The Art of Literary Tourism: An Approach to Washington Irving's "Sketch Book"

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WHEN *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* first appeared in Britain it was received with magisterial surprise by Francis Jeffrey who saw it as a turning-point in American literature. He expresses surprise that a work written by an American and originally published in America "should be written throughout with the greatest care and accuracy, and worked up to great purity and beauty of diction," and then continues:

> It is the first American work, we rather think of any description, but certainly the first purely literary production, to which we could give this praise; and we hope and trust that we may hail it as the harbinger of a purer and juster taste. . . . for the writers of that great and intelligent country.[1]

Jeffrey hesitates here because, as other critics of the 1818-1820 period recognized, the only other American work which might measure up to this praise was Franklin's *Autobiography*. It is particularly significant that he should point out the historical importance of *The Sketch Book* in Anglo-American literary relations before he comments on the book's intrinsic merits. William Cullen Bryant followed exactly the same procedure in his 1860 address on Irving.[2]

Of course it is theoretically possible that Irving's miscellany might have gained this recognition, a recognition which masks the origin of its status as an American classic, without external circumstances having any direct effect on the book itself. But such is not the case. In *Bracebridge Hall* (1822), the sequel to *The Sketch Book*, Irving expresses amused surprise at the way the earlier work was received: "It has been a matter of marvel, that a man from the wilds of America should express himself in

tolerable English."[3] In both works Irving gently ridicules the prejudiced expectations on the part of an average British reader that he will have to cope with some kind of wild or uncouth writer by adopting a stance of conscious urbanity. More than that, in *Bracebridge Hall* Irving tacitly admits that the honeymoon period in his relation to his readers is now over, and he states "I wish to forestall the censoriousness of the reader."[4] In fact this is by no means a new anxiety on Irving's part. Throughout *The Sketch Book* he constantly adopts an attitude of apology towards his own writings. Again and again he rounds off a sketch with a self-denigrating admission that he has been too verbose, or too trite, or more detailed than his subject warrants. At the end of "The Christmas Dinner," for instance, he imagines a reader accusing him of triviality and deflects the charge by generalizing: "It is so much pleasanter to please than to instruct — to play the companion rather than the preceptor."[5] Although at times this sort of gesture can become an irritating mannerism, it can also be an ingenious tactic for anticipating hostile reactions from the reader. By making it absolutely explicit that his sketches are light Irving makes the charge of superficiality so obvious that in effect it becomes an irrelevance.

There are various reasons why Irving should incorporate within his text an admission that it is dealing with light subjects, and an undoubtedly important one is political. His anticipatory defensiveness is specifically directed towards British readers and the essay "English writers on America" examines the situation which made such defensiveness necessary. At the beginning of the piece he questions the grounds for British hostility towards America and puts it down to the nationalistic bias of British travellers abroad — a fault which Irving takes extreme care to avoid in *The Sketch Book*. Before he waxes too lyrical about the advantages of the new republic Irving seems to sense that he might be antagonizing his British readership and dissipates his criticism through a parent-child analogy between the two countries, America of course being the child. And thus by shifting his tack in mid-essay Irving comes round to the flattering conclusion that "there is no country more worthy of our study than England" (I, 98). As Benjamin Lease has recently pointed out,

this essay has an important historical status in *The Sketch Book*. Irving was writing at a time when Anglo-American relations were particularly tense and by performing a diplomatic balancing act throughout this essay Irving pleads for an end to rancour and avoids the nationalistic extremes of either side.[6]

In the statement quoted above "study" sounds too rigorous for Irving's actual method since *The Sketch Book* follows the broad analogy of a tour. We begin with the crossing ("The Voyage") which is followed by a Liverpool sketch ("Roscoe") and some preliminary general views of British customs and attitudes ("English writers on America" and "Rural Life in England"). The main bulk of the book alternates London sketches with rural ones, here again mimicking local excursions within the broad tour — excursions to Windsor ("A Royal Poet") and to Stratford, for instance. In "The Author's Account of Himself" Irving makes his stance as tourist quite explicit:

