

BETWEEN WORLDS: HYBRIDITY IN WASHINGTON IRVING'S *THE SKETCH*

BOOK

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts in English
Creighton University
2500 California Plaza
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Graduation: 05/2009

Between Worlds: Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book*

You urge me to return to New York – and say many ask whether I mean to renounce my country? For this last question I have no reply to make and yet I will make a reply – 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 writing of an American – Is that renouncing my country? How else am I to serve my country – by coming home and begging an office of it; which I should not have the kind of talent or the business habits requisite to fill? – If I can do any good in this world it is with my pen – I feel that even with that I can do very little, but if I do that little, and do it as an American I think my exertions ought to guarantee me from so unkind a question in that which you say is generally made. (Irving, *Letters*, 614)

In 1821, Washington Irving wrote from England to his good friend, Henry Brevoort, declaring his purpose for remaining in Europe and asserting his nationality as an American. When he left the United States in 1815 there is little indication that he planned to spend

seventeen years abroad. Rather, he left with the intention of visiting family and working in the family business in Liverpool. After the business went bankrupt, Irving was faced with a decision that directed the rest of his life – to stay in Europe or return to America. In 1817, he rejected his brother William's demand to return and accept the post of Naval secretary, affirming his decision to live off his pen. At the time, he felt that Europe was the only place where he could pursue a writing career. He writes, "As to coming home – I should at this moment be abandoning my literary plans, such as they are. I should lose my labour on various literary materials which I have in hand, and to work up which I must – I must be among the scenes where they are conceived" (Irving, *Letters*, 614). In these European "scenes" Irving found inspiration in America's colonizing forefathers, claiming Europe as part of America's cultural heritage (Pethers 137). Regardless of his years abroad and his desire to remain in Europe, he sought to serve his country, to do the little he could with his pen and to do it always as an American.

Irving sought his inspiration in the "courtly muses of Europe"; however, he continued to write as an American discovering the Old World – the land of America's colonizing forefathers (Emerson 22). The framework of postcolonialism allows for insight into this relationship between New World writer and Old World inspiration. Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha refers to this use of sources as a "renewal" of the Old World, consequently formulating a cultural "in-between space" (10). By "renewing" and "refiguring" America's European past within his sketches, Irving created something new, thus positioning his writing and himself between Old and New World cultures (10). Although postcolonial criticism is typically applied to understand the relationship between colonizer and indigenous person, the theoretical framework that this criticism proposes, specifically concerning the articulation of identity, allows for better understanding of Irving and his writing. Scholar Richard MacLamore asserts that Irving's

European sketches are part of America's cultural heritage and that such resources have the ability to create "possible cultural identity" (34). MacLamore discusses the relationship between America and Europe, maintaining that Irving's writing is neither entirely American nor European, and is "poised between these conflicting attitudes towards cultural and political relationships" (34). However, he does not identify exactly how *The Sketch Book* is between "conflicting identities." More precisely, *The Sketch Book* is a hybrid of two cultures produced by the "in-betweenness" Bhabha investigates and MacLamore implies. Irving's writing effectively combines European sources with an "American consciousness," and is, thus, situated within the cultural space that lies between the Old World and the New World (Rubin-Dorskey, *Adrift*, 31). Consequently, his work represents the hybridity of this transatlantic exchange. This essay will examine two central points of hybridity in *The Sketch Book*. First, Irving, an American writer, utilizes Europe as a point of reference and, secondly, as a place from which to "renew" Old World sources.

During the nineteenth century America was experiencing a period of transformation. The years of the founding fathers had passed and the young United States was quickly changing from one of Jefferson's yeoman farmer to one of progress, expansion, and economic growth (Rubin-Dorskey, "Anxiety" 68). The changes evoked by the American Revolution were monumental, not only producing a new country, but initiating the foundation of an incipient American culture. This period of change evoked questions about America's future, and consequently, its past. Americans sought to stabilize their post-revolutionary nation by formulating a legitimate national identity; however, there were few recognized forms from which to necessarily establish an identifiable culture. Richard Bushman writes that Americans were concerned with "the prevailing idea that high culture and civilization were synonymous, that is, that societies could be

ranked on a scale of civilization, measured by the quality of their art, literature, and manners” (346). The establishment of a “high culture,” one that implied sophistication and tradition measured by European standards, would grant America legitimacy as a nation of the world. It was left to the post-war generation to produce such a culture; politicians, artists, and writers were called to create an identity that could culturally connect and represent the American state on par with its European forbearers. After all, “The link between the state and literature depends on the fact that, through language, the one serves to establish and reinforce the other” (Casanova 66). As America’s first professional author, Irving contributed to what Bhabha calls the “inscription or writing of [American] identity” by writing and encouraging the formulation of a “high culture” (70). In addition, his work also introduces aspects of a “popular culture” through which Americans could identify themselves; however, he configures his writing by renewing, or reinvigorating, the past of America’s colonizers. In his most famous literary production, *The Sketch Book*, Irving constructs a variety of sketches that comment upon English critics, European culture, American nationhood, and travel experiences. These fictional stories are set in Europe and America and tell the story of the upper and lower classes as well as the comical characters of myth and the tragic heroes of everyday life. Consequently, as Irving writes, he makes a contribution to both American and European literary cultures.

