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Washington Irving: Artist of the Picturesque

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WASHINGTON IRVING: ARTIST OF THE PICTURESQUE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Dana Dewey Woody

August 1965

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Washington Irving might have been remembered as a painter instead of an author had he followed a natural inclination and youthful wish. On his first trip to Europe in 1805 he met the young American artist Washington Allston in Rome. They became friends and together viewed the historic shrines and art masterpieces. Irving was charmed by his new friend and enchanted by the beautiful sights and inspiring atmosphere of Rome.

In a biographical sketch of Allston many years later, Irving recounts his own moment of decision as he considered: "Why might I not remain here and turn painter? I had taken lessons in drawing before leaving America, and had been thought to have some aptness, as I certainly had a strong inclination for it." Feeling obligation as a dutiful son and considerate brother to the hopes his family held for him, he gave up this delightful prospect to complete unfinished business: "I was to return home to the dry study of the law, for which I had no relish, and, as I feared, but little talent."¹

When he eventually gave up law and turned to writing, Irving remained an amateur painter in his own way, using words rather than

¹Washington Irving, "Washington Allston," in Salmagundi (New York, 1897), II, 391. This and all subsequent references to Irving's works are to the Holly Edition.

pigments. He continued to make pencil sketches in his notebooks, such as the Brig o' Doon at Ayr, included as an illustration in Stanley T. Williams' biography, Washington Irving. Professor Williams remarks that Irving could "sketch gracefully" and was "meticulous in delineating an English manor hall or a Spanish muleteer."² Irving maintained a keen interest in the visual arts and was sensitive throughout his life to form, color, design, and methods and materials of construction. His ability to write combined with his artist's eye produced descriptions of people, architecture, landscapes, and animals which capture and possess the senses as effectively as if they were on canvas. His most frequently used pen name and several titles of his writings clearly show that Irving considered himself an artist: "Geoffrey Crayon" wrote The Sketch Book, The Crayon Miscellany and Sketches in Paris.

Irving's descriptive writing was always sympathetic to men of the brush. In addition to Allston his close friends included the painters John Vanderlyn, Stuart Newton, and Charles R. Leslie. He toured England and Scotland with Leslie who said his range of observation was widened by Irving and that Irving thought of his work as closely related to Leslie's.³ When he wrote of Oliver Goldsmith's friendship with William Hogarth and Sir Joshua Reynolds, Irving expressed his own affinity with painters:

²Stanley T. Williams, Washington Irving (New York, 1935), I, 138-139.

³Van Wyck Brooks, The World of Washington Irving (New York, 1944), pp. 132, 154.

There are no friendships among men of talents more likely to be sincere than those between painters and poets. Possessed of the same qualities of mind, governed by the same principles of taste and natural laws of grace and beauty, but applying them to different yet mutually illustrative arts, they are constantly in sympathy, and never in collision with each other.⁴

Living in the period of romanticism in art and literature, Irving reflects the spirit and taste of the times in his descriptions. "Writers . . . incorporate with their own conceptions the anecdotes and thoughts current in society, and thus each generation has some features in common, characteristic of the age in which it lived."⁵ His choice of subject matter and his attitude toward it were romantic. He wrote about things that were old, unusual and strange--Spanish castles, English churches and manor houses, Hudson River area legends and traditions. He found nature delightful and was sympathetic toward humble creatures, such as the noble savage and animals.

Art of the romantic period pleased without disturbing and pictured common human situations, painted sentimentally and with a touch of humor. The beauty of primeval nature was painted with tenderness and love. The prints of American history, life, and manners by Currier and Ives enjoyed great popularity. In 1872 William Cullen Bryant edited an enormous picture-book of engravings with commentary which presents the diverse American landscapes, scenic points of interest, and quaint

⁴Washington Irving, Oliver Goldsmith, A Biography (New York, 1897), I, 182-183.

⁵Washington Irving, "A Royal Poet," in The Sketch Book (New York, 1894), I, 142.

towns. It is significantly entitled Picturesque America. Whatever was picturesque pleased the romantic tastes of the times. The classic and monumental were generally disregarded.