> 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, caught sometimes by the delineations of beauty, sometimes by the distortions of caricature, and sometimes by the loveliness of 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.
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> (I, 5)

Here again he rejects anything as intensive as study for sauntering. Irving casts himself as a *flaneur* responsive to any momentary sight or impression, but above all moving at an unhurried pace. *The Sketch Book* is thus the direct product of tourism. In this passage it is interesting to note the care with which Irving avoids attributing too much weight to his own literary enterprise. It is, at least by the portfolio analogy, not original; similarly there are strong suggestions of genial amateurishness particularly in the concluding phrase "for the entertainment of my friends." From the very beginning Irving tries to establish a relaxed conversational intimacy with the reader who is invited to accom-

pany the author on his excursions. This intimacy is all the easier because Irving consistently denies any particular expertise. He denies philosophical insight and even originality in his undertaking by identifying it with current fashions. Lease argues that the narrative voice is crucial here:

> The poetry of Crayon's spell is intensified by the *persona* he creates of the alienated observer, whose self-deprecatory touches suggest that he is not really at home in England or in his own land. . . .[7]

We shall see many examples of this stance which anticipates later treatments of Europe by Hawthorne and James.

The tour-analogy gives Irving an opportunity to pun about his own discursiveness. He describes "The Angler" as a "rambling sketch" which is literally true because it centres on a stroll along the banks of the River Alun. It is also analogically true in the sense that the sketch opens with reflections on Irving's boyhood reading; the specific memory of Izaak Walton leads him on to boyhood fishing expeditions, which leads logically into his encounter with the Cheshire fisherman. The associations are by no means arbitrary but avoid any impression of careful planning and in that the linkages are typical of the whole book. We could thus see the ramble as a metaphor of the book's own predictability and absence of solemn purpose. In *Bracebridge Hall* the invitation to the reader is made clear: "to ramble gently with me, as he would saunter out into the fields, stopping occasionally to gather a flower, or listen to a bird, or admire a prospect, without any anxiety to arrive at the end of his career."[8] The very sentence itself slows down to a leisurely survey of possibilities which muffle the reader's desire for a specific conclusion. One of the differences between *The Sketch Book* and its sequel, however, is that in the latter the reader is based at the Hall and makes trips to nearby villages, gypsy encampments, etc. In other words the notion of the ramble is far more literal, whereas in *The Sketch Book* the ramble or tour becomes an analogue which holds together quite different kinds of writing.

When disembarking at Liverpool Irving noted "I was a stranger in the land" (I, 18) and many of his sketches bear out

Henry James's later generalization that "Americans in Europe are *outsiders.*"[9] At times Irving indulges in a kind of social voyeurism as when he attends country funerals. His stance as spectator only becomes useful when he can build this into a perspective which defamiliarizes the subject of the particular sketch. In "The Art of Bookmaking" a visit to the British Museum is interrupted when Irving sees a "strange-favored being, generally clothed in black" emerging from a room in the interior. Dramatizing his mock-courage as that of an knight errant, Irving penetrates this mysterious sanctum and discovers a room full of "studious personages" scribbling industriously. He refuses to identify this as the reading room until the last possible minute so as to capitalize on the whimsical perspective he has established. This is an effect which Irving manages several times in *The Sketch Book* and it is very similar to the opening scene of James's *The Europeans* where a European visitor's reaction to modern Boston is one of puzzlement. Even in the central core of *The Sketch Book*, the Christmas sequence, we never lose our sense of Irving being an outsider. The sequence is introduced by a general essay ("Christmas") which reminds the reader that he is witnessing an example of rural tradition, so that he cannot simply yield to the narrative. The intermediate sketch, "The Stage Coach," establishes a pretext for Irving going to Bracebridge Hall in a notional friendship with a member of the family, but in a sense this reinforces Irving's position as a visitor. At the height of the festivities the implicit stress on family and local community excludes Irving despite the inward pull of the Dickensian jollity. So he comments of the Christmas Eve dance, "the dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one" (II, 40). It is absolutely characteristic of Irving to compare his experiences with other ones, so that the reader is to an extent held back from imaginative engagement with the scene. Despite their animation, in these sketches Irving remains an observer and not a participant.