Homi Bhabha writes, “The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ [...] it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts that performance of the present” (10). Irving’s sketches “renew,” or reinvigorate, the European past, configuring American culture in relation to its colonial heritage; but, it is necessary to assert that Irving writes with the “sensibility of an American” (Rubin-Dorskey, *Adrift* 31). American culture had yet to be clearly defined; yet, Irving’s position as an outsider,

his consistent New World mentality, and his incorporation of early American history indicate an “American consciousness.” In fact, he asserts Crayon’s Americanness and New World position, as well as his own, from the beginning of *The Sketch Book*, stating “To an American visiting Europe the long voyage he has to make is an excellent preparative” (11). His words do not refer to a random traveler visiting a foreign land, but to an American visiting the land of his colonizing forefathers. In fact, he writes, “I will visit this land of wonders, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated” (9). Consequently, although fascinated by European forms, Irving writes with the mentality of an American, and for the purpose of understanding his heritage as an America. Furthermore, he experiences Europe as an outsider observing the parent country. As a result of his foreignness, frequent feelings of exclusion emerge in his writing. For example, in “The Voyage” he speaks through the voice of Crayon as he completes his journey from the New World to the Old. “I alone was solitary and idle [...] I stepped upon the land of my forefathers – but felt that I was a stranger in the land” (15). His position as an outsider is made apparent in these lines, and is connected with his nationality.

Irving lived as an outsider for seventeen years, writing of America from beyond its borders and discerning new truths about America’s past, and thus, present. By looking at America from the outside or a place of “estrangement” he was better able to discern its “unconscious assumptions, boundaries, and proscribed areas,” and inscribe them into written culture (Giles, *Virtual Americas* 3). As he reflected upon America in Europe, he remained devoted to his homeland. D.H. Lawrence describes this devotion when he writes “it is perhaps easier to love America passionately, when you look at it through the wrong end of the telescope, across all the Atlantic water” (56). Irving, although absent for many years, remained attached to the days of his childhood, dreaming of the scenic Hudson highlands of his youth, and verbally

painting them within various sketches such as “Rip Van Winkle.” He also maintained personal connections with his family and “the Lads of Kilkenny,” as he called his group of friends in America. His devotion never faded, and, as a result, his writing maintains a pervasive “American consciousness.” Irving’s situation between worlds and the American-European combination in his work indicates what Bhabha refers to as an “in-between” space, defined as “those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (2). Consequently, Irving’s work embodies a hybridity, establishing “a difference” within his writing “that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha 19). Each sketch within *The Sketchbook* represents a “moment” “produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (2). These moments are best understood within the context of Irving’s transatlantic peregrination. He lives and writes within the transatlantic “in-between space” identifying with certain aspects of European society as well as those of America. This situation is reflected most clearly in *The Sketchbook*, described by Paul Giles as caught between worlds, “pre-Revolution and post-Revolution, between America and Europe, thereby placing itself in a position to represent the various prismatic processes whereby old patterns become refracted into new shapes” (*Insurrections* 161).

To study the “old patterns” of America’s European heritage and mold them into “new shapes” Irving had to be where they were created; however, this heritage was most clearly observed in the land of America’s colonizers. As Lawrence writes, “America isn’t a blood-home-land. For every American, the blood-home-land is Europe. The spirit-home-land is America” (120).¹ Foster Dulles notes this condition as a common interest among transatlantic travelers, writing, “For some transatlantic travelers it remained the ‘old home to which they were bound by invisible ties, a world familiar through personal associations; for others it had the fascination of

¹ Lawrence’s statement ignores the position of Native American’s whose blood and spirit homeland is America. He also fails to take into account the diversity of Americans’ heritage.

the unknown, a strange and almost mysterious continent – the source of their civilization” (2). In his earlier years, Irving purposely sought out the “old home” for the inspiration of his writing. In “The Author’s Account of Himself” he gives more specificity to his interest in Europe through the voice of Geoffrey Crayon. He writes:

But Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements 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 [...] I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement...(*Sketch Book* 9)

The inspiring European landscape presented “charms” and inspirations which were less obvious, although not absent, in the “youthful promise” of America. As Cushing Strout writes, “The Past became attractive by virtues of its very opposition to the Present. The New World remained unquestioned as the land of the free, the home of virtue, and the hope of the future, but its undecorated simplicity and bustling practicality stifled conventional romantic impulses” (76). Furthermore, Irving dreamed of “see [ing] the great men of the earth,” and Europe was where these men, acclaimed writers and painters, resided (*Sketchbook* 9). In fact, he was one of many Americans drawn to Europe to witness the environment that bore the renowned literary, artistic, and architectural achievements of the Western world. James Fenimore Cooper, Henry James, Washington Allston, and Thomas Cole were just a few of the other writers and artists who followed the same pursuit, witnessing Europe’s grandeur and creating American works in relation to what they experienced. For Irving, “The European scene became [...] the key that would unlock his own imagination and creative energy” (Kasson 28).

Although the European scene inspired him, Irving did not simply re-write the history and literature of Europe. Rather, he sought to “renew” the past of America’s colonizer by bringing forth specific aspects of European culture in his works. The most common renewal of European heritage is Irving’s representation of historical figures, places, and scenes. In “Westminster Abbey,” Irving’s reinvigoration of the past is depicted through famous historical and literary names. This sketch portrays Geoffrey Crayon ambling about the monuments where England’s great monarchs and poets rest. As he comments upon the tombs of Elizabeth I, Mary of Scotland, and the poets of the past, his position as an American calls upon England, a New World colonizer, as a point of reference for America. Because America did not have the *traditional* inspirations of the Old World, Americans turned to the history of Europe to see how to create a culture that could compare with that of its colonizers. This becomes apparent as Crayon walks through Poet’s Corner meeting with the tombs of “illustrious” names and the “renowned of history” (136). In looking to Europe, Irving inscribes an identity “called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus” (Bhabha 63). In “Westminster Abbey,” England is America’s “locus,” the “Other” that America exists in contrast to (Bhabha 63). As Irving writes with this conception of the “Other” England becomes a “yardstick” for Americans to measure themselves upon whether to follow similar paths or to deviate from those already made (Manning, *Sketch Book*, Intro xxiv).

In *The Sketch Book*, Irving connects America and Europe through a shared history, strengthening the exchange between Atlantic regions (Dulles 32). As he does so, he participates in *translation studii*, “the transfer of art and learning from the Old World to the New” and vice versa (Buell 420). These interactions produced both positive and negative effects. Positively, continuous contact allowed for the exchange of information and good will between regions.