The cult of the picturesque which developed and flourished in the nineteenth century was a major feature of romanticism. Sensing the approaching drabness and uniformity of the industrial age, romantic poets and painters turned away to clutch and cherish whatever was largely untouched by contemporary industrial and social ills. They admired the beauty of nature, exotic lands and people, the way of life and architecture of the Middle Ages, and they sought to revive the spirit of past times. The artistic temperament sought out the picturesque for inspiration and study.

Revolting from eighteenth-century rationalism, the romantics sought an emotional reaction in their contemplation of the picturesque. An emotional response was as important to them as the picturesque object itself. In "The Solitary Reaper" Wordsworth describes a Highland girl who was picturesque because she was a peasant in a field, singing as she reaped. Equally important to the girl or her melody was Wordsworth's emotional reaction to her song which he carried in his heart,

Long after it was heard no more.

Likewise, the daffodils around Ullswater in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" were picturesque because of their beauty in such a lovely setting. Yet they carried the extra merit of evoking emotion in Wordsworth not only while he viewed them but also when he recalled seeing them later. To the romantic lover of the picturesque, responding with the

heart to a picturesque object, such as the ruins of Tintern Abbey, was a pleasant and beneficial experience for all mankind. Irving, a true romantic, spent a considerable portion of his life searching for the picturesque, reacting emotionally to it, and describing it with the artistry of a painter.

Unlike the English romantic poets, Irving did not desire to reform mankind or expound a philosophy of life. As he loved the theatre and was pleasantly entertained by life, he chose to entertain rather than to reform or dictate. Viewing life from the point of view of a spectator watching the players on a theatre stage, he wrote down the picturesque scenes of life for the entertainment of others. In "The Author's Account of Himself," Irving explains his approach to his subject, and establishes himself as an artist of the picturesque who wishes to entertain:

I was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners. . . . 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. When, however, I look over the hints and memorandums I have taken down for the purpose, my heart almost fails me at finding how my idle humor has led me aside from the great objects. . . . I fear I shall give equal disappointment with an unlucky landscape painter, who had traveled on the continent, but, following the bent of his vagrant inclination, had

sketched in nooks and corners and byplaces. His sketch book was accordingly crowded with cottages and landscapes and obscure ruins, but he had neglected to paint St. Peter's or the Coliseum; the cascade of Terni, or the bay of Naples; and had not a single glacier or volcano in his whole collection.⁶

Likewise, in "The Author," the first essay of Bracebridge Hall, Geoffrey Crayon tells his readers: "My only aim is to paint characters and manners."⁷

⁶The Sketch Book, I, 1, 4-5.

⁷Washington Irving, Bracebridge Hall (New York, 1896), I, 11.

CHAPTER II

PICTURESQUE PEOPLE

The romantic interest in humble lives was expressed in a search for picturesque people. What made them picturesque was their unusual way of life, occupation, native locale, or race, but largely their costumes. Opposed to picturesque costume is the simplicity of a flowing classical gown, harmonious in all respects. To the lover of the picturesque, it was too symmetrical, too plain. It lacked a random quality and the necessary mixture of colors, textures, and designs. A band of gypsies, far from aristocratic in dress, manner, or station in life, had a picturesque quality in their attire. It was a synthesis of whatever materials they could scrape together. Often it was all they had on which to pride themselves; so they arranged it with flair. Although not elegant, it expressed a carefree abandonment in the odd mixture of color and design, very catching to the eye. Such costume was picturesque and suitable for description.

When Irving describes a band of gypsies encamping near Bracebridge Hall, he admires the costume of a gypsy girl:

I could not but admire a certain degree of slattern elegance about the baggage. Her long black silken hair was curiously plaited in numerous small braids, and negligently put up in a picturesque style that a painter might have been proud to have devised. Her dress was of figured chintz, rather ragged, and not over clean, but of a variety of most harmonious and agreeable colors, for these beings have a singularly fine eye for colors.¹

¹Bracebridge Hall, I, 189-190.

A similar peasant, a ragged yet attractively dressed Greek girl, caught the eye of the French romantic painter Eugène Delacroix and is the subject of his oil painting Orphan Girl in the Graveyard (1824). This choice of subject matter, sympathetic attitude toward it, and interest in costume is one of many parallels in romantic art and Irving's writings.

