churches; attend wakes and fairs and other rural festivals; and cope with the people in all their conditions, and all their habits and humors. (p. 65)

Irving feels that the English have a talent for landscape gardening which abets the beauties of nature while retaining the rustic, primitive individualism of each abode or park. He states that because they have studied Nature intently, they discover an exquisite sense of her beautiful forms and harmonious combinations. These charms are assembled around the haunts of domestic life and rural

abode. The rudest habitation, the most unpromising and scanty portion of land becomes a little paradise in the hands of an Englishman (p. 67).

From specific places, Irving turns to glorifying the seasonal scenes of nature as he describes a morning in early spring:

The next morning was one of those quickening mornings which we sometimes have in early Spring, for it was about the middle of March. The chills of a long winter had suddenly given way; the north wind had spent its last gasp; and a mild air came stealing from the west, breathing the breath of life into nature, and wooing every bud and flower to burst forth into fragrance and beauty. (p. 254)

Irving's depictions of winter center around the Christmas season. He goes so far as to suggest that there is a natural need for Christmas festivities--that Christmas comes at an appropriate time seasonally. He romantically feels that at other times of the year man derives a great portion of his pleasures from the beauties of nature. In the middle of winter, however, when Nature "lies despoiled of every charm and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow," man turns to other sources for gratification (p. 181). Irving describes the beauty of Nature which seems to have crept into the opaque winter on Christmas Day:

The beauty of the day was of itself sufficient to inspire philanthropy. Notwithstanding the frostiness of the morning, the sun in his cloudless journey had acquired sufficient power to melt away the tin covering of snow from every southern declivity, and to bring out the living green which adorns an

English landscape even in the mid of winter. Large tracts of smiling verdure contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of the shaded slopes and hollows. Every sheltered bank on which the broad rays rested yielded its silver rill of cold and limpid water, glittering through the dripping grass, and sent up slight exhalations to contribute to the thin haze that hung just above the surface of the earth. (p. 213)

Here, Irving suggests the romantic notion that most good thoughts are nature-inspired.

Irving's preceeding romantic citations of nature and Gothic architecture have been seen directly through the eyes of Geoffrey Crayon. The reader senses that the sketches have been spotted by Irving exactly as Crayon records them. Irving in his genius takes another route in telling of the antiquity and the beauties of the natural scenes of Europe. Perhaps he feels that his essays may not be of universal interest to Americans; so he uses the tale to convey the same descriptions in a lighter context. The three tales in The Sketch Book which Irving pseudonymically tells closely ally with the short story which was in infant stage at the time. In these tales, Irving skillfully weaves a plot set against Gothic and natural scenes of Europe and America.

In his European travels, Irving explored many countries which he was to write about later--England, France, Spain, Germany and others. One of the most important countries visited, as far as influence on scenery and legend is concerned, was Germany. The

romantic setting which augments the historical and legendary aspects of Irving's short stories set in America also seems German-influenced. This can be seen in records of Irving's travels there and in similarities to his German-set tales. Herr A. Laun, the German biographer of Irving, is of the opinion that Irving had been naturally drawn to Germany because "he found there so much that was attractive to his soul and his imagination, which was revealed in myths and legends and was inclined toward the dreamy, mystical and the romantic."<sup>1</sup> The world of Germany laid powerful hold of Irving's imagination. At his first possible opportunity, he visited the Rhineland and remained in Germany for a period of over a year. He entered the country at "the little ghost-ridden city" Aix-la-Chapelle and worked his way up "the haunted stream" as he visited such German cities as Frankfort, Munich, Salzburg, and Vienna.<sup>2</sup> Irving set one of his best known stories, "The Specter Bridegroom," in the romantic scenery of Odenwald, Germany:

On the summit of one of the heights of the Odenwald, a wild and romantic tract of Upper Germany that lies not far from the confluence of

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the Short Story (New York: Bible and Tanner, 1966), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the Main and the Rhine, there stood, many, many, years since, the Castle of the Baron Von Landshort. (p. 153)

The eerie description of German forests adds to the mood of mysticism:

In this way they had entered among the mountains of Odenwald, and were traversing one of its most lonely and thickly wooded passes. It is well-known that the forests of Germany have always been as much infested by robbers as its castles by specters; (p. 158)

The romantic aspect of a return to the medieval is seen in the description of the great hall of Baron Von Landshort's castle:

Around the walls hung the hard-favored portraits of the heroes of the house of Katzenellenbogen and the trophies which they had gained in the field and in the chase. Hacked corslets, splintered jousting spears, and tattered banners were mingled with the spoils of sylvan warfare; the jaws of the wolf and the tusks of the boar grinned horribly among cross-bows and battle axes, and a huge pair of antlers branched immediately over the head of the youthful bridegroom. (p. 161)

The other two tales, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," are set in America. Whereas in the past, Irving has skillfully shown Europe to Americans, he now shows America to Americans. In doing so, he is "the first author to bring out the lyric and romantic sentiment in American scenery, as far as literature is concerned by the great appeal of the beauty of American streams and forests."<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 39.

"Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving hoped to give Americans a color of the romance and tradition which he had found in Europe. Living where he did, Irving learned to relish the beauties of nature:

I thank God I was born on the banks of the Hudson! I think it an invaluable advantage to be born and brought up in the neighborhood of some grand and noble object in Nature--a river, a lake, or a mountain. We make a friendship with it--we in a manner ally ourselves to it for life.<sup>1</sup>

In 1798, on a summer holiday in Westchester County, Irving explored the Sleepy Hollow region he afterwards made an enchanted realm. In 1800, he made his first voyage up the Hudson. Later, his romantic imagination was to recollect this adventure to add local color to several of his tales:

Of all the scenery of the Hudson, the Kaatskill Mountains had the most witching effect on my boyish imagination. Never shall I forget the effect upon me of the first view of them predominating over a wide extent of country, part wild, woody, and rugged; part softened away into all the graces of cultivation. As we slowly floated along, I lay on the deck and watched them through a long summer's day; undergoing a thousand mutations under the magical effects of atmosphere; sometimes seeming to approach; at other times to recede; now almost melting into hazy distance, now burnished by the setting sun, until, in the evening, they printed themselves against the glowing sky in the deep purple of an Italian landscape.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 6.



During the next two or three years much time was consumed in excursions up the Hudson and the Mohawk--as far as the wilds of Ogdensburg and Montreal. These explorations and visits gave him material for future use and "exercised his pen in agreeable correspondence."<sup>1</sup> These experiences of boyhood travels are mentioned by Irving in the opening sketch to The Sketch Book, "An Author's Account of Himself":

I was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners. Even when a mere child I began my travels, and made many tours of discovery into the foreign parts and unknown regions of my native city, to the frequent alarm of my parents and the emolument of the town crier. As I grew into boyhood, I extended the range of my observations. My holiday afternoons were spent in ramblings about the surrounding country. I made myself familiar with all its places famous in history or in fable. I knew every spot where a murder or robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen. I visited the neighboring villages, and added greatly to my stock of knowledge by noting their habits and customs and conversing with their sages and great men. I even journeyed one long summer's day to the summit of the most distant hill, whence I stretched my eye over many a mile of terra incognita, and was astonished to find how vast a globe I inhabited. (p. 13)

Irving's imaginative mind was able to transmute these raw materials which he found in the New World, into what is as absolute a creation as exists in literature.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Warner, pp. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 193-194.



The scenes of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" involve accounts of the natural as well as surroundings of the local village. Both tales are set predominately out-of-doors--"Rip Van Winkle," in the mountains of the great Appalachian family, the Kaatskills:

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill Mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers. When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but, sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory. (p. 38)

The description of the green knoll which Rip ascends the day of his fateful adventure is most vivid. Covered with mountain herbage, the knoll crowned the brow of a precipice. Rip was able to overlook the lovely Hudson country from an opening between the trees. On the other side, Rip could look down into a deep, dark mountain glen sided with impending cliffs. As evening was gradually advancing and the shadows of the mountains were mysteriously thrown over the valleys, Rip lay romantically musing on the scene (pp. 42-43). Here the intrigue of mystery begins to take hold of the reader

as Rip approaches the hollow where he is to encounter his twenty-year sleep:

As they ascended, Rip every now and then heard long rolling peals, like distant thunder, that seemed to issue out of a deep ravine, or rather cleft, between lofty rocks, toward which their rugged path conducted. He paused for an instant, but supposing it to be the muttering of one of those transient thunder showers which often take place in mountain heights, he proceeded. Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheater, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of which impending trees shot their branches, so that you only caught glimpses of the azure sky and the bright evening cloud. (p. 44)

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" takes place in a little valley, "a sequestered glen," as Diedrich Knickerbocker calls it, in a small village. Situated in the bosom of a spacious cove, Tarry Town lies close to a little valley among high hills which Knickerbocker describes as "one of the quietest places in the whole world" (p. 329). Even Diedrich Knickerbocker recognizes a romantic spot for meditation. Irving has his hero of the story, Ichabod Crane, basking in the romantic beauty of an autumn day at one point. Irving speaks of the browns, yellows, oranges, purples, and scarlets which illuminate the forest. The sounds of files of wild ducks, barking squirrel, and whistling quail can be heard at intervals.