Although the American Revolution severed political ties, Americans remained connected to Europe, specifically to England. In fact, Irving addresses this continuation when he writes, “Even during the late war [...] it was the delight of the generous spirits of our country to shew [*sic*] that in the midst of hostilities they still kept alive the sparks of future friendship” (47). For Irving, these connections included family, friends, and business. Consequently, he, like many Americans, was interested in his European counterparts. Similarly, Europeans were fascinated with the new and largely unsettled American continent. Depictions describing the cathedrals of Europe or the American Wild West emerged, catching the mutual attention of both sides of the Atlantic. In *The Sketch Book*, Irving incorporates these two interests, presenting a picture, although hazy at times, of America while also portraying European culture. It is “through his happy combination of subjects and methods Irving was able to attract and engage a body of transatlantic readers who ordinarily would not converge on the same body of reading” (Alderman 15).

Positive connections were achieved through this exchange, but Irving’s writing also portrays an antagonism among transatlantic cultures. He directly addresses this tension in “English Writers on America.” He writes, “There is a general impression in England that the people of the United States are inimical to the parent country” (47). This hostility is inflamed by the tension between the colonizer and the colonized. Americans were unsure of the meaning of their culture, and were often deemed “unsophisticated” by European writers and travelers. Indeed, while there were many similarities, there were also many differences. In fact, the inherent contrast of American and European is pervasive throughout *The Sketch Book* whether it is by direct comparison or as a part of Irving’s inner contrast when he, an American writes, about European history. Jane Eberwein argues that *The Sketchbook* introduces “a pattern of national

contrasts regarding landscape, imagination, and character” (157). Constantly, Irving and his American narrator invoke contrast whether it concerns examining the attitudes of English writers in America or observing the English countryside as a foreigner. James Hedges argues that this focus on “points of contrast” between the two regions is what, in fact, makes *The Sketch Book* an American book (*Washington*, 128).

The sense of comparison present in Irving’s work is a reflection of the power struggles between colonized and colonizer. Bhabha articulates this contrast by depicting the exchange that occurs between native and colonizer – a look that portrays a desire to uproot the “Other” from its place of assumed superiority – “the phantasmic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, and therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles” (63). As the native looks at the colonizer, he desires equality. He turns to his colonizer to learn how to achieve such equality while simultaneously desiring to usurp his position. Intrinsicly, the exchange of looks and the desire to replace or, at the least, compare with the “Other” is a craving for a balance of power (Tuckerman 261). This exchange portrays the relations that occurred as Americans, like Irving, sought to assert their own cultural identity and equality. As portrayed in “Westminster Abbey,” for Irving, “It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated” (Bhabha 63). Importantly, his look to Europe is not the same as that of a native or slave whose position is complicated by racial notions of superiority and inferiority. Rather, Irving’s position concerns America’s assumed cultural inferiority, or perhaps naiveté, emphasized by cultural contrast. As a result of these power struggles, Americans turned to Europe for a place from which to observe a sophisticated culture and construct their own. In fact, Irving writes specifically of the British, “After our own country there was none [...] whose good opinion we were more anxious to possess” (*Sketch Book* 47). Although he argues that Americans

should not worry about the opinion of England, he continues by asking “why are we [Americans] so exquisitely alive to the aspersions of England?” (45). In reaction to this relationship, he writes of the renowned European writers and locations, such as Westminster, observing the greatness of England’s past and asserting a challenge for Americans to seek similar achievements.

The relationship between America and its cultural locus, or as Bhabha depicts, native and colonizer, indicates the “in-between space” through which cultural differences are manifested. This relationship is given fictional representation in Irving’s renewal of the past in “Westminster Abbey.” His narrator alludes to the fact that the great history that surrounds him in Westminster is different from the culture he encounters at home. Irving writes in this sketch, “We feel that we are surrounded by the congregated bones of the great men of past times; who have filled history with their deeds, and the earth with their renown” (*Sketch Book*, 135). He continually writes of the great leaders and poets that are buried in the abbey, praising their “deeds” as those to which others, including those of his home country, should aspire. The narrator’s walk through the abbey allows him to present a contrast between himself and the renown of England, establishing “a temporary contact for him with great spirits” (Hedges 133). As an American making these observations, Crayon sets America in contrast to England, thus illustrating the dichotomy and space between the cultures. Simply, as Irving utilizes English history for his inspiration, what he writes and *where* he writes matters (Bhabha 232). The fact that he is an American in Europe writing about English history alters how readers perceive his words and his position as a writer. James Tuttleton maintains that Irving’s “self-consciousness as a writer is inseparable from his interest in the past” (45). This self-awareness pertains to Irving’s position as an American writer studying the colonizing culture. The contrast between English location and American writer

depicts an “intervening space” between colonizer and colonized, New and Old Worlds (Bhabha 10). In “Westminster Abbey,” Irving does not directly assert his “Americanness” as he does in other instances; however, throughout *The Sketch Book*, including several sketches that explicitly discuss the transatlantic contrast, Irving’s position as an American is made apparent. Thus, as he observes Westminster his person and location create a site of both difference and similarity.

In Westminster’s Poet’s Corner, Irving gives specific reference to the great English authors. For instance, he writes of Shakespeare and Addison as men who have left a lasting influence upon literary culture (Irving, *Sketch Book*, 136). By mentioning these authors he sets not only America, but himself in contrast to their greatness. In fact, he writes:

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 men is ever new, active and immediate. He has lived for them more than 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. (*Sketch Book* 136)

Like many American writers and artists, he found his muse “by confronting the writers of the past and drawing inspiration from their environment,” and “he attempted to create a literature of his own that would receive similar recognition” (Kasson 31). The authors of Poet’s Corner are Irving’s “locus,” his place of contrast and aspiration; however, his position as an author is complicated by his place between Old and New Worlds. The contrast between the two worlds left room for Europe to denounce America and its writers as uninspired and unsophisticated. This sense of cultural pressure is revealed when Irving writes “The world at large is the arbiter of a

nation's fame; with its thousand eyes it witnesses a nation's deeds, and from their collective testimony is national glory or national disgrace established" (*Sketch Book*, 45-6). Consequently, he writes from a position of defense, seeking the approval of his homeland as well as that of a very critical international audience. Thus, his sketches remain articulations of difference, but also represent the "cultural uneasiness" that mirrors Irving's anxieties about becoming a successful *American* writer (Hedges, *Washington Irving* 131; Eberwein 153).