Nineteenth-century admiration for picturesque costumes also exemplified the romantic tendency to favor tradition over progress. As if they foresaw the twentieth-century uniformity and drabness of the white-collar worker or the man in the gray flannel suit, the romantics cherished quaint, individual dress. Until their time, one's occupation usually could be determined by one's attire, be he sailor, baron, chimney sweep, judge, wine merchant or other tradesman, or any of various attendants at court. Gradually these distinguishing tags of identity were disappearing. As early as 1813 the feeling of nostalgia for attire gradually passing from the scene is expressed in a book of watercolor sketches entitled Picturesque Representations of the Dress and Manners of the English, by William Alexander.

In addition to costume, the racial origin and especially the way of life of the gypsies contributed to their picturesqueness. They remained untouched by progress and conformity:

I have been very much struck with their peculiarities. I like to behold their clear olive complexions, their romantic black eyes, their raven locks, their lithe slender figures. . . . Their mode of life, too, has something in it very fanciful and picturesque. They are the free denizens of nature, and maintain a

primitive independence. . . . They are totally distinct from the busy, thrifty people about them.²

Irving's description of elegantly dressed women illustrates the important feature of emotion which is evoked by picturesque costume. The following passage also shows the romantic's distaste for classical simplicity:

I was always extremely sensible to female beauty, and here I saw it in all its powers of fascination: for whatever may be said of "beauty unadorned," there is something almost awful in female loveliness decked out in jewelled state. The swanlike neck encircled with diamonds; the raven locks clustered with pearls; the ruby glowing on the snowy bosom, are objects which I could never contemplate without emotion; and a dazzling white arm clasped with bracelets, and taper, transparent fingers, laden with sparkling rings, are to me irresistible.³

Ornateness was as picturesque as a simple peasant's colorful attire because it, too, evoked emotion in the eye of the beholder. Because of its simplicity, harmony, and balance, classical dress did not evoke such a heightened degree of emotion.

By today's standards, Irving would be considered extremely clothes-conscious. On his first trip to Europe he indulged in custom-tailored, luxurious attire befitting a gentleman. His fancy dress created a stir when he returned to America, and for the rest of his life he was well known for his stylish, fashionable clothes. His writings show that he appraised attire with the sensitive eye of a dress designer.

²Ibid., II, 35.

³Washington Irving, "Buckthorne," in Tales of a Traveller (New York, 1895), I, 244-245.

His awareness of the various styles of dress of past eras is shown in "The Art of Bookmaking," in which he dreams a literary masquerade.⁴ In "A Royal Poet" Irving discusses the poetry of the imprisoned James I of Scotland. When Irving says, "His description of the Lady Jane is given in the picturesque and minute manner . . . he dwells with the fondness of a lover on every article of her apparel,"⁵ he calls to mind his own fondness for description of costume.

Oliver Goldsmith, whom Irving greatly admired, was also clothes-conscious. As his wealth increased, his wardrobe enlarged. In his biography of Goldsmith, Irving tells several anecdotes about Goldsmith's wigs and velvet coats. He includes descriptions of the many fancy clothes Goldsmith ordered during prosperous years, including the following items purchased during a single year:

a green half-trimmed frock and breeches, lined with silk; a queen's-blue dress suit; a half-dress suit of ratteen, lined with satin; a pair of silk-stockings breeches, and another pair of a bloom-color.⁶

These details presented a colorful, picturesque image of the protagonist.

Irving was always aware of people suitable as subjects for painting, or people who resembled figures he had seen in paintings. He describes the seraph-like children at Bracebridge Hall who awoke him in

⁴The Sketch Book, I, 120-123.

⁵Ibid., p. 138.

⁶Oliver Goldsmith, A Biography, I, 294.

"Christmas Day" as "one of the most beautiful little fairy groups that a painter could imagine."⁷ In "Roscoe" Irving describes the person of Mr. Roscoe and adds that he had "a head that would have pleased a painter."⁸ Lady Lillycraft was "dressed in an old-fashioned riding-habit, with a broad-brimmed white beaver hat, such as may be seen in Sir Joshua Reynolds' paintings."⁹ General Harbottle's activities with the ladies remind Irving of "those courtly groups of ladies and gentlemen in old prints of Windsor Terrace, or Kensington Garden."¹⁰ When General Harbottle is riding a horse, he looks "not unlike one of the doughty heroes in the old prints of the battle of Blenheim."¹¹ In "The Country Church" Irving describes in detail the manner and appearance of the congregation, rich and poor. He makes a lengthy comparison between the simplicity of a high-ranking nobleman's family and the pretentiousness of a family of a wealthy citizen. In this comparison of "the unpretending great and the arrogant little," Irving sees himself as an artist when he writes: "I have been rather minute in drawing the pictures of these two families."¹²

Irving's knowledge of the various historical schools of painting

⁷The Sketch Book, II, 33.