Two of the more fully described village scenes are in the pictures of Ichabod's village school and

Van Tassel's spacious farm. Whereas Irving has romantically described scenes in nature earlier, now he points out the crude simplicity of the schoolhouse and the influence of the past in the architecture of Van Tassel's farmhouse. The schoolhouse is a crude log structure which stands alone at the foot of a woody hill (p. 332). Van Tassel's spacious farmhouse is built with high ridged, sloping roofs in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers (p. 339). Unlike their European cousins, early Americans such as Crane and Van Tassel did not actually have a choice about their "romantic" way of life. There were then no finely constructed edifices in the New World; materials which the settlers had to work with were crude in comparison to European mortar, and the romantic excursion in the woods was merely a step out one's front door in a country that was still settling her frontiers. Nevertheless, Irving, the romantic, points out these ideas as a way of showing Americans that other than a few years of antiquity, they have all the ingredients of as fine a country as any in Europe.

That most of Irving's scenes in The Sketch Book are European is perhaps a by-product of Irving's choice "to remain in England as a professional writer and contribute to American literature rather than return to America, accept a post in the Navy Department, and follow writing

as an avocation."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, too, because of his extended European stay, Irving was able to write imaginatively of his native land as seen in the discussion of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." In 1827, Irving wrote, "The fact is that the longer I remain from home the greater charm it has in my eyes, and all the coloring that the imagination once gave to distant Europe now gathers about the scene of my native country."<sup>2</sup> For the romantic individual, distance lends enchantment to the view.

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

### CHAPTER III

#### ANCIENT AND PRESENT PHYSIOGNOMIES

The characters of The Sketch Book can be divided into three major categories--the narrators, the non-fictional characters of the essays, and the fictional characters of the tales. In The Sketch Book, the foremost characters are the four people to whom the authorship of various sketches is attributed: namely, Irving himself; Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman; Diedrich Knickerbocker; and an old Swiss. As author, Irving gives a brief record of the sketches from conception to publication in the preface. Anything else that the reader finds out about Irving has to come from secondary sources. Emily Foster, an old and intimate friend, describes him in her journal as being five feet, seven inches tall, with moot-point, blue-green eyes, a long nose, medium-sized mouth, oval shaped face and dark or chestnut hair for which he was quite concerned, even ordering special oils for its treatment and wearing a wig in old age.<sup>1</sup> Irving liked social intercourse and people. He was sensitive

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 25.

to experience and to human contacts; wherever he went, even if on a mission, he could not resist noting characteristics of the people around him.<sup>1</sup> His personality and noteworthy opinions are found throughout the pages of The Sketch Book in the guise of the narrator Geoffrey Crayon. In England, Irving contrived to follow that ideal which he defined in "An Author's Account of Himself," that of a romantic wanderer on a quest. In all his tours, his attitude was the same; he sought the place, the incident, and the character which he could weave into a mythical place.<sup>2</sup>

By writing The Sketch Book as that of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman, Irving clears himself of any personal reference to which he might have alluded. He characterizes through the eyes of Crayon various types of people, some factual and some fictitious, whom he contacted in his travels. Irving does not attribute a physical description to Crayon. The reader sees him as a lone traveler fond of visiting different places, "a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they play their parts" (frontispiece).

Irving never makes Crayon possess too much literary

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, p. 180

talent. A writer of travel essays with frequent insight into human nature, Crayon relies on other sources, the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker and a meeting with a nameless old Swiss, for the three tales which he reiterates in The Sketch Book. To Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving attributes a kind of diluted Rousseauism, as one looking for the innate goodness of man. Irving seems to feel that human nature is not the sorry piece of workmanship that philosophers would make it out to be. He is "fully satisfied that man, if left to himself, would about as readily go right as wrong."<sup>1</sup> Irving describes Knickerbocker in The Sketch Book as "an old gentleman of New York, who was very curious in Dutch history of the province, and the manners of the descendants from its primitive settlers" (p. 37). Knickerbocker's research is reported as showing Irving's interest with men rather than books:

His historical researches, however, did not lie so much among books as among men, for the former are lamentably scanty on his favorite topics, whereas he found the old burghers, and still more their wives, rich in that legendary lore so invaluable to true history. Whenever, therefore, he happened upon a genuine Dutch family, snugly shut up in its low-roofed farmhouse, under a spreading sycamore, he looked upon it as a little clasped volume of black letter and studied it with the zeal of a bookworm. (p. 37)

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 90.

Irving continues to point out that the result of all of this research was a history of the province during the reign of the Dutch governors. Irving capitalizes on the fact that the tales were found among the papers of the "late" Diedrich Knickerbocker. That Knickerbocker is no longer around affords Irving a chance for some literary criticism of the man and his works. Irving contends that Knickerbocker could have better spent his time at endeavors other than writing. To Irving, Knickerbocker seemed to view all things in his own way and often to inflict this viewpoint on his friends. Nevertheless, Irving feels that Knickerbocker never really intends to offend anyone (pp. 37-38).

The author of the third tale in The Sketch Book, "The Specter Bridegroom," is an old Swiss whom Crayon meets in the inn kitchen of a small Flemish town during a journey to the Netherlands:

He was a corpulent old Swiss, who had the look of a veteran traveler. He was dressed in a tarnished green traveling jacket, with a broad belt around his waist, and a pair of overalls, with buttons from the hips to the ankles. He was of a full, rubicund countenance, with a double chin, aquiline nose, and a pleasant, twinkling eye. His hair was light, and curled from under an old green velvet traveling cap stuck on one side of his head. (p. 151)

In moving from characterizations of the men who "author" various sections of The Sketch Book to the people about whom Irving writes, one often finds that



they are portrayed in a romantic light. In dealing with this group of characters, this paper will examine them in the light of non-fictional and fictional portrayals. The non-fictional characters are people that Crayon runs into from time to time in traveling. Both the Englishmen and the Americans he meets will be treated. The fictional ones are those who appear in Diedrich Knickerbocker's tales, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and the old Swiss' "The Specter Bridegroom."

Irving's romantic tendencies seem to influence the kinds of people he chooses to discuss. He seems to believe that the faces around him in the present day are recopies of physiognomies of former times. In the sketch of "The Christmas Dinner," he speaks of once having traced a family nose through a whole picture gallery. He feels certain that "the quaint features of antiquity are often most faithfully perpetuated in ancient lines legitimately handed down from generation to generation . . . " (p. 219) At this particular Christmas celebration at Bracebridge Manor, Crayon feels that many of the faces around him originated in the Gothic age, and have been merely repeated by succeeding generations. He espied one little girl with a high Roman nose in particular whose countenance could have probably

been found in the court of Henry VIII (p. 219). Just as the influence of romanticism is seen in Irving's scenic descriptions with emphasis on the primitive, Gothic, and nature, so also, does the influence of the romantic love of antiquity show itself in his character descriptions. Irving's preoccupation with people may have resulted from his romantic vision of their ancestors.

Similiarly, as family characteristics are handed down in successive generations, Irving suggests that so it is with writers. He feels that authors beget authors by transmitting vital principles of writing from one to another (p. 81). Irving's meeting with William Roscoe, a literary figure of the day, led him to a typical romanticization. The rainbow tints with which Irving enveloped this grave scholar were in his own mind. The sketch of "Roscoe" in this vein is perhaps symbolic of Irving's approach to Europe.<sup>1</sup> Irving describes him as being advanced in life and of a tall form that might have once been commanding, but now bowed by time. Slight furrows on his brow showed that thought had been busy there. Irving spends considerable time telling of Roscoe's kindred with antiquity. Irving calls him the literary landmark of Liverpool, and, in doing so, compares him

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 181.

to Pompey's column at Alexandria (pp. 22-27). This constant association of antiquity with Roscoe serves as another reminder of Irving's romantic characterization of the scholar. The favorable impression which this man made on Irving can be seen in the fact that the sketch on Roscoe was the third one in order in The Sketch Book. Taking precedence over it were the only two which would have needed logically to precede it, "An Author's Account of Himself" and "The Voyage."