As Henry James was to admit in his *Autobiography*, the reactions of an American visitor to Europe are complicated by recognitions.[10] In "The Voyage" Irving makes the point that "there is a volume of associations with the very name" of

Europe (I, 15). Earlier reading in English literature had lodged all kinds of images in Irving's mind which would then be measured against actual scenes. His excursion to Stratford would be one obvious example of this process. But that would only explain a small proportion of the literary allusions and quotations in *The Sketch Book*. Squire Bracebridge, for instance, has adapted one of Herrick's poems into a Christmas carol which gives us an example of a deliberate attempt to keep a tradition (that of carol-singing) alive. This example would contrast with the epigraph to the sketch "Christmas Day" where a quotation from Herrick is foregrounded into Irving's general perspective on Christmas. Indeed one of the functions of his epigraphs is to invite the reader to relate the ensuing narrative with the past, and not necessarily in an indulgently nostalgic way. The Christmas epigraphs raise the question whether seasonal customs have survived, and thereby play a part in the organization of the whole series. "Rural Funerals" takes this method a step further in offering the reader examples of local customs "with extracts from the older British poets who wrote when these rites were more prevalent" (I, 258). At the end of the sketch Irving slides off his main subject on to a meditation on death which blurs his central concern with the continuity between literary passages and rural survivals. Here and elsewhere he uses literature to gain access to British customs or manners. The literature is, in short, a means, which helps to explain partly why on his visit to Windsor Castle Irving should reject the more predictable course of describing the place. Instead his imagination seizes on the story of James I of Scotland's imprisonment and composition of *The King's Quair*. He admits that the sketch may be fanciful, and certainly King James begins to sound suspiciously like an eighteenth-century man of sensibility, but "A Royal Poet" gives us another example of Irving's attempts to relate literature to life, this time by imaginative inference.

The most immediate significance of *The Sketch Book*'s title and of Irving's adopted pseudonym Geoffrey Crayon is to point an analogy between writing and the visual arts. Irving was an amateur sketcher and became a close friend of the Scottish genre-painter Charles Robert Leslie at the time when he was

planning *The Sketch Book*. In fact there was a plan for Leslie to illustrate a new edition of *Diedrich Knickerbocker's A History of New York* and it was probably under the impact of their friendship that Irving adopted his new pseudonym.[11] During this period Irving and Leslie went on a stagecoach journey where the one was jotting down prose impressions while the other was dashing off sketches.[12] Leslie paid generous tribute to Irving's visual sense: "You opened to me a new range of observation in my own art, and a perception of the qualities and character of things which painters do not always imbibe from each other."[13] A later friend of Irving's was his fellow American N. P. Willis, the titles of whose works alone suggest a similar emphasis on the graphic. *Pencillings by the Way* appeared in 1835, *Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil* in 1845 and *Hurry-Graphs; or, Sketches of Scenery, Celebrities, and Society, taken from life* in 1851. Irving's biographer Stanley T. Williams suggests that Willis was consciously imitating Irving by the 1840's.[14]

Throughout *The Sketch Book* Irving excels at quick and concise visual descriptions of characters. The minister at Bracebridge Hall, for instance, is described as follows:

> 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. (II, 56)

Clearly this kind of description exaggerates idiosyncrasies to the point of caricature and in a similar way Irving plays on disproportion in his more famous description of Ichabod Crane. It is partly a method of shorthand because in the passage above the grotesque analogy with a filbert suggests that the parson's life has somehow atrophied which indeed turns out to be the case since he is a scholastic pedant. The size of his wig disqualifies him from the reader's serious consideration and, as in the description of the British Museum researchers, distinguishes him from Irving himself who by his humour demonstrates that he has kept a firm hold on his humanity. This is why in the introductory note to "Rip Van Winkle" we are told that Diedrich Knickerbocker's researches were into *men* not books; and also why the Boar's

Head sketch should have the misleading sub-title "A Shakespearian Research." Irving focuses his attention on the present inhabitants of Eastcheap and on stories he can glean from them. Irving's texts are, in other words, existing places and people. So, although he has a clearly antiquarian interest in many of his subjects, he takes pains "to avoid dryness of scholasticism."

