The Subversive Storyteller

The Subversive Storyteller:
The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America

By

Michelle Pacht

The Subversive Storyteller: The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America,
by Michelle Pacht

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by Michelle Pacht

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-0165-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0165-2

For Ian,
who makes everything better

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction 1

Section I: The Making of a Genre

Chapter One.. 9
America's Earliest Cycles: Defining a Nation
  An American Abroad in Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*.. 10
  Sympathy for the Enemy in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Legends of the Province-House*... 15

Chapter Two 23
Exploring America: Local Color Fiction
  A City Girl's Rural Education in Sarah Orne Jewett's *Deephaven*...... 24
  How to Reform a Racist: Genre as Politics in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* 27

Section II: Moving Towards the Modern

Chapter Three 37
Art in America: The Tyranny of the Marketplace
  Gender and the Destructive Nature of Art in Willa Cather's *The Troll Garden* 38
  Reclaiming the Rights of the Artist in Henry James's *The Finer Grain*.. 50

Chapter Four... 61
War Stories: Protest through Literature
  Succumbing to Fear: Nick Adams and the Lost Generation in Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* 62
  Admitting Guilt: The McCaslins and the Sins of the South in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* 72

Section III: A Fractured Society: Seeking (and Finding) Community

Chapter Five 89
With and Without God: Isolation and Redemption
    Violence as Grace in Flannery O’Connor’s *Everything That Rises Must Converge* 91
    Isolation as Community in Raymond Carver’s *Cathedral* 102

Chapter Six 113
Creating Community: Ethnicity and American Identity
    Talk-Story and Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* 115
    Reservation Politics Goes Mainstream in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* 123

Conclusion 137

Bibliography 141

Index 161

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the culmination of many years of research, writing, and teaching on the American short story and short story cycle. It originated with the work I did at the CUNY Graduate Center, where I had the enormous benefit of Norman Kelvin’s sharp eye and generous spirit. I could not have written this book without his continued input and support. I feel fortunate to have had him as a mentor and am honored to call him a colleague and friend.

I am grateful to Marc Dolan and Bill Kelly for their guidance as I wrote and re-wrote early versions of this text, and to Gregory Erickson and Phyllis Van Slyck for sharing their wisdom and expertise during the publication process. I also thank Kimberly Feltes and Jennifer Lemberg, whose caring and friendship have been a source of comfort and joy to me for more years than I care to remember.

I feel privileged to know Esther Mohr, whose incredible warmth and generosity have truly enriched my life. Indeed, I am indebted to all the members of my newly expanded family, who have welcomed me with such open arms.

The unflagging love and support of my parents, Betty and Saul Pacht, have made all of my accomplishments possible. They showed me by example that hard work and dedication can make even one’s wildest dreams come true. I am also grateful to my brother, Steven; not only did he join me for a twelve-hour jaunt to Milledgeville, he saved me from having to write this book on parchment.

Finally, I thank my students—past, present, and future—who, in creating a community within which to share and discuss ideas, make it all worthwhile.

INTRODUCTION

The Subversive Storyteller: The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America examines how nineteenth- and twentieth-century American authors adapted and expanded the short story cycle to convey subversive or controversial ideas without alienating readers and endangering their positions within the literary marketplace. The twelve authors highlighted in this book span the first two centuries of America's literary tradition and come from a wide range of cultural, racial, and geographic backgrounds. Their texts exploit the fragmentation and inherent lack of cohesion of the genre to reflect the changing realities of life in America. Some are considered canonical, some are not, but in my exploration of Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Legends of the Province-House*, Sarah Orne Jewett's *Deephaven*, Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*, Willa Cather's *The Troll Garden*, Henry James's *The Finer Grain*, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*, William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, Flannery O'Connor's *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* I demonstrate how each represents a different stage in the development of the short story cycle in America. These texts also exemplify the efforts these authors made to carve out unique identities for themselves—as writers, as individuals, and as Americans.

Neither a miscellaneous short story collection nor a traditionally unified novel, the short story cycle can express both the plight of an individual and the fate of a community through its very structure. Despite the different thematic and structural choices made by the authors discussed in this book, the texts examined here indicate a struggle to define and understand the always-changing world in which the characters–and their creators–live. Though published as a unified collection, each text discussed here was, in fact, created from existing pieces by either the author or the author's editors and publishers. *The Subversive Storyteller* examines how these texts are held together, whether by a preface, the arrangement of the stories, thematic ties, a collective protagonist, or the addition of stories expressly written to fill perceived gaps. It also explores how the spaces in between the stories are often as crucial to understanding the larger meaning of the text as the stories themselves, particularly when presenting a controversial point of view.