The only other writer to whom Irving devoted an entire sketch besides the great bard William Shakespeare, who figured in several, is the royal poet, James I of Scotland. Crayon tells of visiting the ancient Keep of the Castle where James was detained as a prisoner of the State for many years of his youth (p. 86). Irving goes on to relate the history of this amiable but unfortunate prince. Sent by his father from the Scottish throne at eleven to be reared in the safety of the French court, it was his mishap to fall into the hands of the English enemy on his voyage. James I was detained in captivity over eighteen years but was constantly given the instruction and respect due his rank. Irving comments that "the picture drawn of James in early life by the Scottish historians is highly captivating, and seems the description of a hero of romance rather than a character in real

history" (pp. 86-87). Romantically alluding to the call of the muse in ancient Greek poetry, Irving refers to James the First's good fortune to be gifted by the muse's inspiration:

It was the good fortune of James, however, to be gifted with a powerful poetic fancy and to be visited in his prison by the choicest inspirations of the muse. Some minds corrode and grow inactive under the loss of personal liberty; others grow morbid and irritable; but it is the nature of the poet to become tender and imaginative in the loneliness of confinement. (p. 87)

Sixty-five years later, an American mild iconoclast, Mark Twain, has one of his heroes, Tom Sawyer in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, romantically imagine what the runaway slave Jim does in his captivity. Before aiding Jim in the final, very simple escape, Tom has Jim perform all kinds of useless feats such as scratch messages and poetry on a grindstone and battle incoming mice and spiders which Tom has provided for the occasion. Tom's explanation to Huck for all of the garnish to the escape is that he has read in books that this is the way an imprisonment and escape should be.<sup>1</sup> In his recollection of the romantic James I, Irving never supposed that he or his contemporaries would be the objects of later American humor and satire.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: The New American Library, 1959), pp. 252-255.

Another character type which particularly appeals to Irving and to whom he also pays high compliments is the woman who appears in The Sketch Book essays. His fascination with women caused him to expound on their virtues and, very rarely, their vices throughout The Sketch Book. Wherever Irving went, in Europe or in America, he looked most closely and lovingly at the women and girls. Almost any pretty girl was worth looking at, but some more than others.<sup>1</sup> Irving seemed to prefer the bud to the full-blown rose and the ballroom to the bedchamber. He enjoyed and sought the innocence of youth.<sup>2</sup> Only in "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" does Irving allow Diedrich Knickerbocker to portray Dame Van Winkle in an unfavorable light and Katrina Von Tassel in the "full-bloom rose" role. As fictional characters from the pages of pseudonymic authors, the tales will be treated later for character description.

Irving celebrates the fidelity and fortitude of women in such sketches as "The Wife," "The Broken Heart," "The Pride of the Village," and "The Widow and Her Son." Filled with eighteenth century sentimentalism, "The Wife" is based on realistic materials involving two of Irving's

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, pp. 126-127.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

friends, Leslie and Allston, who appear in the sketch as the composite figure Leslie.<sup>1</sup> In this sketch, Irving expounds on the virtues of a loving wife such as the spouse of his friend Leslie. Irving takes this opportunity to speak metaphorically of the providential role of a woman. In doing so, he compares a woman to a vine in that she is the stay and solace of a man in binding up the broken heart. To Irving, nothing is more touching than a soft and tender female who rallies to the support of her husband in times of misfortune (p. 30). He goes on to tell of the perfect match which his financially comfortable friend Leslie has made and his plans for her future. Leslie is described as a serious romantic; she is full of life and gladness. He seems mutely entertained by her sprightly delightful nature. He wanted her life to be like a fairy tale (p. 29). Irving's confidence in wives as all-loving and faithful is further bolstered by the attitude of Leslie's lovely, frail wife as he faces a large financial loss. When asked how his wife took the news of this disaster, Leslie replies favorably:

Like an angel! It seemed rather to be a relief to her mind, for she threw her arms around my neck and asked if this was all that had lately made me unhappy. But, poor girl, she cannot realize the change we must undergo, She has no idea of poverty, but in the abstract; she has only read of it in

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 176.

poetry, where it is allied to love. She feels as yet no privation; she suffers no loss of accustomed conveniences or elegancies. When we come practically to experience its sordid cares, its paltry wants, its petty humiliations--then will be the real trial. (p. 33)

Still later when reporting on his wife's state of being after she has learned the rudiments of poverty, Leslie exclaims that rather than repine his wife has been nothing but sweetness and good humor. Indeed, she seems to be in better spirits than he has ever known in her (pp. 34-35). The author, through Crayon, speaks of accompanying his friend to his simple cottage on invitation to judge for himself her fortitude. He reports that

Mary came tripping forth to meet us; she was in a pretty rural dress of white, a few wild flowers were twisted in her fine hair, a fresh bloom was on her cheek, her whole countenance beamed with smiles--I had never seen her look so lovely. (p. 35)

Upon meeting them, Mary speaks of her watch for him to return home and of her preparation of strawberries and cream which she has set on a table under a tree. Exclaiming to her husband how sweet and still everything is there, she suddenly puts her arm through his and exclaims, "Oh, we shall be so happy!" (p. 36). In concluding his sketch on the marital bliss of his friend, Irving has the contented Leslie advise:

I can wish you no better lot than to have a wife and children. If you are prosperous, they are there to share your prosperity; if otherwise, there they are to comfort you. (p. 30)

In another treatise on woman's love, "The Broken Heart," Irving makes some of his own observations on human nature and love before telling his woeful story. He says that he has often known people to laugh at love stories and treat these tales of romantic passion as "mere fictions of novelists and poets" (p. 72). Irving feels that lurking even in the coldest heart is a warmth which can be kindled. As a romantic, he believes in broken hearts and the possibility of dying of disappointed love. Although he does not consider men as prime targets, Irving does feel that many lovely women have been put to an early grave because of this malady of the heart. He attributes this fact to the differences in a man and a woman's emotional composition. To a man, love is merely an embellishment in his early life. He seeks "fame, fortune, space in the world's thought and dominion over his fellow man" (p. 72). But, Irving refutes, a woman's heart is her whole world. Her life is comparatively fixed, secluded and meditative. "Her lot is to be wooed and won; and if unhappy in her love, her life is like some fortress that has been captured, and sacked, and abandoned, and left desolate" (p. 73). Although the disappointment of love may occasion some bitter pangs for man, because he is an active being, he is able to plunge his thoughts and energies elsewhere (p. 73).



Wishing to give an example of the bounds of a woman's grief at the loss of love, the author relates the story of a young girl. In the romantic tradition of secrecy, the girl is unknown; she has never in fact been seen in her true identity. Crayon's story comes to him second-hand. He heard it from someone who had talked with her at a masquerade ball:

The person who told me her story had seen her at a masquerade. There can be no exhibition of far-gone wretchedness more striking and painful than to meet it in such a scene. To find it wandering like a specter, lonely and joyless, where all around is gay--to see it dressed out in the trappings of mirth and looking so wan and woebegone, as if it had tried in vain to cheat the poor heart into a momentary forgetfulness of sorrow. After strolling through the splendid rooms and giddy crowd with an air of utter abstraction, she sat herself down on the steps of an orchestra, and looking around for some time with a vacant air that showed her insensibility to the garish scene, she began, with the capriciousness of a sickly heart, to warble a little plaintive air. She had an exquisite voice, but on this occasion it was so simple, so touching, it breathed forth such a soul of wretchedness that she drew a crowd mute and silent around her, and melted everyone into tears. (p. 76)

The reason for her romantic melancholy lies in the fact that her lover, a young Irish patriot, had been tried, condemned and executed on a charge of treason during the troubles in Ireland (p. 74). The young girl's tender story completely won over a brave officer, who, in attempting to alleviate her destitute and dependent situation, solicited her esteem. In the end, assured that her heart was another's, he succeeded in gaining

her hand (p. 76). Hoping that a change of scenery might help her to forget her past sorrow, he took her to Sicily. Although she made an effort to be a happy, amiable wife, nothing could cure the silent and devouring melancholy in her soul. True to the romantic idea of a bereaved lover, she wasted away and at length died, the victim of a broken heart (p. 76). Irving's reflection on death in youth as doubly portrayed in "The Broken Heart," can be traced to the romantic account of Robert Emmet in The History of the Late Grand Insurrection and possibly to Byron's Don Juan.<sup>1</sup>

Another melancholy tale of love is seen in "The Pride of the Village." This story comes to Crayon after he has observed the funeral procession of a young girl. Upon his return to the inn in which he is residing in the small town, he learns the whole story of the girl:

She had been the beauty and pride of the village. Her father had once been an opulent farmer, but was reduced in circumstances. This was an only child, and brought up entirely at home, in the simplicity of rural life. She had been the pupil of the village pastor, the favorite lamb of his little flock. The good man watched over her education with paternal care; it was limited, and suitable to the sphere in which she was to move, for he only sought to make her an ornament to her station in life, not to raise her above it. The tenderness and indulgence of her parents and the exemption from all ordinary occupations had fostered a natural grace and delicacy of character that accorded with

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 182.

the fragile loveliness of her form. She appeared like some tender plant of the garden, blooming accidentally amid the hardier natives of the fields. (p. 313)

It happened during one May Day celebration of which the young girl had been queen that she attracted the attention of a young officer. His intentions, however, were unthinking and his dashing personality caused her to fall in love with him. When orders came for his regiment to leave the vicinity, he told her at the last possible moment. The shock was too much for her to bear. From here, the story follows the pattern of other romantic tales of melancholy. She avoided society and slowly pined away in her solitary grief. She felt that death was near, but looked to it as a place of rest from her gloom (p. 317). She felt, however, that she could not go to her grave until she had sent her former lover her forgiveness for the suffering he had caused her and her blessing. Upon receipt of her poignant letter, the soldier immediately returned to her side only for her pining spirit to give way in his presence (pp. 317-318).