Irving's uneasiness was justifiably felt, for although *The Sketch Book* was received with great acclaim in both America and Europe, both Irving and his writing were subject to significant criticism. Rather than new productions, the sketches were deemed a mere replication of European culture. As William Hazlitt, an English critic, writes in *The Spirit of the Age*, "Mr. Irvine [*sic*] is by birth an American, and has [...] taken off patterns with great skill and cleverness, from our best-known and happiest writers, so that their thoughts and almost their reputation are indirectly transferred to his page, and smile upon us from another hemisphere" (335). Hazlitt denounces Irving's work as "imitative," but as the popularity of his writing portrays, he is also praised for integrating European sources in his creation of American literature. Furthermore, his use of European sources allows him to claim a sense of legitimacy, implying that "instead of being a race of illiterate nomads, it seems that Americans are actually heirs to the cultural values and social customs of their transatlantic neighbor" (Pethers 145). Irving's writing attests to American abilities to write as eloquently and sophisticatedly as her "transatlantic neighbor." Although he endured criticism for his use of European sources, he recognizes this technique as part of America's heritage. In fact, he writes in "English Writers on America," "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" (*Sketch Book* 49).

Irving also reinvigorates the past of America's colonizers by studying and recording the manners and customs of England and other nations. Like "Westminster Abbey," "Rural Funerals" and the Christmas sketches are references from which to compare American culture to Old World culture; however, like other postcolonial works, these sketches reveal Irving's attempts to ground his hybrid literature in *everyday* instances of cultural identity (Bhabha 205). The history presented in "Westminster Abbey" is an important point of reference for Americans, but Irving's work is not confined to the "high culture" of monarchs and poets. He also writes about the manners and customs of rural areas to construct a vision of popular culture. These practices offer a point of reference from which Americans could construct their own culture. Henry James, a transatlantic subject himself, is noted for asserting a specific connection between the manners of a people and the "locality of culture" (Bhabha 200). In *The American Scene*, James revisits New York noting "their [New Yorkers'] manners, their habits, their intercourse, their relations, their pleasures, their general advantage" (12). Such manners and customs of a locality allow for definition and distinction. Lionel Trilling provides a thorough definition of manners when he writes:

What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication [...] They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm [...] They are the things that separate them from the people of another culture. They make the part of a culture which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. (qtd. in *Novel of Manners* 8)

Manners allow for writers to pinpoint certain cultural aspects, affiliations, and behaviors. For instance, in "Rural Funerals" Crayon observes the different rites of English country folk,

allowing for insight into their cultural gestures and “tone.” Irving’s Christmas sketches perform a similar function, detailing the older customs and allowing American readers to review and reference the English “hum and buzz.” As James Munson writes, “*The Sketch Book* was meant for American readers, with their nostalgic yearning for the Mother Country. Irving, a great Anglophile, did a considerable amount of research before giving to his readers an ideal view of an English Christmas.” Similar to Irving’s renewal of history in “Westminster Abbey,” these sketches stand as transatlantic transmissions, providing a source of “cultural possibility in the vanishing traditions of rural England” (MacLamore 34-5).

In “Rural Funerals” and the Christmas sketches, the descriptions of English, rural manners call attention to Irving’s tendency toward “local attachment” while simultaneously reaffirming his position as a “citizen of the world” (Giles, *Insurrections* 150).² In “Christmas,” Irving refers to these manners as “rural habits,” “traditionary customs of golden hearted antiquity,” and “feudal hospitalities” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 151). Necessarily, he creates a picturesque setting that contributes to his description of local manners. For instance, he writes, “Where does the honest face of hospitality expand into a broader and more cordial smile [...] than by the winter fireside” (*Sketch Book* 150). Cultural manners and customs are also presented in his description of the genial “conversation during dinner” as well as the atmosphere and regularity of storytelling at festivities (185). In addition, he comments upon the bounty of the English Christmas meal when he writes, “The table was literally loaded with good cheer, and presented an epitome of country abundance,” associating plentitude with England (183). For American readers, such instances of local culture portray the English and European “spirit of place” as D.H. Lawrence calls it; this place is defined as a space where “every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is

² Irving also wrote several sketches describing urban localities, specifically London. See “A Sunday in London” or “London Antiques” for further inquiry.

home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality” (Lawrence 12). Irving captures the nature of the English “spirit of place” by recording local manners that create a locality’s “vital effluence” and “vibration.” As he does so, he once again posits America and Europe in comparison to one another.