In his 1842 *Graham's Magazine* review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's collection *Twice-Told Tales*, Edgar Allan Poe defined the short story as a work whose author must first have "conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect" (*Essays and Reviews*, 572). Since that time critics have been fascinated by this genre and the single, preconceived effect it attempts to create. The short story often highlights a single character reacting to a specific situation, a narrowness that enables it to be complete despite its brevity. Ian Reid takes Poe's definition one step further and claims that stories "frequently focus on one or two individuals who are seen as separated from their fellow-men in some way, at odds with the social norms, beyond the pale" (27). This sense of separation from society is reflected in literary magazines, the story's earliest form of presentation to the reading public. Beginning in the nineteenth century, stories have primarily been read in these magazines, set amidst a wide range of miscellaneous pieces, from news briefs to recipes. The resultant physical isolation of the story is often a reflection on the state of the story's characters.

Judith Leibowitz differentiates the short story from the novel by contending "the novel's task is elaboration, whereas the short story's is limitation" (qtd. in Reid 44). What would happen if the individual's plight as depicted in a short story were combined with other stories to create a community of sorts, an elaboration? What would we call it? Both "short story sequence" and "composite novel" have been used to describe such a work, but "short story cycle" best fits the genre I discuss here, since the circularity and return to the beginning implied by the word "cycle" is instrumental to the function of these texts. Because this sort of text requires the reader to "construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them cumulative thematic impact" (Luscher, 149), its true purpose becomes clear only after reading it in its entirety. Each story's significance within the larger framework of the cycle shifts with each subsequent story, therefore one must read the text through to the end and then start over at the beginning in order to fully understand its meaning. It is important for the words "short story" to be used as well, since it is the combination of generic elements, and the prominence of the short story within that combination, that allows these texts to accomplish tasks that a traditional novel or short story collection could not. The novel's conclusiveness requires a depth and finality not suited to the fractured existence of nineteenth and twentieth century America, while the short story's specificity makes it difficult for it to express larger, more inclusive themes. The story cycle resolves this dilemma by incorporating the relevant aspects of each genre into a unique text.

The short story cycle's ancestry can be traced as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*, with early forerunners including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio's *Decameron,* Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. While also composed of independent stories presented together through an external frame, these collections lack both internal linking and firm structural unity. As Forrest Ingram notes, the cycle is "a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (19). Story cycles are made up of elements often called text-pieces, a term that applies to any component of the larger text, including poems, quotations, fragments, and, of course, short stories. While story collections or miscellanies permit rearrangement of these component parts, the text-pieces of a short story cycle require a certain sequence in order for the larger text to achieve its desired effect. Authors create a rhythm for the reader through the placement of the various elements, juxtaposing text-pieces to produce a particular effect and using the contrast between them to help convey their point. Moving any of the pieces of the text would therefore disrupt the invisible links that tie them together.

The opening text-piece tends to introduce the themes that will be elucidated throughout the cycle just as the closing piece sums them up and expresses the author's final thoughts on the subject. The order of the internal pieces cannot be changed without changing the impression the text makes on the reader. Though the works of Homer, Ovid, Chaucer, and others look forward to the short story cycle, their sporadic appearance over the centuries implies a genre that is not yet fully developed. A sustained interest in the cycle first becomes apparent only in the nineteenth century and the form is more fully realized by twentieth-century authors. Its unusual generic makeup allows the short story cycle to accomplish unique goals; goals that help fulfill the particular needs of American authors. While the story cycle is not an exclusively American phenomenon (James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Ivan Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* immediately come to mind), the genre is particularly well suited to the inhabitants of a new and growing nation.

The short story is the primary component of the story cycle and it, too, has been called particularly American. As Martin Scofield writes, "It could be argued…that around the 1820s and 1830s the Americans virtually invented what has come to be called ‘the short story’, in its modern literary sense” (1), noting that “it is perhaps the ‘lightness’ and mobility of the short story, above all, that suits it to the preoccupations of a fast developing rural and urban culture, characterized by the diversity of its traditions and the mixed nature of its population” (8). America’s booming magazine market helped contribute to the popularity of the growing genre by creating a venue for the short story, allowing it—and its authors—to thrive. But as early as the nineteenth century, American authors measured their success by the number of bound books to their names rather than the number of “disposable” magazine publications. The short story cycle allowed authors to adapt and combine their shorter works to create longer texts, thereby solidifying their literary reputations.

The Subversive Storyteller explores the development of the story cycle in America through twelve representative texts. Roxanne Harde notes that “James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) is often credited as the first story sequence or collection of linked short stories, and…Sherwood Anderson claimed that he had invented the genre with *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)” (1), but earlier examples of the genre can quickly be found. This book is divided into three sections that delineate the three major phases of the story cycle in this country. Section I: The Making of a Genre, explores the earliest American cycles, including Washington Irving’s *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-20), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Legends of the Province-House* (1837), Sarah Orne Jewett’s *Deephaven* (1877), and Charles W. Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* (1899). As representatives of a genre still in the making, all share the use of narrative frames, repeated characters, and single locations in their examinations of the historical, political, and cultural perspectives that define the times in which their authors lived. These elements create explicit connections between the stories within, something that later authors abandoned in favor of more tenuous connections that the reader must identify and interpret. Despite these explicit connections, there are implicit connections as well, and it is here that these authors manage subtly to convey their subversive content.