The last sketch to tell of a woman's tender and loving heart is "The Widow and Her Son." Whereas in the previous sketches Irving shows the fidelity of a wife or a lover, in this sketch the womanly love involved is that of a mother for her son, perhaps the second strongest bond of love between a man and a woman. Irving

merchant class takes on the aura of nobility in a place where the merchant is king. Irving describes one such family, the Lambs, and their affected airs. This not only occasions him to expound on the pretentious family, but to throw in some mild satire of literary and political strains. In an evil hour, as Irving deems it, one of the Lamb daughters had the honor of being a lady in attendance on the Lady Mayoress at her grand annual ball. The family never got over it. Immediately, they were smitten with a passion for high life. "They set up a one-horse carriage and put a bit of lace around the errand boy's hat. They took to reading novels, talking bad French, and playing the piano" (p. 248). Despite the ostentation of his family, the father, Honest Lamb, manages to retain his romantic rustic and simple nature:

Honest Lamb, in spite of the meekness of his name, was a rough, hearty old fellow, with the voice of a lion, a head of black hair like a shoe brush, and a broad face mottled like his own beek. It was in vain that the daughters always spoke of him as "the gentleman," addressed him as "papa" in tones of infinite softness, and endeavored to coax him into a dressing gown and slippers and other gentlemanly habits. Do what they might, there was no keeping down the butcher. His sturdy nature would break through all their glozings. He had a very hearty, vulgar good humor that was irrepressible. His very jokes made his sensitive daughters shudder; and he persisted in wearing his blue cotton coat of a morning, dining at two o'clock, and having a "bit of sausage with his tea." (p. 249)

In addition to the butcher, Lamb, Irving mentions

probably infuses his memory of Sarah Sanders Irving, his own mother in this story.<sup>1</sup> This sketch, as the others, shows the romantic melancholy at the loss of a loved one:

She had made an effort to put on something like mourning for her son; and nothing could be more touching than this struggle between pious affection and utter poverty: a black ribbon or so, a faded black handkerchief, and one or two more such humble attempts to express by outward signs that grief which passes show. When I looked around upon the storied monuments, the stately hatchments, the cold marble pomp with which grandeur mourned magnificently over departed pride, and turned to this poor widow bowed down by age and sorrow, at the altar of her God and offering up the prayers and praises of a pious though a broken heart, I felt that this living monument of real grief was worth them all. (p. 111)

In observing the characters encountered on the type of trip which Crayon takes in Europe, the place in which each character is to be found often has an effect on the description. Other than the author's favorite types of people, such as writers and women, he also describes the people of certain occupations or areas. One such place is a small neighborhood situated in the center of London known as Little Britain. Possessing every type of shop and trade, the vicinity is self-sufficient from the big city. Likewise, its social register is removed from that of the royal influence, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 183.

merchant class takes on the aura of nobility in a place where the merchant is king. Irving describes one such family, the Lambs, and their affected airs. This not only occasions him to expound on the pretentious family, but to throw in some mild satire of literary and political strains. In an evil hour, as Irving deems it, one of the Lamb daughters had the honor of being a lady in attendance on the Lady Mayoress at her grand annual ball. The family never got over it. Immediately, they were smitten with a passion for high life. "They set up a one-horse carriage and put a bit of lace around the errand boy's hat. They took to reading novels, talking bad French, and playing the piano" (p. 248). Despite the ostentation of his family, the father, Honest Lamb, manages to retain his romantic rustic and simple nature:

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In addition to the butcher, Lamb, Irving mentions

two other business men of Little Britain, the apothecary and the inn-keeper. The apothecary is described as a tall, dry old gentleman of the name Skryme who has a cadaverous countenance full of cavities and projections, with a brown circle around each eye, like a pair of horn spectacles. He seems more of an astrologer than an apothecary as Irving describes Skryme's interest in scientific and historical phenomenon which he considers "a sign of the times" (p. 241). The prime wit of Little Britain is said to be the inherited inn proprietor, bully Wagstaff. In describing him, Irving refers to an inherited trait of loquacity which Wagstaff possesses. This romantic reference to antiquity could be Irving's way, too, of reminding his fellow Americans of the inherited traits each of them has received from his European forefathers:

His ancestors were all wags before him, and he has inherited with the inn a large stock of songs and jokes, which go with it from generation to generation as heirlooms. He is a dapper little fellow, with bandy legs and pot belly, a red face, with a moist merry eye, and a little shock of gray hair behind. At the opening of every club night he is called in to sing his "Confession of Faith," which is the famous old drinking trowl from Gammer Gurton's Needle. (p. 244)

Besides describing some of the people in an old-fashioned section of London, Irving also portrays the characters of London town. In doing so, he chooses to show the visitors to a city park on a Sunday afternoon.



On this day, the city pours forth its legions to breathe the fresh air and enjoy the sunshine of the parks and rural environs. To Crayon, there is something delightful in seeing the poor prisoner of the crowded and dusty city able to come forth once a week and throw himself upon the green bosom of nature. Crayon likens this visitor to a child restored to the mother's breast. He feels that the people who landscaped these lovely grounds have done as much for health and morality as if they had spent the same on hospitals or prisons (p. 114). Here Irving expresses a Rousseauistic concept of nature as the mother and healer of all, another of the romantic references to nature which Irving often makes in a character description.

Perhaps because of his romantic tendencies toward nature and simpler surroundings Irving turns to the English countryside for most of his characters. In England, Irving points out, the metropolis is merely a gathering place of "the polite classes, where they devote a small portion of the year to a hurry of gait and dissipation" (p. 65). The romantic passion to return to the more congenial habits of rural life, however, seems inherent in Englishmen. Irving feels that the English are strongly gifted with a quick sensibility to the beauties of nature. While favorably discussing



the Englishman's tact for rural occupation, Irving praises this mindfulness of natural grandeur. Romantic leanings toward mind-elevation through nature and a return to the simple life are present here (p. 66). In speaking of the retreat of city businessmen, Irving praises rural occupation:

In rural occupation there is nothing mean or debasing. It leads a man forth among scenes of natural grandeur and beauty; it leaves him to the workings of his own mind, operated upon by the purest and most elevating of external influences. Such a man may be simple and rough, but he cannot be vulgar. The man of refinement, therefore, finds nothing revolting in an intercourse with the lower orders in rural life, as he does when he casually mingles with the lower orders of cities. He lays aside his distance and reserve and is glad to waive the distinctions of rank and to enter into the honest, heartfelt enjoyments of common life. Indeed, the very amusements of the country bring men more and more together; and the sound of hound and horn blends all feelings into harmony. I believe this is one great reason why the nobility and the gentry are more popular among the inferior orders in England than they are in any other country, and why the latter have endured so many excessive pressures and extremities without repining more generally at the unequal distribution of fortune and privilege. (p. 69)

At the same time that Irving extolls the rural working class, he interjects a little political-social opinion concerning the class problem in the city, a problem very much in light during a romantic period characterized by reform bills and revolutions, both industrial and civil.

Outside of the work circle in a village, one of the prime social gathering points is the country church. Irving carefully notes the types of characters which

worship there from noble gentry to poor widows, at the same time drawing conclusions on human nature. In observing the parishioners of a specific country church, Irving pays particular attention to two families of the nobility class as he contrasts their arrivals, attitudes, and departures. The first family is especially striking in their simple and unassuming appearances. They converse freely with the peasants as they pass them on their way to church. There is neither haughtiness on the part of one nor servility on the other (pp. 100-101). In contrast to this family is that of a wealthy citizen who always came to church in a majestic carriage emblazoned with arms (p. 101). Irving comments that the behavior in church is akin to the arrivals of each respective family. The nobleman's family is quiet, serious, and attentive. They seem to have a great deal of respect for sacred things and sacred places (p. 103). The others, on the contrary, are constantly in a state of flurry, betraying their continual consciousness of finery and of being the wonders of the congregation (p. 103). When the service is at an end, Irving comments on the departures of the two families:

The young noblemen and their sisters, as the day was fine, preferred strolling home across the fields, chatting with the country people as they went. . . . The others departed as they had come, in grand parade. Again were the equipages wheeled up to the gate. There was again the smacking of whips, the clattering of hoofs, and the glittering

of harness. The horses started off almost at a bound; the villagers again hurried to right and left; the wheels threw up a cloud of dust; and the aspiring family was rapt out of sight in a whirlwind. (p. 104)

Here Irving seems to favor the romantic simplicity of the former family and disdain the ostentation of the latter.