The manners and environment depicted throughout the sketches portray a “spirit of place”; however, Irving also examines specific customs of rural folk that facilitate greater understanding of the country’s “vibration” or “hum and buzz.” The rural funeral rites and Christmas ceremonies are “the small parts of everyday life [that] are part of culture” and do not pertain to the deeds of great leaders and the works of great poets (Bhabha 208-9). In these sketches, he considers the cultural particularities that allow American readers to examine English identity and assert a relation to it on a common, everyday level. He sets these customs within a larger context by noting rites, such as decorating graves and singing hymns as mourners walk to the grave site, that are common in several funeral traditions. Specifically, he traces the lineage of such customs to the ancient Greeks and Romans while finding similarities with other European cultures such as Hungary, Germany, and Switzerland, (Irving, *Sketch Book* 109-118). By calling upon distinct examples of English funeral customs and placing them within a specific regional context, he also constructs a sense of locality. For example, he describes a rite performed in parts of southern England at the funerals of young females who die before they are married. He writes of a “beautiful rite observed in some of the remote villages of the south [...] A chaplet of white flowers is borne before the corpse by a young girl nearest in age, size, and resemblance and is afterwards hung up in the church over the accustomed seat of the deceased” (109). Irving asserts

the locality of this custom by stating that it was performed in “villages” in the “south” of England, attributing particularity to the common customs of the area. In addition, he lists many examples of the older English traditions such as “burlesque pageants” and “green decorations” (150). These details enliven the Christmas scene at Squire Bracebridge’s residence, describing the “old home.” As Irving comments upon the Christmas celebrations and rural, funeral scenes, he observes the social environment, the actions of the people, and their preferences. His ability to capture locality is not confined to his European sketches, but is also a key aspect of his American tales such as “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” By detailing European manners and customs in the same book as colonial American manners, he forces upon his reader a juxtaposition that calls for comparison. Significantly, Irving’s writing continues to function as a reference from which to inform New World cultural developments.

In his use of such European sources, Irving’s work may seem “imitative,” as Hazlitt deemed it, but it is more essentially a product of hybridity. In “Westminster Abbey,” “Rural Funerals,” and the Christmas sketches, Irving’s tendency to combine an “American consciousness” with English history and manners creates a “hybridity of histories” (Bhabha 242). Lawrence Buell asserts that postcolonialism is marked by this “cultural hybridization” best described as a “fondness for cross-cultural collages” (428). As Irving utilizes Europe as a place of reference, he renews the past of his English colonizer and claims this history as part of his American birthright (Pethers 137). He is not directly amalgamating American and European sources as he does in other sketches, but rather evokes a contrast, thus inscribing a comparative mentality and creating a cultural “in-between space.” Bhabha describes these “in-between” spaces as “interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are

negotiated” (2) These interstices are definitive of *The Sketch Book*, for Irving’s work clearly represents an overlap between Old and New Worlds, creating a work that combines the two, but which is also between the regions. In fact, his work represents a negotiation that accepts certain terms or aspects of the Old World, adopts those of the New World, and molds them into a new form. By drawing into perspective the condition of his postcolonial homeland *and* colonizing forefathers, a constant sense of contrast and reference pervades the sketches, producing hybrid, cultural forms.

Americans did not only borrow the history and manners of Europe and incorporate them into their writings; they also utilized and inherited the writing styles, specifically of England. This influence remains most prevalent in the common language shared by England and the United States, a significant indication of postcolonialism. As Brander Matthews writes, “The possession of a common language is a bond of unity, more potent than our joint-ownership of the common law” (69). Although America has yet to establish a national language, the majority of America’s writers were, although not restricted to, English-speaking and writing individuals. Furthermore, Irving’s work mirrors English spelling and grammar. These commonalities are results of the colonial period during which “the early colonists [...] brought us our speech and established its form” (Baugh 343). For writers of Irving’s time, the British-English language and British literary styles remained strong influences. Moreover, literary style and tradition was largely influenced by the great English authors. In *The Sketch Book*, Irving claims this literary history through multiple literary allusions when he quotes famous English poets and writers at the beginning of each section. However, his writing is connected not only to an older English literary heritage, but also maintains commonalities with British nineteenth-century writers. For instance, classic, nineteenth-century English writer and critic William Hazlitt utilizes literary

allusions in similar methods in his *Sketches and Essays and Winterslow*. In addition, both writers use the sketch as a form to discuss various issues of cultural sophistication such as book-reading and local culture. Irving's work diverges in his creation of humorous, fictional stories set in America; however, his sketches involve literary history similar to that found in Hazlitt's work. Consequently, Europe stood as both a linguistic and cultural reference.³

The comparative nature of Irving's American consciousness and his use of European history and manners indicate a hybridity that situates his writing within a transatlantic "in-between" space. This contrast continues throughout most of the sketches, but Irving goes one step further by creating a fluid, hybrid combination of these sources. In "Rip Van Winkle," it becomes more apparent that Irving "was caught between two worlds, two cultures, two modes of perception, one American, one European" (Rubin-Dorsky, "American Romantic" 36). He tells the story of Rip and the men of the Half-Moon through the retrieved manuscripts of Diedrich Knickerbocker. In doing so, he maintains transatlantic strands, but more precisely, creates a work of pure fiction that does not rely on the observations of a travel-worn, American narrator. Unlike "Westminster Abbey," "Rural Funerals," and the Christmas sketches, "Rip Van Winkle" constructs an avenue for Europeans to place themselves within America and find cultural similarities and differences. In addition, he contributes to American culture while continuing to combine both American and European sources. In "Rip Van Winkle," Irving's work is not confined to English culture. Rather, he melds together folkloric, cultural, and historical

³ This short excerpt on language is to acknowledge the enormous contribution and colonial influence upon American writing and language; however, this is a subject that deserves a discussion of its own and could not be covered in depth within this essay. There is a wide range of texts to satisfy those interested in such linguistic influences. *The Cambridge History of the English Language* and *A History of the English Language* by Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable are helpful places to begin.

influences from Germany, the Netherlands, and colonial America, inscribing a hybridized literary form and situating himself and his writing somewhere between America and Europe.⁴