As its title suggests, Section II: Moving Towards the Modern, introduces the story cycle as part of a modern tradition that recognizes the isolated nature of the individual. While the earlier story cycles depend on external frames, twentieth-century authors are comfortable enough with the genre to bind their texts together thematically instead. This section traces the changes apparent in the genre as represented by Willa Cather’s *The Troll Garden* (1905), Henry James’s *The Finer Grain* (1910), Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1930), and William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1940). In these examples, the authors create connections in the spaces *between* the stories, linking each text internally without the benefit of a narrative frame, a common setting, or a common narrator. Instead, repeated metaphors, varied settings, and collective protagonists are used to extend the scope of the genre beyond just one person in one location. In doing so, these authors express culturally and politically unpopular ideas by exploiting the cycle's ability to integrate disparate narrative threads while still highlighting the discontinuity inherent in the genre.

Section III, A Fractured Society: Seeing (and Finding) Community, looks at more recent examples of the story cycle, including Flannery O'Connor's *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1956), Raymond Carver's *Cathedral* (1981), Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* (1975), and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984/1993). O'Connor and Carver address the growing sense of isolation experienced by Americans in an increasingly disjointed world. Their characters struggle to find some sort of connection in a society where religious faith and a sense of community have all but disappeared. Despite the beliefs of mainstream American society, God and family are no longer enough to resolve the pressing social problems of the day. The cycles by Kingston and Erdrich, however, are able to combine the oral traditions of their respective heritages with the written tradition of Western literature to create a multi-cultural community for their characters. These texts subvert accepted ideas about the West's supremacy over the "exotic" other in positing that only by combining cultures can community be found.

My classification of these texts as short story cycles may be surprising to some, since most have more traditionally been called story collections, novels, or memoirs—even by the authors themselves. This genre confusion is natural and I do not preclude the use of other appellations for these texts by calling them story cycles. A story cycle is easily mistaken for a story collection; the difference, of course, is in the connections between the stories that may or may not exist in a collection but is the hallmark of the cycle. By definition, the story cycle often acts like a novel so this blurriness between genres is also to be expected. The novel has long been deemed to be both the most commercial and prestigious literary form, so it makes sense for authors (and their publishers) to attempt to enhance their reputations—and their sales—by calling their works novels. There is no reason why a story cycle cannot also be a memoir, a piece of historical fiction, and/or a local color text. My focus on genre here is part of an effort to be inclusive, not exclusive; to reveal and explore the many layers often hidden within one text.

The Subversive Storyteller examines how each of these twelve texts expresses the concerns of the time in which it was written through the genre itself, as well as the role the American literary marketplace plays in the development of this form. It makes sense then to organize the chapters chronologically, since historical and cultural events are often key to understanding the goals of each author and each text. In most cases, the text-pieces that make up the story cycle were published separately before and/or after publication of the whole text, often as revisions of the original. Since these revisions often help establish a text as a cycle, the changes made will be discussed in detail in the coming pages. The publication history of each text (the parts as well as the whole) is also important, since these authors were aware of the need to produce a saleable commodity and all struggled in different ways with the profession of authorship. They published primarily in the mass-market magazines of their day and were often forced to shorten, simplify, or otherwise adjust their styles to satisfy the popular tastes of both readers and editors.

The three classifications within the short story cycle genre proposed by Forrest Ingram are also considered. The *composed* cycle is the most unified and is defined as a text that was planned as such from its inception. A cycle that was conceived of as a whole only after it was begun is considered a less unified *completed* cycle. The least unified is the *arranged* cycle, a cycle put together after the stories that comprise it have been written (17-18). *Completed* and *arranged* cycles usually require the author to add to, delete from, or otherwise revise the text-pieces so that they will make sense within the new larger scheme to which they belong. *Composed* cycles are created as cycles and do not share this necessity; they therefore tend to exist in fewer extant versions. Despite the different origins these categories imply, all still describe something different from and greater than a typical story collection. Each text-piece first creates its own space before being combined with others like it to create a larger, more coherent space to which they all contribute. The short story's limitation is therefore combined with the novel's elaboration without losing the integrity of either genre. As we will see, the authors discussed here take advantage of the story cycle's unique generic makeup to express subversive or controversial ideas subtly, thereby preventing damage to their reputations—or their pocketbooks.

SECTION I:

THE MAKING OF A GENRE

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICA'S EARLIEST CYCLES: DEFINING A NATION

Two of the earliest American examples of the story cycle, Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Legends of the Province-House*, are informed by a desire to create a uniquely American literary legacy. The short story cycle's structure allows Irving and Hawthorne simultaneously to acknowledge Britain as America's influential predecessor and express the recent colonies' intention to establish themselves as a nation. As the individual stories describe his various tours through England, Geoffrey Crayon becomes a stand-in for Irving as well as for the reader, and it is only when we look at the stories together, that many of the time's political anxieties are revealed. Similarly, Hawthorne uses his narrator to hold the four Province-House tales together. While each story elucidates a different point regarding America's role in the War of Independence, the frame created by the series of storytellers (and by the house itself) imbues the text with a larger meaning that would likely not have been palatable to his readers at the time had he expressed it outright.