Besides the nobility which Irving so carefully scrutinizes, he also speaks of one old woman in church who made an impression on him. As a romantic, he notices her humility and simplicity. She is the only being in the whole congregation who appears to Irving to feel the humble and prostrate piety of a Christian. "The lingerings of decent pride were visible in her appearance. Her dress, though humble in the extreme was scrupulously clean" (p. 106). Her humility and rustic simplicity probably touched him far more than the showiness of some of her fellow worshippers.

Just as social rank seems to influence the personalities of some of Irving's characters, so, too, the profession one chooses in life often affects the person. The English gentleman, born to his station rather than cultivated, fascinates Irving:

I do not know a finer race of men than the English gentleman. Instead of the softness and effeminacy which characterize the men of rank in most countries, they exhibit a union of elegance and strength, a robustness of frame and freshness of complexion which I am inclined to attribute to their living so much in the open air and pursuing so eagerly the

invigorating recreations of the country. These hardy exercises produce also a healthful tone of mind and spirits, and a manliness and simplicity of manners, which even the follies and dissipations of the town cannot easily pervert and can never entirely destroy. (p. 68)

A prime example of an English gentleman is found in Master Simon, one of the residents of Bracebridge Manor where Crayon passes one holiday season:

He was a tight little man, with the air of an arrant old bachelor. His nose was shaped like a bill of a parrot; his face slightly pitted with the smallpox, with a dry, perpetual bloom on it, like a frost-bitten leaf in autumn. He had an eye of great quickness and vivacity, with a drollery and lurking waggery of expression that were irresistible. It seemed to be his great delight during supper to keep a young girl next to him in a continual peal of agony of stifled laughter, in spite of her awe of the reproving looks of her mother who sat opposite. (pp. 199-200)

On route to his stay at the Bracebridge home, Crayon encounters another breed of the stately English, a typical English stagecoachman whom he describes in detail:

He has commonly a broad, full face, curiously mottled with red, as if the blood had been forced by hard feeding into every vessel of the skin; he is swelled into jolly dimensions by frequent potations of malt liquors, and his bulk is still further increased by a multiplicity of coats, in which he is buried like a cauliflower, the upper one reaching to his heels. He wears a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat; a huge roll of colored handkerchief about his neck, knowingly knotted and tucked in at the bosom; and has in summertime a large bouquet of flowers in his buttonhole, the present, most probably of some enamored country lass. His waistcoat is commonly of some bright color, striped, and his small clothes extend far

below the knees, to meet a pair of jockey boots which reach about halfway up his legs. (p. 187)

Although Irving insinuates that all English stagecoachmen dress alike and possess common features, he still describes the breed as romantically individualistic as compared with other occupations.

While staying at Bracebridge, Irving has Crayon come into contact with the manor parson:

The parson was a little, meager, black-looking man, with a grizzled wig that was too wide, and stood off from each ear, so that his head seemed to have shrunk away within it, like a dried filbert in its shell. He wore a rusty coat, with great skirts and pockets that would have held the church Bible and prayerbook; and his small legs seemed still smaller from being planted in large shoes decorated with enormous buckles. (p. 209)

In speaking of this old parson, Crayon tells of his attitudes toward the past. The parson seems to be living in the days of nearly two centuries ago when all Christmas festivities were banned by the Church as being anti-Christian. He continually urges his hearers in the most solemn manner to stand to the traditional customs of their fathers, and feast and make merry on this joyful anniversary of the Church (p. 212). Perhaps this is Irving's way of sending a message to his fellow Americans. He may be challenging them to forget the revolution and any ill-feelings for England, and to remember her as the mother country full of history and a magnificent heritage of antiquity which the New World

had yet to build.

While still musing on antiquity, Irving describes men of a similar occupation in goals to the parsons. He speaks of the recluse monks who spend their lives praying for their fellow man, while the parson preaches to his. Irving tells of wandering the halls of an abbey one day and coming across a number of gray-haired old men, clad in long black cloaks, coming forth in a single file past him (p. 234). Irving mentions being particularly struck by their appearance, "Their black cloaks and antiquated air comported with the style of this most venerable and mysterious pile" (p. 234). Irving's romantic imagination makes believe that these men are the ghosts of departed years passing in review about him (p. 234).

According to Irving, no discussion of English character is complete without adding a sketch of John Bull, the personification of England:

One would think that in personifying itself, a nation would be apt to picture something grand, heroic, and imposing; but it is characteristic of the peculiar humor of the English, and of their love for what is blunt, comic, and often familiar that they have embodied their national oddities in the figure of a sturdy, corpulent old fellow, with a three-cornered hat, red waistcoat, leather breeches, and a stout oaken cudgel. (p. 300)

Using his romantic imagination once again, Irving makes the simple John Bull out to be a real person, going so

far as to describe his home and children:

John Bull, to all appearances, is a plain downright matter-of-fact fellow, with much less of poetry about him than rich prose. There is little of romance in his nature, but a vast deal of strong natural feeling. He excels in humor more than in wit; is jolly rather than gay; melancholy rather than morose; can easily be moved to a sudden tear, or surprised into a broad laugh; but he loathes sentiment, and has no turn for light pleasantry. He is a boon companion if you allow him to have his humor and to talk about himself; and he will stand by a friend in a quarrel, with life and purse, however soundly he may be cudgeled. (pp. 301-302)

In describing the romantic individual John Bull, Irving is showing another facet of English character to Americans. After sufficiently describing the man himself, Irving turns to a characterization of John Bull's children. Here perhaps Irving is speaking of the children or inhabitants of English soil:

His children have been brought up to different callings, and are of different ways of thinking; and as they have always been allowed to speak their minds freely, they do not fail to exercise the privilege most clamorously in the present posture of his affairs. Some stand up for the honor of the race, and are clear that the old establishment should be kept up in all its state, whatever may be the cost; others, who are more prudent and considerate, entreat the old gentleman to retrench his expenses, and to put his whole system of housekeeping on a more moderate footing. (p. 307)

Here, Irving may be referring to the new English colonies in America and their desire to break from the mother country, or he may be speaking of the newly voiced liberal movement in England to update the running of the



country's governmental processes.

Throughout The Sketch Book Irving busies himself with glorifying, condemning, or commenting on various English characters. His mention of American characters is more limited. He devotes one sketch, "English Writers on America," to explaining that most comments on America by Englishmen have been unfavorable. He chastizes the English for their criticism of Americans who model themselves after their mother country:

We are a young people, necessarily an imitative one, and must take our examples and models, in a great degree, from the existing nations of Europe. There is no country more worthy of our study than England. The spirit of her constitution is most analogous to ours. The manners of her people--their intellectual activity--their freedom of opinion--their habits of thinking on those subjects which concern the dearest interests and most sacred charities of private life, are all congenial to the American character, and in fact, are all intrinsically excellent; for it is in the moral feeling of all people that the deep foundations of British prosperity are laid, and however the superstructure may be time-worn or overrun by abuses, there must be something solid in the basis, admirable in the materials, and stable in the structure of an edifice that so long has towered unshaken amidst the tempests of the world. (pp. 63-64)

Irving could hardly blame the English writers for their opinions, however, when he himself admitted that Americans abroad did not exemplify what he thought they should.

Irving's attitudes toward an American abroad were that he be "frank, manly, unaffected in his habits and manners, liberal, and independent in his opinions, generous and



unprejudiced in his sentiments toward other nations, but most loyally attached to his own."<sup>1</sup> Many Americans whom he met abroad were unsophisticated travelers who played Indian when surrounded by the wonders and the improvements of the Old World.<sup>2</sup> Due in part, probably, to this unfavorable image of Americans and partly to his romantic notions, Irving chose to write of the first Americans, the Indians, in The Sketch Book. In doing so, he gives Europeans a look into a people almost as old as themselves. At the same time, he was showing Americans, who were still fighting Indians in sections of the country, some of the history and pride and worth of the Indian race. In The Sketch Book, Irving shows some of the finest traits of his own nature in acting as defender, interpreter, and, to some extent, historian, of the American Indian.<sup>3</sup> Irving's fairness and generosity toward Indians are connected with the romantic enthusiasm for primitivism. By his very nature, the Indian is imbued with a romantic love of nature, the gift of which Irving feels is "wonderfully striking and sublime" (p. 272). Irving justifies the anti-social actions of present-day

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<sup>1</sup>Hellman, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Warner, pp. 100-101.

<sup>3</sup>Hellman, p. 84.