⁸Ibid., I, 18.

⁹Bracebridge Hall, I, 24.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹Ibid., p. 159.

¹²The Sketch Book, I, 156.

is evident throughout his writings. He was amused by the early eighteenth-century Watteau style. The women in these portraits were portrayed as shepherdesses "with hooped petticoats, and waists no thicker than an hourglass, who appeared ruling over their sheep and their swains, with dainty crooks decorated with fluttering ribbons."¹³ To Irving, a romantic lover of the picturesque, these portraits were too sentimental and slightly ridiculous. In general, he employed restraint in determining who was picturesque.

His first treatment of picturesque people, the Dutch, is found in Knickerbocker's History of New York and continued in "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." The romantic interest in old legends and traditions finds expression in these stories. The Dutch are an example of picturesque people of the past. In Knickerbocker's History Irving carries his satire of the Dutch settlers' government and mode of life into their dress. He refers over and over to practically every item of their clothing, emphasizing line more than color, presenting to his readers a portfolio of pastel caricatures. He makes especial fun of their baggy, homespun breeches (known today as knickerbockers or knickers), preferring well-fitting, sleek ones. Still, the baggy breeches were quaint, picturesque, and pleasing in an amusing way, as were their other distinctive items of clothing. The Dutch were generally short, stocky, and rather ugly. Being so rotund, they sat around smoking their pipes, accomplishing little.

¹³Tales of a Traveller, I, 32.

When he first mentions the various characters, Irving gives a brief account of the individual's attire, stressing and exaggerating the breeches in his caricatures. Diedrich Knickerbocker was dressed in "a pair of olive velvet breeches," and Hermanus Van Clattercop wore "five pair of breeches." Ten Broeck introduced into the settlement "the ancient Dutch fashion of ten pair of breeches." Henry Hudson "prohibited the seamen from wearing more than five jackets and six pair of breeches, under pretence of rendering them more alert." Peter Stuyvesant's warriors were "clad in ten pair of linsey-woolsey breeches." One soldier is pictured wearing "breeches which he held up with one hand while he grasped his firelock with the other." The problem was eased with the invention of suspenders, "a kind of harnessing, or strapping, by which our forefathers braced up their multifarious breeches."¹⁴

One entire chapter is devoted to a description of their clothing. He paints a vivid picture of the women with their little caps of quilted calico, their petticoats of linsey-woolsey, striped with a variety of bright colors, their white aprons, and huge patchwork pockets. Since they spent so much time making all the clothes, they wore "scissors and pincushions suspended from their girdles by red ribands." Their blue worsted stockings were decorated with "magnificent red clocks." High-heeled leather shoes, with "large and splendid silver

¹⁴Washington Irving, Knickerbocker's History of New York (New York, 1893), I, 7, 115, 122, 154, 354; II, 183.

buckles" completed the outfit. The gentlemen wore linsey-woolsey coats, "gallantly bedecked with abundance of large brass buttons," half a score of breeches, enormous copper buckles on their shoes, and they always had a pipe in the mouth. As the gentlemen wore many breeches, the women wore many petticoats, sometimes a dozen, looking as "luxuriant as a full-blown cabbage." His caricatures invariably show that the cut of their clothes causes exceeding plumpness below the waist. Irving refers to this chapter on costume as "the sketch here given."¹⁵ As it was written ten years before the appearance of The Sketch Book, it shows his early association of picturesque people and their attire with painting. He presents Henry Hudson as a short, square, double-chinned man who was "always jerking up his breeches when he gave out his orders" so that Hudson in the future may be painted realistically:

I have been thus particular in his description for the benefit of modern painters and statuaries, that they may represent him as he was; and not, according to their common custom with modern heroes, make him look like Caesar, or Marcus Aurelius, or the Apollo of Belvidere.¹⁶

This passage is further evidence of the romantic's distaste for eighteenth-century classical style. Another vivid caricature is the one Irving draws of Keldermeester's hair:

a mop of hair not a little resembling the shag of a Newfoundland dog, terminating in a queue like the handle of a frying-pan, and queued so tightly to his

¹⁵Ibid., I, 262-269.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 118.

head that his eyes and mouth generally stood ajar, and his eyebrows were drawn up to the top of his forehead.¹⁷

The many lithographs and drawings by other artists, used as illustrations in various editions of Knickerbocker's History of New York, attest to the pictorial images evoked by Irving's vivid descriptions.