Both texts rely heavily on an external frame and a common narrator to create unity between the text-pieces. Both frames provide a context for the stories that are contained within; Irving presents a travelogue through which he explores a number of historical spaces while Hawthorne focuses on one building in particular. Irving's narrator, Geoffrey Crayon, is the voice through which each element of the text is expressed, though he acknowledges other sources before him. Hawthorne, too, has one narrator through whom the stories of others are funneled and who learns the importance of storytelling as he narrates. While Irving's cycle shifted and changed as it was being created, Hawthorne presented his in a more fully articulated form from the beginning. However, both authors were forced to adapt the way they presented their texts to the public by their contemporary publishing conditions. Though they are early examples of a genre that has grown significantly in the generations since their publication, both *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and the

Legends of the Province-House clearly exemplify traits representative of the short story cycle.

An American Abroad in Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*

The first internationally renowned American writer, Washington Irving is often credited with establishing the short story form in this country. His most acclaimed and remembered works were released in America as a series of seven pamphlets beginning in May 1819, appearing at irregular intervals through September 1820. Despite their seemingly haphazard presentation, there was a plan to present the sketches (later to be published as *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*) as part of a larger work, making the text a pre-cursor of the arranged short story cycle. The process of composition and publication offers valuable insight into the genre that has become one of America's most representative forms. Irving has indicated that in putting the elements of *The Sketch-Book* together, genre was a particular concern; he resisted (and would continue to resist) writing a novel or other long prose piece and hoped instead to give greater credence to and expand the possibilities of the shorter literary work. As Irving wrote to his friend Henry Brevoort on December 11, 1824, "I have preferred adopting the mode of sketches and short tales rather than long works, because I choose to take a line of writing peculiar to myself, rather than fall into the manner or school of any other writer" (Neider, xxvii). Irving clearly recognized the craft required of shorter works and chose to hone his existing talent rather than attempt a longer form. He was also aware of the scorn with which American writers were viewed at the time and hoped to change attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic by producing writing that would be admired by all. At the same time, he recognized the dilemma between America's desire to create a unique national identity and its continued connection to its British heritage. This subversive goal—to celebrate America's "independence" while at the same time acknowledging its continued debt to its British past—is well-served by the genre Irving chooses to employ here.

When read as a unit, it is clear that the sketches, essays, and stories that make up *The Sketch-Book* work together in a way that miscellaneous parts randomly thrown together would not. Irving's creation of the text's narrator, Geoffrey Crayon, indicates a desire for unity and cohesion. As Irving wrote in his Preface to the Revised Edition: "The following papers, with two exceptions, were written in England, and formed but part of an intended series for which I had made notes and memorandums…however, circumstances compelled me to send them piecemeal to the United States, where they were published from time to time in portions or numbers” (Manning, 5). The circumstances were apparently financial, as can be gathered from Irving’s note to his brother Ebenezer: "This letter is accompanied by a small parcel containing some manuscript for publication…A large edition should be struck off…and the price must be pretty high…large editions make good profits. I want to receive the profits from it as soon as possible as my purse is slender" (Myers, 43). He was not sure the manuscript would be well-received, but it was clear that Irving had other works on hand should his first attempt prove popular: “I shall be anxious to hear of the success of this first re-appearance on the literary stage. Should it be successful, I trust I shall be able henceforth to keep up an occasional fire” (Ibid). This interest in not just the publication, but also the financial details of that publication, indicates Irving’s concern regarding his reduced circumstances. Despite his apparent desire to collect the text-pieces into one larger text at the time, he had a pressing need to publish the sketches as quickly and profitably as possible.

As it turned out, the pamphlets were well-received, and despite their piecemeal presentation these literary sketches do indeed create a greater narrative whole when combined, just as several sheets of drawn sketches might together provide a greater sense of one large picture. William Hedges calls the original American publication of *The Sketch-Book* "a cross between a book and a periodical. The make-up of later installments was not fully determined until earlier ones had come out. But… a sense of coherence emerges in patterns of imagery functioning in relation to the central figure of Crayon" (129). By making Crayon the focus and center of each text-piece (including the Knickerbocker stories), Irving uses his protagonist to bring together the individual parts of his text. As Susan Manning writes in her introduction to the text, "its sketches are populated throughout by verbal embodiments of the voice and moods of Crayon, echoes and reflections which help to establish an extraordinary cohesiveness of tone over the disparate moods and genres gestured at in the work" (xxv). The aging traveler is also a reflection of Irving himself, and taken together, his adventures reveal a great deal about the author’s state of mind at the time they were written.