Indians by blaming these actions on the influence of the whites (p. 274). The admirable spirit of the Indian who lives in a state of perpetual hostility and risk is spoken of with respect by Irving. He romantically appreciates the closeness to nature and the rugged existence of the primitive savage. Comparing the Indians to the ancient Gauls in a romantic parallel with antiquity, he shows the American lack of appreciation for this antiquity:

When the Gauls laid waste the city of Rome, they found the senators clothed in their robes, and seated with stern tranquility in their curule chairs; in this manner they suffered death without resistance or even supplication. Such conduct was, in them, applauded as noble and magnanimous; in the hapless Indian it was reviled as obstinate and sullen! How truly are we the dupes of show and circumstance! How different is virtue, clothed in purple and enthroned in state, from virtue, naked and destitute, and perishing obscurely in a wilderness! (p. 281)

After condemning the petty deceptions and artificial character of the civilized world, Irving praises the romantic noble savage for his integrity through his individuality:

The Indian, on the contrary, free from the restraints and refinements of polished life, and in a great degree, a solitary and independent being, obeys the impulses of his inclination or the dictates of his judgment, and thus the attributes of his nature, being freely indulged, grow singly great and striking. (pp. 283-284)

He compares the nobility of the savage who "would fight it out to the last man, rather than become a servant to

the English, (p. 294) to the civilized English who had inhumanely leveled an entire Indian village of women and children by fire (p. 293). Irving devotes a sketch to the son of an Indian chief in "Philip of Pokanoket." A prime example of romantic primitivism is seen in Irving's comment on Philip's father, Massasoit, chief Sagamore of Wampanoogs:

They were visited by Massasoit, a powerful chief who reigned over a great extent of country. Instead of taking advantage of the scanty number of the strangers, and expelling them from his territories, into which they had intruded, he seemed at once to conceive for them a generous friendship, and extend toward them the rites of primitive hospitality. (p. 285)

Speaking of the Indians, Irving clearly shows that their behavior is not motivated by the same cultural traditions that motivate the behavior of the transplanted Europeans. Indian cultural traditions are adequate to produce a character of adequate romantic proportions.<sup>1</sup>

The only other American characters to be found in The Sketch Book are in the fictional sketches of "Rip Van Winkle" and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Although Irving may have pieced together several tales which he heard as a boy growing up in the Hudson region and as a man traveling in Germany to form the plots of these tales, his characters are products of his highly

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 111.

romantic imagination. The first of these tales in The Sketch Book, "Rip Van Winkle," is a compound of German folklore, boyhood recollections, and Irving's mood concerning the transience of things mortal.<sup>1</sup> This romantic transience is seen in the character of Rip who desires nothing more than to escape the incessant tongue of Dame Van Winkle (pp. 40-41). His simplicity and individuality establish his romantic character. Irving portrays Rip as a likeable, but lazy, village inhabitant. He is a kind neighbor and an obedient, henpecked husband. He is especially appreciated by the children of the village for whom he is a constant source of entertainment. The great fault in his composition is an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor, namely that of keeping his farm in order. Knickerbocker sums up the whole of Rip's character in one line: "If left to himself he would have whistled life away in perfect contentment" (p. 40).

Irving equips the male characters of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with qualities equally or more romantic. Ichabod Crane, the school teacher, is romantic in the individuality in which Irving portrays him. Crane typifies the case of one attempting to be a sophisticate in rustic surroundings:

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 181. found in every

The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half hour at his toilet, brushing and furbishing up his best and indeed only suit of rusty balck, and arranging his looks by a bit of broken looking glass that hung up in the schoolhouse. (p. 344)

Crane's appearance is full of remorse; yet Irving does not seem to allow pity for this character:

He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangle a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock, perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield. (p. 332)

The other two male characters which are featured in the tale are typified by the rustic he-man, Brom Bones, and the simple, yet thriving farmer, Baltus Van Tassel. Irving romantically alludes to antiquity when describing Brom Bones' "Herculean frame" and "Tartaran dexterity on horseback" (p. 340).

Irving makes a romantic allusion to the medieval in "The Specter Bridegroom." He speaks of "the specter bridegroom" Herman Von Starkenfaust as "one of the stoutest hands and worthiest hearts of German chivalry, who was now returning from the army" (p. 157). The Baron of the castle is portrayed as a romantic believer in the supernatural tales which abound in every mountain and

valley of the region. The walls of his castle decorated with portraits of old warriors from generations back also show his romantic interest in antiquity (p. 155).

The women characters of Irving's tales in The Sketch Book are romantic in that they are individual. Each woman is different from other fictional women whom he portrays. In contrast to Rip's nonchalant manner, Irving gives Rip's wife considerable temper and verbosity:

But his wife kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family. Morning, noon, and night, her tongue was incessantly going, and everything he said or did was sure to produce a torrent of household eloquence. (pp. 39-40)

In describing her death Irving shows all the passion of her life: "Oh, she too had died but a short time since; she broke a blood vessel in a fit of passion at a New England peddler" (p. 51). Irving characterizes this fictional wife in a very different manner than the demure, long-suffering, faithful wives and lovers of his essays. It has long been seen earlier that Irving had a very favorable attitude toward women. Perhaps in the sincerity of his essays he felt that he could not criticize this lovely sex, but in his fictional tales, he could good-naturedly poke fun at all of the typical characteristics of the proverbial henpecking woman.

Another fictional woman, Katrina Van Tassel, in

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," is more similar to Irving's essay characterizations. Although her love for her man is not full of the passion seen in such affairs as "The Broken Heart" and "The Pride of the Village," she, nevertheless, does manifest a more tender feeling than Dame Van Winkle. The daughter of a substantial Dutch farmer in the New World, Irving describes Katrina as "a blooming lass of fresh eighteen, plump as a partridge, ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches" (p. 337). Although Irving specifies, as shown earlier, that he prefers the bud to the full-blown rose, his treatment of the character Katrina is still more favorable than that of the wench Dame Van Winkle. Irving shows his interest in antiquity as he describes the mode of Katrina's dress as being "a mixture of ancient and modern fashions. . . ." (p. 337). She wore the ornaments of pure yellow gold, which her great-great-grandmother had brought over from Saardam (p. 337). Here Irving once again reminds Americans of their romantic heritage from the Old World. He seems to be saying that some ancestors brought heirlooms and some traditions, but all brought some piece of the Old World to hand to posterity.

The female heroine of the last tale, "The Specter Bridegroom," comes closest to Irving's essay portrayal of women. The Baron's daughter is kind, gentle, and proficient



in the qualities that a young lady of her station should show:

By the time she was eighteen she could embroider to admiration and had worked whole histories of the saints in tapestry with such strength of expression in their countenances that they looked like so many souls in purgatory. She could read without great difficulty, and had spelled her way through several church legends and almost all the chivalric wonders of the Heldenbuch. She had even made considerable proficiency in writing, could sign her own name without missing a letter, and so legibly that her aunts could read it without spectacles. She excelled in making little elegant good-for-nothing lady-like knickknacks of all kinds; was versed in the most abstruse dancing of the day; played a number of airs on the harp and guitar; and knew all the tender ballads of the Minnelieders by heart. The young lady was a pattern of docility and correctness. (p. 154)

She is the romantic embodiment of a woman living under the influence of medieval antiquity.

Irving's characters portrayed in The Sketch Book may be seen as romantic, loyal women; rustic, primitive, and individualistic men; and lovers of antiquity chosen to carry the author's message from Old World to New and back again. The message was that an abundant heritage, rich with a colorful past, had formed the basis for the advanced civilization his contemporaries in America were then enjoying.



## CHAPTER IV

### CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

In pointing out the romantic scenes of the Old World, Irving made Americans aware of the aesthetic treasures across the ocean. By discussing the people whom he came across during his travels, he humanized Europe for Americans. In reporting the customs and habits of their European cousins, Irving was able to manifest to Americans a concrete way of keeping their heritage alive, namely through the continuance of these traditions. Had he been merely a lover of fine scenery, there would have been no need for Irving to leave his own country; instead, he carefully noted the customs and habits of the people he visited.<sup>1</sup> Irving, the romantic, was a lover of the grace and splendor of these old traditions and old ways.<sup>2</sup> In completing the romantic excursion of Crayon into Old World tradition, Irving found the links of custom in each place he visited, which had kept generations of people in changing societies virtually the same. Regretfully, Irving noted that holiday customs and rural games were

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, p. 178.

growing more and more faint, gradually being worn away by time and obliterated by modern fashion. Irving compares these slowly dying customs to the romantic picturesque Gothic architecture seen crumbling in various parts of the country, partly dilapidated by the waste of ages, and partly lost in the additions and alterations of later days (p. 180). Noting the customs and traditions of the Old World, then, is probably much more than just that. It is a desperate plea to preserve on New World soil, those games, those observations, which have meant so much to the ancestors of American pioneers. Irving feels, perhaps, that building a world with traditions would make it a more pleasant place as he voices the opinion of the Squire of Bracebridge Manor:

Our old games and local customs had a great effect in making the peasant fond of his home, and the promotion of them by the gentry made him fond of his lord. They made the times merrier, and kinder, and better, . . . (p. 214)

In The Sketch Book, Irving observes customs and traditions in three basic areas: those of a region of London, Little Britain; Christmas traditions; and rural funeral customs. With his romantic interest in the past, Irving probably uses Little Britain as a stereotype home of English customs because "it is a fragment of London as it was in its better days, with its antiquated folks and fashions" (p. 240). Here, Irving says many of the holiday games and customs of another day flourish in

great preservation:

The inhabitants most religiously eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, hot cross buns on Good Friday, and roast goose at Michaelmas; they send love letters on Valentine's Day, burn the pope on the fifth of November, and kiss all the girls under the mistletoe at Christmas. Roast beef and plum pudding are also held in superstitious veneration, and port and sherry maintain their grounds as the only true English wines, all others being considered vile outlandish beverages. (p. 240)

The inhabitants' belief in dreams and fortune-telling strikes Irving's romantic eye. He says that the people of this community are certain to be disturbed by comets and eclipses, and a dog's mournful howl at night is looked upon as a sure sign of death in the place (p. 240).