Irving was a firm believer in moderation in all things and took long daily walks to maintain good health. He relished the opportunity to satirize the laziness and rotundity of the Dutch. His ability to draw an unforgettable caricature to stress his point is shown in the following marvelously funny description of the renowned governor, Wouter Van Twiller:

He was exactly five feet six inches in height, and six feet five inches in circumference. His head was a perfect sphere, and of such stupendous dimensions, that dame Nature with all her sex's ingenuity, would have been puzzled to construct a neck capable of supporting it; wherefore she wisely declined the attempt, and settled it firmly on the top of his back-bone, just between the shoulders. His body was oblong and particularly capacious at bottom; which was wisely ordered by Providence, seeing that he was a man of sedentary habits, and very averse to the idle labor of walking. His legs were short, but sturdy in proportion to the weight they had to sustain; so that when erect he had not a little the appearance of a beer barrel on skids. His face, that infallible index of the mind, presented a vast expanse, unfurrowed by any of those lines and angles which disfigure the human countenance with what is termed expression.¹⁸

In "Rip Van Winkle" the protagonist is colorless, simply wearing

¹⁷Ibid., II, 128.

¹⁸Ibid., I, 223-234.

"galligaskins." However, the costumes of the old Dutchman who led Rip over the hill and the Dutchmen playing ninepins are described in detail. This story's popularity and visual images are reflected in John Quidor's oil paintings The Return of Rip Van Winkle (1829) and Rip Van Winkle at Nicholas Vedder's Tavern (1839).

In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" Irving provides verbal illustrations to his story. A description of the physical characteristics and costume of each principal character is given at his entrance into the story. Brom Bones was outstanding for his physical size and prowess. Katrina Van Tassel was picturesquely attractive to the romantic in her dress which was ideally "a mixture of ancient and modern fashions."¹⁹ The local farmers, their wives, and children wear the same homespun clothes of the Dutch in Knickerbocker's History. Ichabod Crane, a suspicious Yankee from Connecticut, lacks the quaintness of the Dutch because of his slender frame and plain, severe style of dress:

He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weathercock, perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield. . . . He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers'; he carried his whip perpendicularly in his hand,

¹⁹The Sketch Book, II, 262.

like a scepter, and, as his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings. A small wool hat rested on the top of his nose, for so his scanty strip of forehead might be called; and the skirts of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horse's tail. Such was the appearance of Ichabod . . . and it was altogether such an apparition as is seldom to be met with in broad daylight.²⁰

This caricature is made by emphasizing strong lines in the picture, such as Ichabod's "sharp elbows" and his whip which he carried "perpendicularly." Again, it shows Irving's artistic skill to conjure up an unforgettable visual image.

England provided Irving with many subjects in his search for picturesque people. In "The Stagecoach" he narrates the events and passing scenes of a Christmas Eve's journey, stressing the prevalence of holiday spirit. He stops his narration of the journey to insert, in his own words, "a sketch" of the picturesque coachman who cannot be mistaken for any other type of person by his singular dress, manner, language, and air.²¹

He presents a composite picture employing the artist's use of selectivity, so that this is not a specific individual, but Irving's own creation. He is meticulous in describing the face, body dimensions, coats, hat, neck handkerchief, flowers in the buttonhole, waistcoat, trousers, and boots, common to all coachmen. If he had provided only a description of the costume, his picture would be static and flat. By

²⁰Ibid., pp. 253, 276-277.

²¹Ibid., p. 3.

adding a description of the coachman's airs and swagger, as he struts about the yard of the inn with his hands in his pockets, Irving gives his picture expression and life. He finishes and frames the picture with suggestions of the inn yard and surrounding buildings.