Critics have argued that *The Sketch-Book* represents Irving’s own struggle against loneliness and depression; a result of the many losses he suffered in the decade or so before it was first published. These begin with the death of his fiancée in 1809, his mother’s death in 1817, and the failure of the family business in 1818.[1] This apparent search for a means by which to express his grief would explain the many literary modes that are easily recognizable in *The Sketch-Book*, including the essay, German gothic, satire, and allegory. Of course, Irving also wanted his American audience to appreciate the writing as literary; this meant using British traditions that would be both familiar and recognizable as such. Like the authors Crayon encounters in the reading room of the British Museum in "The Art of Book-Making," Irving in this text tries on garments borrowed from those who came before him. In praising *The Sketch-Book* in the *Edinburgh Review* of August 1820, Francis Jeffreys expresses surprise that it is "the work of an American, entirely bred and trained in that country…written throughout with the greatest care and accuracy, and worked up to great purity and beauty of diction, on the model of the most elegant and polished of our native writers" (Reichart, xiii). Irving was clearly correct in his view that an American had to co-opt the valued traditions of the day in order to be taken seriously as a writer. Given the dire international reputation assigned to American writers at the time, his desire to borrow from his English ancestors makes sense.

Surface similarities between the various sketches and essays of *The Sketch-Book* become immediately apparent. For example, each text-piece opens with an epigraph taken from the works of a well-known British author, an effort to link the work to that of the accepted canon of the time. Just as borrowing the literary modes of predecessors gives the American Crayon authenticity, borrowing the actual words of these revered authors provides the narrator with a long and illustrious heritage of which he can be proud. Thematically, too, the text-pieces are linked, for every time Crayon delves into the secrets of British society in search of meaning, he ends up face to face with the reality of the mundane. By putting these exploits into the words of Crayon, Irving can distance himself from his protagonist while at the same time satisfying his own desire for knowledge and information. He can tour with Crayon, record his alter ego's impressions, and then step back to view more objectively what Crayon has seen. This allows him to comment more honestly on what he sees since the ideas are being filtered through another's persona. The frame also creates one of the strongest internal links between the sketches, despite their publication as separate entities.

Despite this intended cohesion, Irving chose to call his work *The Sketch-Book,* with its implicit apologies and shortcomings apparent in the very title. As Rubin-Dorsky writes, "the word 'sketch' implies a preliminary study or a representation of a work of art intended for elaboration; and while a sketch may have line, shading, and color, it connotes hastiness and incompleteness” (55). The project seemed designed specifically to lack the uniformity of a novel, to suggest rather than spell out its meaning. The word “sketch” also takes advantage of the contemporary interest in travel sketching, indicating Irving's desire to be both popular and successful by catering to the reading public's desires. While Irving played into the implications of his choice of genre, he counteracted the incompleteness of the form by balancing the word “sketch” with the word “book” in the title. A book works as both a literal and figurative means of holding the sketches together; it physically and metaphorically connects and ties them to one another. The clear indication is that these are not loose sheets of paper that can be re-arranged; they are the fixed pages of a book, one following the other in a specific order.

---

[1] Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift*, 37

The cohesiveness of the text is complicated by the fact that there are several existing editions of *The Sketch-Book*. According to Irving’s journals, he had begun to make notes for some of the sketches as early as 1810 (when he alluded to what would become “Rural Funerals”) and as late as 1818 (when he made further notes on “Rural Funerals” and referred to elements of “A Country Church” and “The Boar’s Head Tavern”).[2] As the pamphlets appeared in America, British periodicals began publishing pieces of *The Sketch-Book* without the author’s permission or supervision (and, naturally, without offering royalties), leading Irving to publish an English edition of what had been originally conceived of as a text for American audiences. For the 1820 two-volume edition published in England, Irving added “Traits of Indian Character” and “Philip of Pokanoket,” the only text-pieces written in America, and “L’Envoi,” the short piece that closes the text. The two Indian tales first appeared in the 1814 volume of the *Analectic* magazine, which Irving edited from 1813 to 1815, and while many thought they were used as mere filler for the later publication, they succeed in conveying the larger thematic goal of the text; to resolve the dilemma of national identity suffered by both Irving and his persona. Just as the British do in sketches like “Westminster Abbey,” “Christmas Eve,” and “Christmas Day,” among others, the Native Americans portrayed by Crayon in these newer pieces attempt to recognize and preserve their cultural heritage.

The “Author’s Revised Edition” (ARE) of *The Sketch-Book* was published in 1848, and includes a total of 35 separate text-pieces, including several that are entirely new to the collection (such as the

---

[2] Reichart and Schlissel, 27, 255, 29

"Preface to the Revised Edition," the postscript to "Rip Van Winkle," and "Notes Concerning Westminster Abbey"). Two of these, "A Sunday in London" and "London Antiques," were apparently written at the same time as the other *Sketch-Book* pieces but had not been included in earlier editions. Irving's final revisions and corrections, made two years before his death, are included in the ARE, making it the one edition that reflects the author's choices regarding order and placement. These numerous sets of changes indicate that the collection's unity was still incomplete as Irving struggled to refine and reorganize his earlier work in the final years of his life.