Irving's American consciousness remains in "Rip Van Winkle," but in the case of this sketch, he also incorporates specific details of American history and combines them with elements of Dutch and German culture to create a hybrid text that owes much to the greater European, colonial influence. As Bhabha writes, "It is from the hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as the translational – that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project" (248). Irving writes from the transnational, a "hybrid location of culture," and translates European sources and experiences into a unique literary project. In fact, he directly references America's colonial era, describing Rip's village as "founded by the Dutch colonists" (29). Furthermore, he distinctly sets the time period within the colonial era by writing "there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain" (29). In these acknowledgements, Irving lays claim to multiple colonial influences of America's history, presenting a source of cultural hybridity while attempting to create a picture of American locality. This hybridity is more thoroughly defined by Katherine Ledford in relation to Cabeza da Vaca's *La Relacion* as, "part anthropological observation, part historical narrative, part environmental catalogue, all filtered through traditional literary forms signaling the beginnings of uniquely American versions of textual representations" (140). Similarly, Irving builds his story upon German folklore, supplementing it with anthropological and artistic representations of the American Dutch, and historical information about the American Revolution, as well as descriptions of the New York landscape. Kapchan and Strong more clearly explain hybridity when they write, "although the most obvious hybrid genres are those which combine ethnic

⁴ In "Rip Van Winkle," Irving does not introduce Native American culture into his hybrid form. In other sketches and works, Native American culture and, in fact, its degradation is discussed.

identities, hybridity is effected whenever two or more historically separate realms come together in any degree that challenges their socially constructed autonomy” (243). As with Irving’s other sketches, two realms, one American and one European, come together; however, in “Rip Van Winkle” these sources and locations are manifested.

In “Rip Van Winkle,” Rip, the lazy New Yorker, enjoys a nap that lasts for years, taking America out of the colonial period ruled by King George III and into the early postcolonial period under the presidency of George Washington. Irving uses a variety of sources in this sketch, many of which can be traced back to Greek, Roman, and Norse folklore and myth. Although prolonged periods of supernatural sleep are among the stories of many different cultures, the most distinct and influential source of “Rip Van Winkle” is found within German folklore (Pochmann, “German Sources” 481). During Irving’s travels, he encountered and became the pupil of Sir Walter Scott who directed him to German literature, legend, and ultimately Romanticism; Scott introduced him to German tales such as “Thomas the Rhymer,” another story about magical slumber (Pochmann “German Sources” 488; Young 71). In an effort to fully examine German literature during his stay in Germany, Irving became fluent in the German language which enabled him to read the legends in their original forms (Pochmann, “German Sources” 488). In this sketch, he attributes the source of “Rip Van Winkle” to, “a little German superstition about the emperor Frederick der Rothhart, and the Kypphauser Mountain,” thus, acknowledging a European source of origin (Irving, *Sketch Book* 41). This story, along with the various myths previously mentioned, is a probable influence upon “Rip Van Winkle”; however, no legend correlates as closely with Rip’s story as does the legend of Peter Klaus in Otmar’s *Volke-Sagen* of 1800 (Young 71).

In “Irving’s German Sources in *The Sketch Book*,” Henry Pochmann shows a distinct correlation between the stories of Peter Klaus and Rip Van Winkle by meticulously inspecting both tales, side by side. The legend is best summarized by Daniel L. Plunge in his article, “‘Rip Van Winkle’: Metempsychosis and the Quest for Self-Reliance”:

Peter Klaus is a goatherd who lives in a small village at the foot of the Kypphausen mountains. He is in the habit of pasturing his goats along the hillside; one day while on the hill, he notices that one of his goats has wandered off, and sets out in pursuit of it. He follows the goat into a cave where a mysterious groom beckons for him to follow, and he is led into a spacious cavern where twelve knights are in a game of ninepins. At first Peter is afraid of the mysterious company, but he soon becomes less afraid, drinks from the wine that is offered, and falls asleep. When he awakens, he finds himself alone on the hill, and returns to his village only to find it filled with unfamiliar people. (69)

As Plung, Pochmann, and Young discern, this story is the “father legend” of “Rip Van Winkle.” Rip is Peter Klaus, wandering among the mountains that Irving renames and describes as the “Kaatskill [*sic*] mountains” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 29). Like Peter, Rip stumbles upon a mysterious party, except in this case it is Hendrick Hudson and his crew of the Half-Moon. In addition, Rip experiences the same magical intoxication as he drinks of the “wicked flagon,” awakening several years later to find that he is alone, rheumatic, and sporting a foot long beard (35-6). Also like Peter Klaus, Rip experiences bewilderment when he enters his old village. Both characters find their wives dead and village life much changed. Lastly, when Peter and Rip arrive back at their villages, they find a young, familiar-looking woman with children. In both stories, this woman turns out to be each man’s daughter and becomes the source of Rip and Peter’s

enlightenment; for Rip she also becomes his reacceptance into village life (Rodes 151).

Although background details are obviously different, the frame of “Rip Van Winkle” is a distinct *renewal* of the legend of Peter Klaus.

Irving notes in “The Historian” that such “borrowing” was a revitalization of, “the beauties and fine thoughts of ancient and obsolete writers” (qtd in Plung 68). However, as he alludes to and directly discusses in other sketches, these “obsolete writers” are necessarily those of the Old World, America’s colonizers. In “The Art of Book-Making,” Irving writes, “authors beget authors, and having produced a numerous progeny, in a good old age they sleep with their fathers; that is to say, with authors who preceded them – and from whom they have stolen” (*Sketch Book* 63). Irving acknowledges his use of other writers; however, it is significant to recognize this attribution within a postcolonial framework. The authors and sources that Irving turns to are those of Europe. In the case of “Rip,” it is from German authors and Dutch art that Irving finds his inspiration. His reinvigoration of these sources and their incorporation into a hybrid form is further described when Irving writes, “any of their [ancient writers] works, also, undergo a kind of metempsychosis, and spring up under new forms” (63). Irving distinguishes metempsychosis, or renewal, from plagiarism by crediting the influence of German folklore and shaping a culturally diverse tale (Plung 68). He performs this textual reincarnation of European forms throughout much of his work including *Tales of a Traveller*, “The Devil and Tom Walker,” “The Story of the Young Italian,” and more (Aderman 17). As he uses these forms, he includes details and setting, as well as historical background and cultural depiction that are different. Consequently, “Rip Van Winkle” is not a German tale, but a recreation, adapted to New World history and mentality, and enhanced by Dutch culture. This multi-faceted tale attests to the exact nature of hybridity and the creation of implicit “innovative sites of collaboration, and

contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 2). As a work of cross-cultural collaboration, “Rip Van Winkle” stands as one of these “innovative sites” of hybridity.