"The Angler" is devoted to "those worthy gentlemen who are given to haunt the sides of streams with angle rods in hand." Irving describes the regular angler's outfit and compares the fullness of his equipment to that of Don Quixote: "He wore a broad-skirted fustian coat perplexed with half a hundred pockets; a pair of stout shoes, and leathern gaiters; a basket slung on one side for fish; a patent rod, a landing net, and a score of other inconveniences only to be found in the true angler's armory." Thus he gives his reader an illustration to accompany the story. He proceeds to tell in detail the habits of an angler he met in rural England and of the quaintness of his cottage. At the end of the essay Irving admits to painting a picturesque person when he says: "I could not refrain from drawing the picture of this worthy brother of the angle."²²

A trip through the Netherlands also presented picturesque material. In "The Inn Kitchen" Irving sets the stage for the telling of "The Spectre Bridegroom." The picture has for its background a rather dark kitchen interior, showing a great stove around which travelers sit. His keen observation of the scene shows an impressionistic awareness of the diffusion of light:

²²Ibid., pp. 232-233, 247.

A large lamp threw a strong mass of light upon the group, bringing out many odd features in strong relief. Its yellow rays partially illumined the spacious kitchen, dying duskily away into remote corners, except where they settled in mellow radiance on the broad side of a flitch of bacon or were reflected back from well-scoured utensils that gleamed from the midst of obscurity.²³

This passage also shows his awareness of chiaroscuro: light and dark values and bright and dull intensities. In the foreground of this kitchen scene is the old man who narrates the story. He is described with the detail necessary for a close-up figure in the foreground of a picture:

He was dressed in a tarnished green traveling jacket, with a broad belt around his waist, and a pair of overalls, with buttons from the hips to the ankles. He was of a full, rubicund countenance, with a double chin, aquiline nose, and a pleasant, twinkling eye. His hair was light, and curled from under an old green velvet traveling cap stuck on one side of his head. . . . I wish my readers could imagine the old fellow lolling in a huge armchair, one arm akimbo, the other holding a curiously twisted tobacco pipe, formed of genuine écume de mer, decorated with silver chain and silken tassel--his head cocked on one side.²³

France provided picturesque figures for the story of "Annette Delarbre." The peasants of Lower Normandy satisfied Irving's quest for remnants of the Middle Ages. They wore

picturesque costumes . . . tall, stately caps, and trim bodices, according to fashions which have been handed down from mother to daughter for centuries; the exact counterparts of those worn in the time of the Conqueror; and which surprised me by their faithful resemblance to

²³Ibid., I, 236-238.

those in the old pictures of Froissart's Chronicles, and in the paintings of illuminated manuscripts.²⁴

In Italy Irving was fascinated by the robbers or "banditti," and wrote a series of stories about them. Like other picturesque groups, the Italian robbers formed a unique class:

a desperate class of men, that have almost formed themselves into an order of society. They wear a kind of uniform, or rather costume, which openly designates their profession. . . . Their dresses are often very rich and picturesque . . . their hats are broad brimmed, with conical crowns . . . their hair is sometimes gathered in silk nets, they wear a kind of sandal of cloth or leather, bound round the legs with thongs.²⁵

In one of the stories a young painter, with whom Irving clearly identifies himself, is captured by the robbers. He effects his escape by skillfully sketching a leader of the robber band. Irving's perspective is that of an artist:

I seized my pencil with enthusiasm. I found the captain the most docile of subjects, and, after various shiftings of position, placed him in an attitude to my mind. Picture to yourself a stern muscular figure, in fanciful bandit costume; with pistols and poniard in belt; his brawny neck bare; a handkerchief loosely thrown around it, and the two ends in front strung with rings of all kinds, the spoils of travellers; relics and medals hanging on his breast; his hat decorated with various colored ribbons; . . . Fancy him on a mountain height, among wild rocks and rugged oaks, leaning on his carbine.²⁶

This description presents the figure in his native surroundings as well as in detailed costume.

²⁴Bracebridge Hall, II, 103.

²⁵Tales of a Traveller, II, 45.