While *The Sketch-Book* primarily represents Crayon's personality as it is defined by his wanderings, these wanderings also demonstrate Crayon's position as a man caught between nations. His journey *from* home is intended in part to help him *return* home—spiritually, if not literally. He is constantly searching his new surroundings for bits of useful information to pass on to those he has left behind. As Rubin-Dorsky notes, the text "is structured in terms of problem/solution, and…the solution to America's crisis of identity can be found through the English and through the Indians" (98). The journey therefore does more than teach Crayon, it can help teach those in America as well. Through Irving's visions and sketches of England, as told by Crayon, readers can learn how America, too, can become a successful society. Of course, having just freed themselves from Britain's control, citizens of this new nation may not have appreciated this particular message had it been expressed outright by Irving. The genre and its frame therefore provide a buffer for this likely unpopular idea.

Though the pamphlets were not illustrated, drawings were subsequently made for many of the sketches, particularly the five Christmas pieces ("Christmas," "The Stage Coach," "Christmas Eve," "Christmas Day," and "The Christmas Dinner"), which were often republished as a separate group. *The Sketch-Book*'s most famous components, and the only text-pieces read with any regularity today, are the short stories "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and modern readers are for the most part unaware of the context within which they were first published. Like the other elements of the whole, the two stories (cited as the first of their genre to be written by an American) enact a conflict between the old world and the new, tradition and innovation, belonging and rootlessness. Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane share a crisis of identity, a crisis that Geoffrey Crayon—and by extension, Washington Irving—can be said to share as well. Van Winkle loses his house, his wife, even his own name (which his grandson usurps) before finding his place in a society he at first does not understand. Crane chooses to remain detached from those around him, preferring bodily nourishment to emotional companionship, specters over friends or lovers. Rip’s displacement is mirrored in Ichabod’s homelessness, which is further amplified by Crayon’s (a pun on Crane, perhaps) wanderings into the dark recesses of British tradition as represented by the homes, abbeys, and museums he visits.

That the short stories are ostensibly passed to Crayon through Diedrich Knickerbocker has been called inconsistent by some, but this choice can be explained in several ways. First, Irving was hoping to earn money with this publication and since he had published *A History of New York* in 1809 and co-written *Salmagundi* in 1811 to much fanfare as Knickerbocker, he might have hoped to cash in on the success of his earlier alter ego. To mention that name in the context of Crayon’s travels also adds a layer of authenticity to both personae. And while Knickerbocker’s tone is satiric rather than sentimental, the tales he tells mesh wonderfully with those Crayon presents to his readers. Despite the sometimes-anomalous nature of the individual pieces, each helps Irving achieve cohesion in the larger text.

Crayon’s concerns are also Irving’s, of course, and *The Sketch-Book* represents those concerns in its individual parts and through its very form. While this text does not represent the short story cycle per se, it does function as one on this level. With a few exceptions (such as “The Inn Kitchen,” which introduces “The Spectre Bridegroom,” and “Postscript,” which comments on “Rip Van Winkle”), the text-pieces can be understood independently. Yet only when read together do they highlight Irving’s questions about nationality and heritage, his feelings of displacement and identity confusion, and his anxieties regarding his decision to pursue a literary career. These issues continue to be raised in the story cycles analyzed in chapters to come, an indication that the genre is particularly well-suited to resolving, or at least calling attention to, these sorts of questions.

Sympathy for the Enemy in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Legends of the Province-House*

For Nathaniel Hawthorne these same questions of national identity are gathered around the single most influential political event to date—the American Revolution. In writing and combining the four stories that make up *The Legends of the Province-House,* Hawthorne provides insight into his feelings about the conflict through which America gained independence. Ostensibly about a contemporary’s search for stories of America’s glorious fight for freedom at Boston's Province-House, the frame created by Hawthorne implies a deeper, hidden meaning as well. The author is clearly ambivalent about the causes and consequences of the Revolution, and he uses this particular construction to shed light on his ambivalence without having to reveal it directly. By telling these stories through this narrator, Hawthorne can present Tory views with sympathy and understanding while protecting himself from the Tory label.