Although the framework of Peter Klaus is essential to the creation of “Rip Van Winkle,” details concerning Dutch culture are vital to the sketch, attesting to another source of America’s colonial background. Irving was raised in former Dutch New York, and was greatly charmed by its culture. He acquired general historical information concerning Dutch culture from sources such as William Smith’s *A History of the Province of New York* (Kennedy 53). This culture, both material and abstract, is present throughout “Rip Van Winkle” in everything from the names of the residents, such as “Van Winkle,” to the descriptions of Dutch architecture and marital relationships. The strongest influence and use of this culture is displayed in Irving’s use of Dutch genre-painting. Dutch art was of particular interest to Irving, and as one German reviewer said, “in the field of letters probably no one possesses to the same high degree as Irving the art of Dutch genre-painting, executed with careful brush and in classic coloring of language” (qtd in Zlogar 44). Irving purposefully likens the mountain scene to a painting when he writes, “the whole group reminded Rip of the figures in an old Flemish painting, in the parlor of Dominie Van Shaick, the village parson, and which had been brought over from Holland at the time of settlement” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 34). He directly refers to this artistic form, and furthermore to its transference and settlement in the New World, attesting to the acculturation and hybridity of American culture and European colonial influence.

The strongest influence of Dutch-genre painting is found in the legendary scene of Hendrick Hudson and his crew of the Half-Moon. Irving describes the men playing ninepins as, “odd-looking personages,” wearing “Dutch fashion” such as “short doublets, others jerkins, with long knives in their belts, and most of them enormous breeches” (33-4). Irving continues his

linguistic painting by describing their long beards, hats, large noses, and eyes. To create such a vivid picture, he uses a pictorial aspect of Dutch-genre painting to depict a “Merry Party” scene (Zlogar 47-48). “Merry Party” paintings picture young people, fashionably attired in “outlandish fashion” as Irving calls it (Zlogar 48-9; Irving, *Sketch Book* 34). The characters in “Rip Van Winkle” are not young, but their fashions are similar to that of the characters in “Merry Company scenes of the seventeenth-century Dutch artists” (Zlogar 49). Although the rest of the story is laced with similar descriptions, the ninepins scene depicts the strongest visual image for readers; however, several of Irving’s descriptions in “Rip Van Winkle” further resemble the picturesque quality of Dutch culture. Irving uses this genre of art to evoke the Dutch colonialism and tradition of New York. Due to this addition, “Rip Van Winkle” is not a transposition of the German folktale of Peter Klaus, nor is it simply a description of New World culture. It is a new specimen of different sorts, further proving it a cultural hybrid.

Dutch-genre painting greatly influences the imagery of Rip’s encounter with Hendrick Hudson and his crew of the Half-Moon, but this genre of art also transfers a sense of “intrinsic or moral purpose” to “Rip Van Winkle” (Zlogar 50). In fact, “art historians inform us that the predominant tendency in the seventeenth century Netherlands was to view all human activity from an ethical perspective” (9). This ethical perspective was infused within the art of the era, and was a likely influence upon the moral representation in “Rip Van Winkle” (49). Throughout the sketch moral vices such as Rip’s sloth are depicted; however beneath the cheerful scenes lay additional moral issues. For example, Irving describes the crewmen of the Half-Moon participating in the entertainments of drinking and gaming, common depictions and controversial issues in Dutch culture (51). The moral and pictorial influences of Dutch culture, and particularly Dutch-genre painting, reshape the German tale of Peter Klaus, adding a new cultural dimension.

This addition, in combination with the German folklore, further portrays Old World heritage. Although the Dutch settlers were of the Old World, the colonialism within the sketch is of the New World, and it is further enhanced by the explicitly “American” or New World details. As a result, his work attests to a postcolonial condition that combines diverse traditions and histories within the same sketch.

In addition to European sources, Irving incorporates American historical details and an American consciousness, hybridizing his work and setting it within a transatlantic space between Europe and America. As Daniel Plung states, “the Peter Klaus legend offered Irving an opportunity to invest a European tale with American character; thus, he could continue to please his audiences while portraying America as only an American could” (70). Irving, a New Yorker, draws upon his American roots to reshape and ultimately reconstruct the legend of Peter Klaus. First, he portrays a New World setting through extensive description. Setting plays an imperative role in “Rip Van Winkle,” for, “Irving looked at American scenery and values through the eyes of a cultivated expatriate” (Aderman 21). Writing for international audience, it was necessary for Irving to describe the foreign landscape (Heath 2143). As part of the Romantic tradition, his writing is metaphorical as it personifies the Catskill Mountains and enlivens the countryside with magic. In addition, “Rip Van Winkle,” conveys an “aura of the Dutch Hudson” as Irving describes it as, “the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent, but majestic course, with the reflection of purple cloud” (Rodes 143; *Sketch Book* 33). Importantly, he depicts the landscape as an outsider setting his eyes on the glorious Hudson for the first time. By detailing the physical features of New York, Irving paints an enchanting American setting for the scene of Rip’s adventure in the mountains.