Another consequence of Irving's descriptive interests is that he tends to suspend a narrative or essay in order to compose a tableau which might sum up the particular subject. In "The Broken Heart," one of the more sentimental sketches, a girl's sadness at betrayal is articulated visually in a contrast between her and the other guests at a masquerade. Or again in "The Christmas Dinner" Irving describes the mummery, this time in much greater detail, but in essentially *static* detail, despite the ostensible movement which is taking place. The squire watches it in his capacity as organizer and Irving watches the squire watching it. The perspective recedes from the immediate events towards the past, as if the spectacle were hovering on the verge of history. As we shall see, time and specifically the past, are key preoccupations throughout the book.

When Irving tries to describe rural landscapes the result is stiff and formal. Lewis Leary has commented that "his landscapes were stylized in the manner of the Flemish colorists whom he admired."[15] The following lines are typical:

> Nothing can be more imposing than the magnificance of English park scenery. Vast lawns that extend like sheets of vivid green, with here and there clumps of gigantic trees, heaping up rich piles of foliage; the solemn pomp of groves and woodland glades, with the deer trooping in silent herds across them, the hare, bounding away to the covert, or the pheasant, suddenly bursting upon the wing; the brook, taught to wind in natural meanderings or expand into a glassy lake; the sequestered pool, reflecting the quivering trees, with the yellow leaf sleeping on its bosom, and the trout roaming fearlessly about its limpid waters, while some rustic temple or sylvan statue, grown green and dank with age, gives an air of classic sanctity to the seclusion. (I, 107)

Leary points out that the details here are carefully orchestrated to fit into a mood of lethargic quiescence. The patterned syntax (each main noun has its punctual epithet) and the consciously

generic selection of details resemble the Augustan descriptive ideal of ordered variety, and it is relevant here to remember that Jeffrey, Bryant, and William Hazlitt all agreed that Irving's stylistic models lay in the eighteenth century. When he turns to particular subjects, however, we do not get this overwhelming sense of description conforming to preconceived notions of order and decorum. The Mason's Arms tavern is placed precisely in Miles Lane and the description now follows the sequence of a visitor's first impressions. It has thus a kind of plot to it rather than a general tonal unity. First we have a sense of gloom to contrast the interior with the street; as the observer's eyes get accustomed to the twilight his eyes begin to range around the room, noting its division into boxes and then swinging towards the fire:

> 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 medley of kitchen, parlor, and hall that carried me back to earlier times and pleased me. (I, 217)

Irving both notes particular details and allows them to displace the reader into the past. The inn and its inhabitants are a quaint throwback to an earlier period which explains its interest for Irving. But the particularity of the details, our conviction that they are tangible objects, controls Irving's nostalgia and prevents it from becoming indulgent. Again and again when he is describing London, Irving conveys a sense of the city as a positive labyrinth of self-enclosed areas like Eastcheap or Little Britain where the wanderer can discover fascinating scenes. One common denominator among these scenes and those set in the countryside is that they prove to have some connection with the past. For that reason Hazlitt complained of Irving that "instead of looking round to see what *we are*, he sets to work to describe us as *we were*."[16] Undoubtedly he is right. Irving's view of Britain is selective in the extreme. He is fascinated by the quaint survival, the antique, the throw-back, and it is to this general preoccupation with the past that we should now turn.