As Irving did before him in *The Sketch-Book*, Hawthorne uses the frame of this text to convey as much (if not more) about his perspective as the stories themselves. As was the case for Irving, conditions of the literary market affected his ability to present his story cycle to the reading public. Despite his many and varied efforts, Hawthorne failed again and again to publish his planned collections of connected stories as individual texts. Swayed by his publishers, who were convinced readers would not respond to such works, attempts such as *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, *Provincial Tales*, and *The Story Teller* were either rejected outright or consumed by larger projects. *The Legends of the Province-House* was fated to be incorporated into the 1842 edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, where they appeared back-to-back as a unit within the text. The four stories have been published separately only as illustrated children’s books and only under different titles—in 1897 as *Colonial Stories* and in 1906 as *In Colonial Days.*[3]

Critics have argued that the *Legends* can only be understood when viewed as historical texts[4] and the narrative frame is crucial to any interpretation of meaning. Unique among Hawthorne’s works, in these stories "there is no concentration on the moral travail of any single psyche within the fictive historical world…the 'Legends' make their way solely by a relentless exposure of illusion and delusion in American history" (Colacurcio, 391). To explore this history, we move from the narrator’s present to the past to farther into the past and then back to the present as the *Legends* unfold. Hawthorne's attention to times gone by and his narrator's interest in the events that occurred in this particular house indicate the author's awareness of the importance of the past’s influence on the present and the future. Hawthorne’s point here is to call attention to certain moments in history so we can see them as they really were, not through faithful retelling of fact but via the artist’s elaboration and interpretation. In addition, an art form and/or artist figure dominates each of the four legends, calling attention to Hawthorne’s role as the creator of these historical memories.

---

[3] Smith, “Hawthorne’s *Legends*,” 31

[4] Colacurcio, 390

By introducing a number of narrators, the frame forces the reader to notice the process of storytelling, of passing down information, of understanding history. Each story describes a specific incident that Hawthorne feels is related to the American Revolution—the masquerade led by the British government, Hutchinson’s crucial decision to call for British troops, the small pox epidemic that swept Boston in 1721, and the departure of the last British representatives from the Province-House. These stories pass through a series of narrators before they arrive on the printed page: the self-described “thorough-going Democrat” who is drawn to the pub by the “Old Province-House” sign; the tale-teller Bela Tiffany who regales the narrator and bar-owner, Thomas Waite, with stories of the building’s past; and the unnamed “aged loyalist” whose tale concludes the series. Such an elaborate narrative frame was not mere dressing for Hawthorne; it calls the veracity of the tales themselves into question, opening the door for him to safely present controversial ideas. Even the use of the word “legends” in the title indicates something about the narrator’s relationship to fact and fiction.

The thorough-going Democrat acts as a mask behind which the author hides, allowing him to explore politically unpopular ideas without becoming himself unpopular. This precaution was crucial in safeguarding Hawthorne’s burgeoning career as a magazine writer at the time; he had just been given several commissions by John O’Sullivan of the *Democratic Review,* and the editor would hardly have appreciated the criticism of America’s Puritan heritage embedded in this text. Ironically, the stories seem to have been written in response to O’Sullivan’s solicitation for material for the newly created magazine in which they appeared.[5] The *Democratic Review* published them not in the order in which they were written, nor chronologically based on when they were set, but in the same order in which they would appear in *Twice-Told Tales*: “Howe’s Masquerade” in May 1838, “Edward Randolph’s Portrait” in July 1838, “Lady Eleanor’s Mantle” in December 1838, and “Old Esther Dudley” in January 1839. This indicates that Hawthorne’s vision for the arrangement of the stories was conceived from the beginning.

The order in which the stories are told to the narrator, and the chronology of that order, is important to the action and crucial to understanding Hawthorne’s use of his frame. The first tale, “Howe’s Masquerade,” serves mostly to establish the setting for the three tales to come. It takes place in 1775, after the American Revolution but before the British government has been driven from the Province House. The ghostly stream of British officials leaving the building foreshadows their actual departure in the last of the stories, “Old Esther Dudley,” which is set a few years later. “Edward Randolph’s Portrait” is set in 1770 and “Lady Eleanore’s Mantle” in 1721 and as John McWilliams notes, “the first and fourth legends, which celebrate the loss and then the surrender of British power, thus enclose two tales in which the oppressions which justify revolutions are uncovered” (561). The frame suggests that the moments in 1770 and 1721 illustrated in the second and third stories are linked to the causes of the Revolution and are therefore important to understanding the events portrayed in the first and fourth stories. Of course, the Province House itself acts as a sort of frame through which the artist (the narrator and/or Hawthorne himself) reveals the past contained within it. The house, along with the four legends it produces, reveals to both the narrator and the reader that one’s perception of the past must be based not just on facts, but on a considered interpretation of those facts. Art can often indicate truths that history cannot and these four legends feature various incarnations of art and artists as a way to reinforce the lessons contained within the house.

---

[5] Ibid, 628

The art form in “Howe’s Masquerade” is the masquerade itself. As Howe and his guests watch the parade of historical figures march down the Province House stairs, they are allowed to witness history before it occurs (including their own as yet unfulfilled places within it). We learn from the ensuing legends that Howe’s effort to restore his country’s former glory in the colonies through this pageant is doomed by the fact that the house is already haunted by past mistakes. We are introduced here to the beginning of the end of British rule in America, and as the subsequent stories will reveal, ignoring the past can have fatal consequences. After the masquerade, Hawthorne reveals to the reader one of the turning points that led to the British defeat in “Edward Randolph’s Portrait.” Viewed in this way, Hawthorne views Hutchinson’s decision to call in British troops as key to the eventual uprising of Americans even though Hutchinson is not portrayed unsympathetically. He may ignore the advice of his niece, Alice Vane, but her warnings are more mystical than practical. After all, she advises him based on a mysterious legend rather than political fact. Yet Hutchinson is incapable of learning the lesson Alice tries to teach, and his failure to understand her creates the history that is to come.