Two annual events in Little Britain to which Irving devotes lengthy explanations are the Lord Mayor's Day and St. Bartholomew's Fair. Irving explains that the Lord Mayor is looked up to by the inhabitants of Little Britain as the greatest potentate on earth. His gilt coach with six horses is seen as the summit of human splendor, and his procession, with all the Sheriffs and Aldermen in his train, as the grandest of earthly pageants by his people (p. 246). On this day, the King himself dare not enter the city without first knocking at the gate of Temple Bar and asking the permission of the Lord Mayor (p. 246). The city champion who rides in armor before the Lord Mayor has orders to cut down everybody that offends against the dignity of the city.

There is also a little man with a velvet porringer on his head who sits at the window of the state coach and holds the city sword which Irving describes to be "as long as a pike staff" (p. 246). In contrast with the grandeur and solemnity of the Lord Mayor's Day, Irving describes the time of the St. Bartholomew's Fair in Little Britain as one in which "nothing is going on but gossiping and gadding about" (p. 245). The streets of Little Britain are overrun with an irruption of rout and revelry. Irving says that music and songs can be heard at all times of the day or night from the taproom (p. 245). Such attractions as a Punch and Judy Puppet Show; the Flying Horses, Signior Polito, the Fire-Eater, the celebrated Mr. Paap, and the Irish Giant, holiday toys and gilt gingerbread set the brains of adults and children alike absolutely madding (p. 246).

Irving tells of another village tradition, that of May Day, in a sketch entitled "The Pride of the Village." Under the auspices of the village pastor who was a lover of old customs, the Maypole stood from year to year in the center of the village green. On May Day it was decorated with garlands and streamers and a queen or lady of May was appointed, as in former times, to preside at the sports and games and distribute the prizes and rewards (pp. 313-314).

From local observances, Irving moves to Christmas, a tradition celebrated throughout the ages all over the world. This seasonal tradition is treated by Irving in several sketches in The Sketch Book. Of all of the old festivals, Irving states that "Christmas awakens the strongest and most heartfelt associations" (p. 181). He catches the romantic spirit of Christmas as he caught the atmosphere of English rural life and an English Sunday.<sup>1</sup> Irving first discusses Christmas customs in The Sketch Book as he allows the traveling Geoffrey Crayon to muse on customs while traversing the countryside of England just prior to the Christmas season. He speaks of the solemnity and tenderness of the Church services of the season as they dwell on the beautiful story of Christian faith and the romantic pastoral scenes that accompanied its announcement (p. 181). From the liturgical, Irving turns to the social rites of Christmas. He describes them as such that bring the "peasant and the peer together, and blended all ranks in one warm generous flow of joy and kindness" (p. 182). Irving describes the warm, inviting homes of all ranks readied for the holiday season:

The old halls of castles and manor houses resounded with the harp and the Christmas carol, and their ample boards groaned under the weight of hospitality.

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 175.

Even the poorest cottage welcomed the festive season with green decorations of bay and holly--the cheerful fire glanced its ray through the lattice, inviting the passengers to raise the latch, and join the gossip knot huddled around the hearth, beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes and oft-told Christmas tales. (pp. 182-183)

Irving laments that many of the games and ceremonies of Christmas have entirely disappeared, but those that remain are heartily remembered during the season. He speaks of evergreens distributed to houses and churches as emblems of peace and gladness, and of the presents of good cheer passing hands as tokens of regard and kind feelings (pp. 183-184). The particular, impending holiday season which Irving writes about in his sketch it seems that everyone is in good spirits. As a romantic recollector of the past, Irving notes that the scene reminds him of an old writer's account of Christmas preparations:

Now capons and hens, beside turkeys, geese, and ducks, with beef and mutton--must all die--for in twelve days a multitude of people will not be fed with a little. Now plums and spice, sugar and honey, square it among pies and broth. Now or never must music be in tune, for the youth must dance and sing to get them a heat, while the aged sit by the fire. The country maid leaves half her market, and must be sent again if she forgets a pack of cards on Christmas Eve. Great is the contention of holly and ivy, whether master or dame wears the breeches. Dice and cards benefit the butler; and if the cook do not lack wit, he will sweetly lick his fingers. (pp. 189-190)

Irving's message to Americans seems to be "now I have shown you the past and present of Christmas tradition--relish

it for future posterity."

After speaking historically of Christmas traditions and customs, Irving allows Crayon the extreme fortune of receiving an invitation to pass Christmas at the home of an old acquaintance with whom he has a chance meeting at an English inn. Crayon's romantic interest in live tradition, as well as his yearning for a relief from his temporary loneliness, is stirred by the invitation:

"It is better than eating a solitary Christmas dinner at the inn," said he, "and I can assure you of a hearty welcome in something of the old-fashioned style." His reasoning was cogent, and I must confess the preparation I had seen for universal festivity and social enjoyment had made me feel a little impatient of my loneliness. I closed, therefore, at once, with his invitation; the chaise drove up to the door, and in a few moments I was on my way to the family mansion of the Bracebridges. (p. 192)

The romantic leanings of the Squire of Bracebridge toward antiquity and nature in keeping alive age-old customs and traditions within Bracebridge Manor augment Crayon's two-day holiday stay. Upon his arrival and welcome at the Bracebridge home, Irving learns that rather than a simple invitation to dinner, he has been invited as guest to two days of Christmas custom, from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day. Irving observes the first tradition, bringing in the Yule clog, with great wonder. He tells of the grate being removed from the overwhelming fireplace to make way for a fire of wood, in the midst

of which was placed an enormous log which was soon glowing and blazing, and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat. Irving mentions that the romantic squire is insistent on having this Yule clog brought in and illuminated according to ancient custom (p. 198):

The Yule clog is a great log of wood, sometimes the root of a tree, brought into the house with great ceremony, on Christmas Eve, laid in the fireplace, and lighted with the brand of last year's clog. While it lasted, there was great drinking, singing, and telling of tales. Sometimes it was accompanied by Christmas Candles; but in the cottages the only light was from the ruddy blaze of the great wood fire. The Yule clog was to burn all night; if it went out, it was considered a sign of ill luck. (p. 198)

Shortly after their arrival Christmas Eve supper is announced. The dinner chamber is traditionally decorated with holly and ivy and, besides the accustomed lights, two great wax tapers called Christmas candles, wreathed with greens, were placed on a buffet (p. 199). Although the table is abundantly spread, Irving has Crayon take note of the squire's frumentary supper of wheat cakes boiled in milk with rich spices, a standing dish in old times for Christmas Eve (p. 199). After dinner, a merry Christmas dance ensues, the squire himself taking part as he affirmed he had at every Christmas for nearly half a century (p. 201). The Christmas Eve party breaks up for the night with "the kind-hearted old custom of shaking hands" (p. 203). In addition to his romantic



notation of every custom, Irving's romantic imagination comes into focus at this point as Crayon passes the dying embers of the Yule clog on his way to his room at the evening's end:

As I passed through the hall on my way to my chamber, the dying embers of the Yule clog still sent forth a dusky glow, and had it not been the season when "no spirit dares stir abroad," I should have been half tempted to steal from my room at midnight and peep whether the fairies might not be at their revels about the hearth. (p. 203)

Crayon awoke the next morning to the patter of little feet, and presently, a choir of small voices chanted forth an old Christmas carol rejoicing the birth of the Savior (p. 204). At the morning Christmas service the romantic parson gives a most erudite sermon on the rites and ceremonies of Christmas and the propriety of observing it not merely as a day of thanksgiving, but of rejoicing (p. 211).