Hazlitt's criticisms of Irving appear in an article which compares his writings with those of Charles Lamb, with whom we might expect him to have much in common. "Elia — Geoffrey Crayon" was the concluding essay to *The Spirit of the Age* (1825). Hazlitt devotes most of his attention to Lamb (partly no doubt because they were close friends) and describes him variously as an antiquarian who prefers the obscure and remote, a self-denigrating writer with a preference for the picturesque, and one who avoids aggressive theorizing. His style offers "an agreeable relief to the smooth and insipid monotony of modern composition."[17] Hazlitt then turns to Irving whom he dismisses in about a page as a derivative and obsequious writer. He is, Hazlitt argues, so heavily influenced by his eighteenth-century models that he produces "literary *anachronisms*." The whole article is grossly unfair because all of Hazlitt's comments on Lamb, apart from that on his style, would apply equally well to Irving. It reveals Hazlitt's bias that he can slide so easily from praising Lamb's writings to praising his person. Despite the evident bias, this article has the value of pointing to Irving's preoccupation with the past, and also of showing an important difference between his method and Lamb's. Witness, for example, the beginning of his essay "The South-Sea House":

> Reader, in thy passage from the Bank — where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself) — to the Flower Pot, to secure a place for Dalston, or Shacklewell, or some other thy suburban retreat northerly, — didst thou never observe a melancholy looking, handsome, brick and stone edifice, to the left — where Threadneedle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate? I dare say thou hast often admired its magnificent portals ever gaping wide, and disclosing to view a grave court, with cloisters, and pillars, with few or no traces of goers-in or comers-out — a desolation something like Balclutha's.[18]

This passage resembles Irving's tactic in several of his London sketches of leading the reader away from the familiar to discover some hitherto neglected area which is rich in antiquarian interest. The striking difference from Irving's sketches comes in Lamb's style. He adopts a consciously ornate — or, as Hazlitt admitted, *mannered* — style, using the archaic "thy" and

describing himself with humorous scholasticism as "a lean annuitant." The sentence begins with a conversational ease and sporadically returns to direct address, but Lamb clogs his syntax with insertions so as to fill out the generic image of his suburban reader going home from the City. In the last sentence of the paragraph he hypothesizes *some* interest on the part of the notional reader although it very quickly becomes ambiguous whether Lamb is describing or whipping up interest. The whole passage idiosyncratically mixes conversational ease with antiquarian reflection, and it is in this sense that Hazlitt suggests Lamb's style rejects the present. By contrast we devote our main attention to the sequence of Irving's thoughts, to his variety of stances, but almost never to vocabulary and syntax. His Addisonian clarity is a long way from Lamb's ornate style which constantly reminds the reader of the writer's personality.

In his account of himself Irving explains that he has always had a "rambling propensity" and in *Bracebridge Hall* he declares "there is nothing so fascinating to a young mind as the idea of travelling," but then continues: "there is a limit to all our enjoyments, and every desire bears its death in its gratification."[19] Part of Irving's fascination with travel is a yearning after the distant but at the same time he shows a Keatsian awareness of how fleeting all pleasure is. Instead of trying to prolong the moment of pleasure, Irving withdraws one remove from the whole search for gratification. Mutability is a constantly recurring theme throughout *The Sketch Book* and at times is articulated from a perspective outside itself. The concern with mutability thereby becomes an important development of Irving's spectatorial stance and helps to explain his interest in death. In "Westminster Abbey" he synchronizes a stroll around the abbey with a meditation on the brevity of human life. His entry into the abbey via a narrow passage from Westminster School sets up a brief Gothic image of damp crumbling walls and moss-grown monuments. Once inside Irving devotes his attention to the monuments but centres his meditation on the irony that these monuments, intended to buttress memory against time, are themselves subject to transience: "A little longer and even these faint records will be obliterated, and the monument will cease to be a

memorial" (I, 310). As if in confirmation of this process Irving tries to gather his thoughts about the monuments at the end of the sketch and finds that they have blurred together. His conclusion, significantly a *visual* one, is to assemble images of ruins after human life itself has passed away:

> The time must come when its gilded vaults, which now spring so loftily, shall lie in rubbish beneath the feet; when, instead of the sound of melody and praise, the wind shall whistle through the broken arches, and the owl hoot from the shattered tower; when the garish sunbeam shall break into these gloomy mansions of death, and the ivy twine around the fallen column, and the foxglove hang its blossoms about the nameless urn, as if in mockery of the dead. Thus man passes away; his name perishes from record and recollection; his history is as a tale that is told, and his very monument becomes a ruin. (I, 326)