The characterization of Rip is also a uniquely New World feature and strongly alludes to Irving's American consciousness even while in Europe. For instance, Irving clearly portrays a sense of the frontier within his characters and setting (Plung 71). Rip does not represent the industry and reliance of the prototypical American man, Benjamin Franklin, but he does possess a sense of audacity that continually implores New World adventurism. Irving depicts the mountain scene as one of man and dog roving about the wilderness with gun in hand, and happening upon a mysterious group of mythical Dutch men. In this sense, Rip symbolizes the frontier, a distinctly American component that alludes to the adventure and possibility of the New World. European settlers and colonizers, and eventually American trailblazers continually pushed the limits of the frontier in hopes of reaping resources and opportunities just as Rip desires peace and independence from his shrewish wife. In fact, Frederick Jackson Turner maintains that the frontiersman's drive is a distinctly American feature when he writes, "the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (50). Furthermore, Rip's frontiersman image contributes to the image of New World masculinity and exploration. In the Catskills, Rip becomes a man, surrounded by nature, facing the elements, but strangely at peace with and even seeking the solitude of the usually empty mountains. Fear of the surrounding nature is nonexistent, presenting a new and uniquely American man, comfortable in the unknown wilds of a new world. In fact, Irving, like several American romantics, focuses upon the concept of space. Jeffery Rubin-Dorskey writes, "unlike the European romantic, who was forced to create his own solitude, the American romantic found that solitude was all but imposed upon him" ("American Romantic" 36). Surrounded by the same American wilderness, Rip's character contributes to the popular characterization of the New World settler, forming a multi-faceted and contemporary text.

In “Rip Van Winkle,” Irving consciously details the setting, clearly establishing that this story takes place in America. He distinguishes various characteristics of America by using historical information about the American Revolution’s battles and heroes. For instance, when Rip awakens he finds pictures of the English King George transformed into one of a mysterious figure named George Washington, an obvious hero of both the Revolutionary War and the United States. Also within the story, Irving writes of “Bunker’s Hill,” the “heroes of seventy-six,” the “stars and stripes,” and Tories, or English loyalists (Irving, *Sketch Book* 37-8). By using specific references from the Revolutionary War period, Irving alludes to the breaking point between European colonialism and American postcolonialism. In addition to specific historical references, Irving, a diplomat and declared Federalist, writes of American politics to further infuse an American consciousness into the story. This is most apparent when Rip confusedly stumbles about the village, encountering a man handing out bills about the “rights of citizens” (37). Later, a crowd inquires about Rip’s political party preference. They ask, ““whether he was Federal or Democrat?”” (37). These terms and scenes attest to the New World application of democracy, and are evidence of distinctly American elements. Lastly, the story describes the changed, quickened pace that Rip discovers after his magical, alcohol-induced slumber. He walks about the town looking for familiarity and acquaintance, but as he does so, he notes the village to have, “a busy, bustling, disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquility” (37). This attribution alludes to American industrialism and its fast pace lifestyle. Rip’s home is no longer a quiet, lazy village, but a growing hub of industry, politics, self-reliance, and independence. Thus, Irving skillfully presents the transformation from colonial to postcolonial by way of Rip’s nap. Rip falls asleep in a colonial world ruled by King George

III, but when he awakens he is in a different country; however, traces of the old remain, demonstrating Irving's love and fascination with the world of America's colonizers.

Irving's *The Sketchbook* purposefully works to renew the history, customs, and the tradition of Europe, an integral part of America's past and the formation of its future. Whether it is a point of reference from which to juxtapose comparison or a place from which to gather cultural sources, Europe's influence upon America is inevitably tied to colonialism. Paul Giles refers to this relationship in terms of liminality, "concerned always to play off one side of the dividing-line against the other, to reflect the new through the looking-glass of the old" (33 'Liminality'). Specifically, he argues that "Irving's writing, in fact, situates itself on the liminal threshold, whereby it faces in two different directions at once" (35). Indeed, in Irving's writing it becomes apparent that while he looks to the Old World by incorporating European tradition and claiming a cultural heritage, he writes with an American consciousness. This usage is best described in Irving's own words and analogy. In "The Art of Book-Making" he writes of the renewal and transformation of older writings into new forms. Irving asserts, "Thus, it is in the clearing of our American woodlands; where we burn down a forest of stately pines, a progeny of dwarf oaks start up in their place; and we never see the prostrate trunk of a tree, mouldering into the soil, but it gives birth to a whole tribe of fungi" (63). As old boundaries are torn down, new ones arise, but not without the contribution of the old influencing the new. From this combination of old and new, in Irving's case, European past and American consciousness, hybrid sources are formulated in sketches such as "Westminster Abbey," "Rural Funerals," the Christmas sketches, and "Rip Van Winkle." Irving's work portrays this acculturation but its spirit is best described by Walt Whitman. In the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes, "the American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races" (2925). Although

Whitman intends this line as an instruction for American poets, it does in fact describe the purpose of American writers – to inscribe the essence of their nation. Washington Irving meets this challenge, offering readers a cultural production of American identity that portrays both the originality and the elusiveness of its national character.

The hybridity of Irving's writing is best understood as embodying a place between Atlantic regions; yet, Irving too is between boundaries, neither fully grounded in the European culture from which he finds inspiration nor the American culture for which he writes. Bhabha describes this transatlantic space as “the beyond” when he writes, “the beyond, is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past [...] in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present” (1-2). As a result of being within the “beyond,” between new and old, Irving formulates hybrid sketches. He does not leave behind either culture, but rather posits himself in between the horizons of America and Europe. He depicts this “moment of transit” as a static state between coasts in his sketch “The Voyage” as his narrator Geoffrey Crayon travels from New World to Old World. He writes:

The vast space of waters, that separates the hemispheres is like a blank page in existence [...] a wide sea voyage severs us at once. It makes us conscious of being cast loose from the secure anchorage of settled life and sent adrift upon a doubtful world. It interposes a gulph, not merely imaginary, but real, between us and our homes – a gulph subject to tempest and fear and uncertainty, rendering distance palpable. (*Sketch Book* 11)

Like Crayon, Irving was “sent adrift upon a doubtful world” entering a “gulph” both real and unreal; however, it is from this “gulph” that he is able to initiate the creation of a diverse

American identity. Although this postcolonial text differs from the standard of others, it imposes and represents a significant reality of the postcolonial situation – deciphering through the “gulph” or space of uncertainty between worlds to establish a cultural identity.

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