The call to Christmas dinner, the initial invitation issued to Crayon, comes while he is loitering with Frank Bracebridge in the library. They hear the distant thwacking sound of a rolling pin struck on the dresser by the cook, an old customary signal for summoning the servants to carry in the meats (p. 218). The dinner is served in the great hall where the squire always holds his Christmas banquet. In this hall, Crayon notes a picture of a crusader and his white horse which had been profusely decorated with greens for the occasion. Holly

and ivy are wreathed around the helmet and weapons on the opposite wall, which were said to be the arms of the same warrior. Having doubts about the painting and armor having belonged to the same crusader, Crayon is told that the squire, in a romantic search for ancestral antiquity, had found the armor in a lumber room and elevated it to its present situation. Since the squire is the absolute authority on all such subjects in his own household, the matter is currently accepted (pp. 218-219).

The parson begins the meal with a long, courtly well-worded grace of the ancient school (p. 220). Shortly, the butler enters attended by two servants holding a large wax light on each side. On a silver dish, the butler carries a large pig's head decorated with rosemary and holding a lemon in its mouth. At precisely that time a harper strikes up the ancient carol of "The Boar's Head" (p. 220). This procession seems to represent the squire's romantic nostalgia for the past:

"I like the old custom," said the squire, "not merely because it is stately and pleasing in itself, but because it was observed at the college at Oxford at which I was educated. When I hear the old song chanted, it brings to mind the time when I was young and gamesome--and the noble old college hall--and my fellow-students loitering about in their black gowns, many of whom, poor lads, are now in their graves!" (p. 220)

In addition to this main course, Crayon can not help noticing a pie magnificently decorated with peacock's feathers. The squire confesses with some hesitation that

this was a pheasant pie in representation of the traditional peacock pie (p. 222). The squire explains that there has been such a high mortality among the peacocks this particular season that he could not prevail upon himself to have one killed (p. 222). Here the squire is torn between two romantic concepts--that of preserving antiquity or elements of nature:

The peacock was anciently in great demand for stately entertainments. Sometimes it was made into a pie, at one of which the head appeared above the crust in all of its plumage, with the beak richly gilt; at the other end the tail was displayed. Such pies were served up at the solemn banquets of chivalry, when knights-errant pledged themselves to undertake any perilous enterprise, whence came the ancient oath used by Justice Shallow, "by cock and pie." (p. 222)

The final Christmas meal custom which Irving introduces through Crayon's eyes is that of the Wassail Bowl:

The Wassail Bowl was sometimes composed of ale instead of wine, with nutmeg, sugar, toast, ginger, and roasted crabs; in this way the nut-brown beverage is still prepared in some old families, and around the hearths of substantial farmers at Christmas. (p. 223)

So intent is the romantic squire in mixing the contents of the Wassail Bowl exactly according to ancient prescription that he himself skillfully mixes the beverage. Crayon describes it as a potation "that might well make the heart of a taper leap within him" being composed of the richest and raciest highly spiced and sweetened wines, with roasted apples bobbing about the surface (p. 223).

Irving lived at a time when the tendency to be melancholy was romantically fashionable.<sup>1</sup> The sincere emotion which permeates a few essays in The Sketch Book lifts them far above the others in a tenderness of feeling. Irving's own personal sorrows, the death of his mother and of his lover, Matilda, make his book more honest and beautiful.<sup>2</sup> Irving treats respect for and sorrow over the dead in the sketch on "Rural Funerals." Irving, the romantic, feels that "the natural effect of sorrow over the dead is to refine and elevate the mind . . . ." (p. 142). The sorrow for the dead is the only sorrow from which man refuses to be divorced. Man seems to cherish and brood over this affliction in solitude. To go to the grave of a loved one and meditate seems to settle the account with conscience for every past action (pp. 146-147). This sorrow and respect in addition to the rich vein of melancholy which Irving states runs through the English character is evidenced in the customs and solicitude shown by the common people for an honored and a peaceful grave (p. 39). It is an especial precaution that none but sweet-scented evergreens and flowers should be employed in rural funerals. This romantic intention

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<sup>1</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, p. 181.

is to associate the memory of the deceased with the most delicate and beautiful objects in nature.

The rural funeral customs seem to be the most appealing to Irving as he points out their romantic simplicity and association with nature. Among the beautiful and simple-hearted customs of rural life which Irving notes still linger in some parts of England are those of strewing flowers before the funerals and planting them at the graves of departed friends. In a romantic reference to antiquity, Irving brings up the point that allegedly these customs are the remains of the rites of the primitive church. Irving himself contends that they are of still higher antiquity, having been observed among the Greeks and Romans and frequently mentioned by their writers (p. 138). The nature and color of the flowers and of the ribbons with which they are tied often have a particular reference to the qualities or story of the deceased, or are expressive of the feelings of the mourner (p. 141). Irving describes the rite observed in some villages at the funeral of a young female who has died young and unmarried:

A chaplet of white flowers is borne before the corpse by a young girl nearest in age, size, and resemblance, and is afterward hung up in the church over the accustomed seat of the deceased. These chaplets are sometimes made of white paper, in imitation of flowers, and inside of them is generally a pair of white gloves. They are intended as emblems of the purity of the deceased and the crown of glory which she has received in heaven. (p. 139)

The white rose was planted at the grave of a virgin. Her chaplet was tied with white ribbon, in token of her spotless innocence, though sometimes black ribbons were intermingled, to bespeak the grief of the survivors. The red rose was occasionally used in remembrance of one who had been known for benevolence. Roses in general were appropriated to the graves of lovers, usually planted there by the bereaved lover. When the deceased had been unhappy in love, more gloomy emblems were used such as the yew and cypress. If flowers were strewn, they were of the most melancholy colors (pp. 141-142). Irving's romantic nature observes that "there is certainly something more affecting in these prompt and spontaneous offerings of nature than in the most costly monuments of art . . . " (p. 144).

Irving tells of the customary respect paid by the traveler to a passing funeral. As the mourning train approaches, he pauses, uncovered to let it go by; then follows silently in the rear, either to the graveside or for a few hundred yards, having paid this tribute to the deceased, turns and resumes his journey (p. 139). In his own travels, Crayon tells of a funeral train which he saw moving across a village green. In the melancholy respect of a romantic traveler Crayon describes the passing scene as well as the church scene where he

follows the procession:

The pall was supported by young girls, dressed in white; and another, about the age of seventeen, walked before, bearing a chaplet of white flowers, a token that the deceased was a young and unmarried female. The corpse was followed by the parents. They were a venerable couple of the better order of peasantry. The father seemed to repress his feelings, but his fixed eye, contracted brow, and deeply-furrowed face showed the struggle that was passing within. His wife hung on his arm, and wept aloud with convulsive bursts of a mother's sorrow.

I followed the funeral into church. The bier was placed in the center aisle, and the chaplet of white flowers, with a pair of white gloves, were hung over the seat which the deceased had occupied. (p. 312)

This simple but delicate memento of departed innocence affects Irving's romantic wanderer to some extent.

In contrast to the romantic simplicity and melancholy involved in rural funerals, Irving briefly touches upon English city funerals. He feels that few pageants can be more stately and frigid than an English funeral in town made up of show and gloomy parade of mourning carriages, mourning horses, and mourning plumes, and hireling mourners, who make a mockery of grief. While the stroke of death is an awful event in the tranquil uniformity of rural life, the associate in the gay and crowded city is soon forgotten (p. 144). In speaking of city funerals, Irving humorously describes the two rival burial societies of Little Britain, which for a long time were themes of controversy, "the people of

Little Britain being extremely solicitous of funeral honors and of lying comfortable in their graves" (p. 243). The romantic simplicity through nature seems lost without the age-old customs seen in rural funerals.

Although Irving's primary interest is in the customs and traditions of England to bring a fuller perspective of Old World culture to the American eye, he also describes rural funeral customs in other countries. This discussion in the sketch "Rural Funerals" was probably prompted by a holiday which Irving spent in Midland villages and memories of a Swiss churchyard in Gersau.<sup>1</sup> In lower Hungary, Irving tells from his readings, the graves are usually covered with the gayest flowers of the season with seats attached to the monuments of marble to afford a place for meditation (p. 148). The village of Gersau, Switzerland, separated from the rest of the world, had a small church with an adjoining burying ground. At the heads of the graves were crosses of wood or iron with miniature attempts at likenesses of the deceased affixed to some. On all of the crosses were hung chaplets of flowers. Irving, the romantic, sees these gestures as "the fulfilling of one of the most fanciful rites of poetical devotion" on the part of the simple peasant (p. 149).

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<sup>1</sup>Williams, p. 182.



Irving's purpose in custom-writing is self-answered in The Sketch Book:

If, however, I can by any lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow; if I can now and then penetrate through the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good humor with his fellow beings and himself, surely, surely, I shall not then have written entirely in vain. (p. 331)

The reader sees as a purpose, too, the unification of two worlds separated by a vast ocean through common tradition. Thus Irving seems to have achieved much more within the confines of The Sketch Book than a media for entertainment. He has taken the reluctant American pioneer in hand to show him a world full of scenes, characters, and traditions of a romantic past in the Old World.

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