Partly a meditation on the vanity of monuments, partly a recognition of how small a place man occupies in the span of time itself, Irving's view here inevitably suggests a melancholy which tinges all the sketches in the volume. Even during the Christmas gaiety at Bracebridge Hall, Irving retains a background sense that he is watching customs artificially preserved which will in fact very soon become extinct. His portrait of John Bull is even gloomier because the extravagance necessary to support an obviously attractive image of the jolly English squire actually destroys that image by reducing him to poverty. At the opposite extreme "The Mutability of Literature" presents a comic fantasy on the theme of transience by giving past books an opportunity to rail against the shifts in public taste and fashion.

It should be clear by now that several of the pieces in *The Sketch Book* are not descriptive in any straightforward sense and therefore we need to examine a little more closely what Irving means by a "sketch." Its earliest application to literature occurs in John Armstrong's *Sketches: or, Essays on Various Subjects* (1758). In his foreword he explains:

> The Author of the following Papers chuses to call them *Sketches*; as the least imperfect amongst them is to a laboured Treatise what The Painter's Outlines, or his first rude Draughts, are to a finished Picture.[20]

By the end of the century and the beginning of the next the term had come to be applied to small-scale biographies (by Lockhart and others), and to mixed poetry (Blake's *Poetical Sketches* appeared in 1783) or poetry which used the analogy with the graphic arts (Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches* came out in 1793). Armstrong's use of the term, however, is the most relevant to *The Sketch Book* because it approximately classified the contents of a miscellany; his volume contained essays on such diverse topics as language, genius, taste, spelling, and wit. For Armstrong "sketch" covers a diversity of topics; for Irving it rather covers a broad range of literary types. *The Sketch Book* includes examples of essay, meditation, anecdote, reverie, fantasy, and narrative to name only a few. "Sketch" therefore is a hybrid term which can cut across a lot of different genres. Common to all the pieces is that they are in some way outlines or light productions. As we shall see, Irving's insistence on lightness proves to be closely tied to his sense of transience.

Within the spectatorial stance which Irving adopts we can identify a certain kind of yearning:

> 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 common-place realities of the present and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past. (I, 3-4)

We have already seen Irving's modification of tourism into a literary stroll or ramble. Inevitably this involved a selection of the picturesque or quaint for description which in most cases involved a selection of historical buildings, places, etc. Irving's attention is thus regularly bending back towards the past. What is new in this passage is his impulse to escape from the present altogether. In the notebook he kept while working on *The Sketch Book* Irving outlined a slightly different but no less pleasing kind of withdrawal: "He seeks the deep seclusion of studious solitude to bathe in the pure fountains of literature — abstracted from the world & its vanities & buried in his own meditations."[21] In practice this sort of withdrawal was something which attracted Irving temperamentally rather than a real possibility, and we can see various ways in which he controls this

escapist impulse in *The Sketch Book*. In "The Voyage," for instance, he lolls against the ship's rail creating "fairy realms" out of his fancy until the remains of a wreck drift by. In "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" the reader is introduced into a dreamy never-never land but prevented from yielding to the languor of the place by the historical ironies of the one tale and the textual complexities of the other. And when Irving is presenting an inn, for instance, the physical actuality of the details pull against his nostalgia and once again prevent the reader from yielding to the latter. Throughout *The Sketch Book* Irving casts himself as a dilettante who lolls, muses, wanders, and strolls his way through his subjects. In the preface which he added to the revised edition of the book he quotes a letter where he told Walter Scott (who had offered him the editorship of a new journal) that he was not fit for regular employment: "My whole course of life has been desultory, and I am unfitted for any periodically recurring task, or any stipulated labor of body or mind."[22] This kind of description exactly fits the persona which he creates in *The Sketch Book*.

