

UNIT 1

WASHINGTON IRVING (1783-1859)

RIP VAN WINKLE & THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

I. WASHINGTON IRVING (1783-1859): BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Man of letters = temporal, an inevitable creation & adroit user of cultural mechanisms & moods

Before *The Sketch Book* (thirty-six) = lawyer, businessman & soldier

At heart a dreamer & deliberate artist --> fascinated by new playthings of culture (clubs, coteries & literary/theatrical circles) --> own preeminence

Creative life in drawing room, theater & publishing houses

First American classic (schools & libraries besides English masters, but never imitated) --> own style authentic

Good sense & amiability enhanced prestige

Romantic story = son of middle-class Scottish parents & brilliant workmanship in prose --> intuition of America's heritage of world legend & enrich his country with romance & tradition

Golden career <== rapidly growing social/literary life of Manhattan + European fashions of writing + own alert, plastic mind

Twenty-sixth --> light verse, essays & biographies, dramatic criticism, satiric pieces & burlesque Diedrich Knickerbocker's *A History of New York* (1809) --> first remarkable piece of comic literature

Blessings of light heart & sorrow of his life (death of Matilda Hoffman)

War of 1812 as staff colonel --> 1815 again sailed for Europe (17 years) --> return as 'Geoffrey Crayon', author of *The Sketch Book* (1819-1820)

After *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) & *Tales of a Traveler* (1824), play writing in Paris with John Howard Payne

1826 translates Navarrete's *History of Columbus* (3 years in Spain) Madrid - Andalusia (Alhambra) - Böhl de Faber & Fernán Caballero --> *The Life and Voyages of Columbus* (1828), *The Conquest of Granada* (1829), *The Companions of Columbus* (1831), and *The Alhambra* (1832)

Creation of literature = gentleman's avocation

'Sunnyside' (except Minister at the court of Isabella II (1842-1846) --> arbiter of American letters & symbol of American thin literary culture -> Beheld rise of great New Englanders (Poe's tales & *The Scarlet Letter*)

His work long since done (romantic wanderer in Europe belonged to past)

Writing as art had been born in America

Irving lacked sustained wisdom concerning movements of thought --> unrest in England & democratic upsurge in America = Toryism

Meaning of democracy, sectionalism, frontier --> personal distaste

Lover of old ways, of romantic past + In spiritual problems silent (Scotch Covenanter --> skepticism & indifference --> identif. with Episcopal Church)

Notions of current trends of thought seen from indolent temperament & incurably conservative taste

Exploring vein which was to link his books with more macabre studies by Poe & Hawthorne --> shared popular passion for what Scott called "the supernatural in fictitious composition" --> approach to tale of horror characteristically light

Frontier literature = *A Tour on the Prairie* (1835)

Beneficiary & victim of adolescent American culture of first decades of 19th cent

In debt to pre-Victorian drama + periodicals + contemporary idols (Byron, Scott) + literary clubs + growing libraries & private collections of manuscripts + lax copyright laws

First Irving → Satire + short stories + personal essays = easy products of travel, life in society, endless casual jottings in notebooks ==> Second Irving, man of affairs, successful American, substantial citizen of New York = two careers

Third Irving --> homage of younger American writers who resisted more than he corrupting influences in Am. callow culture --> For this nobler Irving, arduous self-imposed discipline for the sake of image & sentence, as notebooks prove

II. WASHINGTON IRVING'S *RIP VAN WINKLE* (1819-20)

Changed Irving from callow youngster to man (human suffering)

20th cent. --> virtues of *The Sketch Book* seem pallid

"Rip Van Winkle" (<-- Otmar's *Volksagen*) ["The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (<-- Bürger's "Der wilde Jäger" & Rübezahl tales)]

Sadness/romantic melancholy in presence of law of change --> flux, brevity of life, transiency of Man

Symbolism probably unconscious, involuntary (essay's indefinitiveness of emotion may be felt as we read, but not explained)

In "Rip Van Winkle" = grim but romantic theme of *tempus edax rerum*

Rip's free youth, prolonged sleep, fanciful dreams & disillusioning return are all ours (German literature, American legend, Walter Scott & Irving's own boyhood) --> symbolic distillation of universal mood

Man's ceaseless enemy, 'time' (German romance of Otmar, Dutch friends, Catskills & Blue Hudson)

Recommend his books for more than simple interest in plot --> "classic value", dependent on style --> "muse of memory"

Familiar elements of popular knowledge (magic filter, bad omens, dogs...)

Rip = American man-child who never grows + innocent of New World

--> Symbolic image of mythical American as rest of world sees them = sympathetic, immature, egocentric, carefree and innocently candorous

Lazarus returned from death --> comical despite his onirical tragedy

III. WASHINGTON IRVING'S *THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW* (1819-20)

"Der wilde Jäger"(Bürger) + "Tam O'Shanter"(Robert Burns)

Short story as casual, plot only as a connection for descriptions of ambiance, customs and life styles

Brom Bones & Ichabod Crane famous fight --> burlesque mythology & popular American traditions

Dutch = not stupid indolent citizens, pipe smokers, sitting on the stairs

Brom = sturdy & boasting braggart from woods, red-neck ends up defeating smart urbane guy

Ichabod = singer of hymns, son of New England, superstitious & simpleton, but clever & ambitious --> father of many national heroes, crazy self-confidence, inexperienced & ridiculous but victorious

Irving's tales celebrate victory of practical man & defeat dreamer (sarcastic fables educative & masochistic referred to author's career)

Brom-type men (defy superstition) always win --> one grows, fantasies must be substituted by common sense (end ironical note to readers)

When Knickerbocker (not Geoffrey Crayon) --> better caricature

The Sketch Book ("The Art of Bookmaking", "The Mutability of Literature", "English Writers on America")