By next introducing us to Lady Eleanore and her mantle, the frame shows us that the smallpox outbreak of 1721 is linked to the Revolution in Hawthorne’s eyes. While the story clearly blames British arrogance and pride for the epidemic that sweeps Boston that year, Hawthorne’s portrayal of Jervase Helwyse as subservient to the beautiful visitor suggests that Americans were at least somewhat to blame as well. If Helwyse represents the American ideals of the day (as he clearly does), then his submission to Lady Eleanore (who just as clearly represents British ideals) and the crowd’s acceptance of that submission, implicates the colonists in the imbalance that will create the need for revolution. As Julian Smith writes, “Hawthorne is condemning her colonial admirers as much as he is condemning Lady Eleanore…reminding us that…many of the colonists continued to pay tribute to English traditions and authority (just as they pay tribute to Lady Eleanore)" (37), thus making the Revolution necessary to break the unhealthy ties between the two entities. This uncomfortable acknowledgement of culpability can, of course, go easily unnoticed within the larger context of the frame and its various narrators, making it easier—and safer—for Hawthorne to ponder the historical significance of the pox he has called pride.

Hawthorne adds another layer to the narrative frame with "Old Esther Dudley," a story told to Bela Tiffany and the narrator by the old loyalist “whose blood was warmed by the good cheer” (223) of tale-telling and wine. This narrator is old enough to have known the protagonist of his tale, adding a sense of authenticity to his observations. Unlike the earlier stories between which there are long stretches of time (the first is told in summer, the second in January, the third the following spring or fall), this story immediately follows the account of Lady Eleanore, and "The effect of this sudden change in the timing between the tales, combined with the change in tellers, is to call attention to the dramatic and ironic tension between the last two stories" (Smith 40). As the most fully drawn character, Esther Dudley is also the most sympathetic. She has a gift for storytelling and her role as an interpreter of the past links her to both the narrator and Hawthorne. While the second and third stories of the series depict the reasons behind England’s defeat in America (a defeat that is foreshadowed in the first text-piece), this legend makes clear that the change does not occur without cost. There is pathos in Esther’s story, and perhaps a warning as well. If, as Margaret Allen contends, Esther “embodies the artist as the repository of cultural traditions, passing a heritage on from generation to generation” (436), then her annihilation in the end means that Americans have failed to understand their past. And if the legends teach us nothing else, they illustrate the importance of understanding the historical events that helped shape the world in which we live.

Hawthorne uses both the content of this story and its placement within the larger frame to serve his thematic intentions. Smith sums up the importance of Hawthorne’s narrative frame by pointing out that, "Hawthorne gives us the basic conflict between colonial and loyalist factions in the first story, develops the reasons for that conflict in the next two stories, and shows us the outcome in the last" (32). This layered frame also works to question the truth of the stories recounted by various tellers, as well as the reliability of the outside narrator. The Democrat explicitly calls his own integrity into question when he admits to taking poetic license in the retelling of the last of the legends. Because the old Loyalist’s tale is told with emotion (and under the influence of wine), the narrator tells us that it

> required more revision to render it fit for the public eye, than those of the series which have preceded it; nor should it be concealed, that the sentiment and tone of the affair may have undergone some slight, or perchance more than slight metamorphosis, in its transmission to the reader through the medium of the thorough-going democrat. 226

That history can be editorialized is apparent here, and that our interpretation of history is influenced by art is equally clear. This allows us to better appreciate Hawthorne’s own predicament in creating this work, as he balances the ideals of his publishers with his own efforts to write a multi-faceted exploration of the British-American conflict.

The frame imbues the individual text-pieces with over-arching meaning but it also points out "the dubious validity of our knowledge of the past” (Allen, 434). Because of this unreliability, “Hawthorne suggests that the artist may be the better historian, for it is only he who can imaginatively recreate the past….not the factual knowledge alone, but moral knowledge vitalized by the imagination” (Ibid, 435). Old Esther Dudley functions as this type of historian, as does Hawthorne himself. Our narrator is at first clearly unsuited for the task, but as he continues to visit the Province House he learns what it means to tell a tale through the process of hearing these stories. The narrator grows more sophisticated as the legends progress, and by the end he seems aware of the need for freedom in telling history. By the fourth tale, he is therefore able to adjust historical fact to meet his artistic needs as a storyteller, allowing him to both elaborate on the last of the legends and to admit to that elaboration. He is no longer merely hearing the stories of the past; he (like Hawthorne) is participating in the creation of those stories.

Despite not being published as intended, these stories work effectively as a unit because of the several detectable patterns that link them. One, as