Whatever the subject of a particular sketch, we rarely lose our awareness of the narrator's presence. In "The Art of Bookmaking," for instance, he casts himself first as an idler and then as a knight errant penetrating the inner mysteries of the British Museum. He then shifts yet again to reflect that the researchers are there because of Providence's care for the transmission of knowledge, a thought which he immediately dismisses as rambling fancy. The "plot" of this sketch and others thus proves to be the variety of stances the narrator goes through. It is quite typical for the sequence to dismiss itself as fancy and this is one way in which Irving avoids the solemn. It is quite consistent with this method that "L'Envoy" should end with a metaphor of travelling ("the kindness with which he [the author] is treated encourages him to go on, hoping that in time he may acquire a steadier footing" (II, 341). This culminates the references to tourism and denies any artificial completion to the work. At one point in *Bracebridge Hall* Irving sees a young couple pass through a gallery and interprets this as a metaphor of the brevity of life ("an emblem of her [the girl's] lot"). This prompts him

in turn to imagine a point in the none too distant future "when I and my scribblings shall have lived through our brief existence, and been forgotten."[23] Given Irving's constant preoccupation with time it is consistent for him to predict the obsolescence of his own writings and this is another reason why he should insist on their lightness. From his point of view he is only being realistic since the most he can hope for is a brief passing effect on the reader. Thus even one of the most powerful sketches in the series — "Westminster Abbey" — contains within itself the reasons why nothing in *The Sketch Book* can take on permanent importance.

To Irving's astonishment *The Sketch Book* became an immediate success in Britain and gained him entry into London literary circles. This was reflected in his nomination as member of the Shakespeare Memorial committee, a nomination which provoked some angry outbursts in the more nationalistic periodicals.[24] It may well be that the success of *The Sketch Book* was due to its urbane and skilful avoidance of any contentious subjects. The only two sketches which Irving wrote in America, "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket," might have provoked some controversy in America in their plea for a humane attitude towards the Indians, but would probably have been safely remote to Irving's English readers. On the whole *The Sketch Book* adopts a briefly flattering attitude towards England whose densely textured surface invites the meditations and descriptions of Irving's persona. However, the brief storm caused by his nomination demonstrated that national sensitivity had not yet disappeared.

NOTES

[1] [Francis Jeffery], "The Sketch Book," *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 34 (1820), 160.

[2] Franklin is mentioned, e.g., by Sydney Smith in his review of recent American travel literature (*Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 31 (1818), p 144). Bryant's comments on *The Sketch Book* appear in *Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. Parke Godwin (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 349-50.

[3] *Bracebridge Hall, or The Humorists*, Vol. I (London: John Murray, 1822), p. 3.

[4] *Bracebridge Hall*, I, 4.

[5] *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, Vol. II, 2nd edition (London: John Murray, 1823), p. 95. Page references are to this edition except where otherwise stated and incorporated into the text.

[6] Benjamin Lease, *Anglo-American Encounters: England and the Rise of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 14.

[7] Lease, *Anglo-American Encounters*, p. 24.

[8] *Bracebridge Hall*, I, 20.

[9] "Americans Abroad," originally published in *The Nation* (3 October 1878), reprinted in Henry James, *The American*, ed. James W. Tuttleton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 359.

[10] Cf. Henry James, *Autobiography*, ed. F. W. Dupee (London: W. H. Allen, 1956), p. 549.

[11] Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 169-70.

[12] Van Wyck Brooks, *The World of Washington Irving* (London: J. M. Dent, 1957), p. 135.

[13] Williams, *Life*, I, 169.

[14] Williams, *Life*, II, 102.

[15] Lewis Leary, *Soundings: Some Early American Writers* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 308.

[16] William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, ed. E. D. Mackerness (London: Collins, 1969), p. 292.

[17] *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 285.

[18] Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (London: J. M. Dent, 1890), p. 1.

[19] *Bracebridge Hall*, II, 67.

[20] Launcelot Temple [pseud.], *Sketches: or, Essays on Various Subjects* (London: A. Millar, 1758), v-vi.

[21] *Notes While Preparing "Sketch Book" &c.*, ed. Stanley T. Williams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 59.

[22] *The Sketch Book* (New York: Signet Books, 1961), x.

[23] *Bracebridge Hall*, I, 65.

[24] This episode is described in detail by Lease (*Anglo-American Encounters*, pp. 19-21).