²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

At night the group of robbers made an effective, dramatic scene to be captured by the young painter's brush. Irving uses this same technique throughout his writings to point out the emotional effect of a scene at night:

I could not look around upon this screen of dusky drapery, relieved by the bright colors of the robbers' garments, the gleaming of their weapons, and the variety of strongly marked countenances, lit up by the flambeau, without admiring the picturesque effects of the scene. It was quite theatrical.²⁷

The Italian shepherds were also a unique class of people in their costume of "black or brown sheepskin" and their isolated place in nature: "They carry long staves, on which, as they lean, they form picturesque objects in the lonely landscape, and they are followed by their ever-constant companion, the dog."²⁸

The Spanish middle ages, a time of high romance, provided the lover of the picturesque with remnants not only Gothic but also Moorish. Although Irving's Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada is primarily the result of his endeavors as a historian, he has given added life to historical facts by "fully illustrating" and giving a "graphic effect" to the events of the conquest.²⁹ His descriptions of costume provide a refreshing pause in the rather tedious reading of the Moorish-Christian battles.

²⁷Ibid., p. 136.

²⁸Ibid., p. 139.

²⁹Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada (New York, 1892), I, xxiv, xxvi.

Among the Moors of Granada in the fifteenth century a passion for dress and ornament pervaded all ranks. The women wore

girdles and bracelets and anklets of gold and silver, wrought with exquisite art and delicacy, and studded with jacinths, chrysolites, emeralds, and other precious stones. They were fond of braiding and decorating their beautiful long tresses, or confining them in knots sparkling with jewels.³⁰

When not in armor, the Moorish cavaliers wore "garments of wool, of silk, or cotton, of the finest texture, beautifully wrought with stripes of various colors." To combat the heat of summer they "arrayed themselves in linen of spotless whiteness." Their armor and weapons were "inlaid and chased with gold and silver . . . richly labored and enamelled . . . of golden filagree, studded with gems . . . wrought in the arabesque fashion."³¹ The youthful Moorish king Boabdil captivated the public eye when ready to enter battle:

He was mounted on a superb white charger, magnificently caparisoned. His corselets were of polished steel, richly ornamented, studded with gold nails and lined with crimson velvet. He wore a steel casque, exquisitely chiselled and embossed.³²

The Spanish chivalry presented all the colorful trappings of medieval pageantry, much like the Crusaders. The men, horses, and battleground tents formed a gay array of colors, patterns, and textures. The attire of the Christian king and queen exhibited the Moorish

³⁰Ibid., p. 6.

³¹Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³²Ibid., p. 129.

influence in the land. Queen Isabella wore a "skirt of velvet, under which were others of brocade; a scarlet mantle, ornamented in the Moresco fashion; and a black hat, embroidered round the crown and brim." King Ferdinand wore a "close vest of crimson cloth . . . short skirts of yellow satin, a loose cassock of brocade, a rich Moorish cimeter."³³

Contemporary Spain also offered many picturesque groups for Irving's literary paint brush. The primitive state of travel within Spain introduced him to the Spanish muleteer, a distinct and picturesque person. He was strong, dark and sunburnt, resolute, frugal, and courteous. He was especially enchanting because of his singing, having

an inexhaustible stock of songs and ballads, with which to beguile his incessant wayfaring. The airs are rude and simple, consisting of but few inflections. These he chants forth with a loud voice, and long, drawling cadence, seated sideways on his mule, who seems to listen with infinite gravity, and to keep time with his paces to the tune. . . . There is something wildly pleasing in listening to these ditties among the rude and lonely scenes they illustrate, accompanied as they are by the occasional jingle of the mule-bell.³⁴

Thus the muleteer evoked an emotional response in Irving. The ancient ballads the muleteer sang reminded Irving of medieval times. Like other picturesque groups, the muleteers were pictorially striking in their environment while engaged in their occupation:

It has a most picturesque effect also to meet a train of muleteers in some mountain pass. First you hear the bells of the leading mules, breaking with their simple melody the stillness of the airy height; or,

³³Ibid., p. 344.

³⁴The Alhambra (New York, 1891), I, 5-7.

perhaps, the voice of the muleteer admonishing some tardy or wandering animal, or chanting, at the full stretch of his lungs, some traditional ballad. At length you see the mules slowly winding along the craggy defile, sometimes descending precipitous cliffs, so as to present themselves in full relief against the sky, sometimes toiling up the deep arid chasms below you. As they approach, you descry their gay decorations of worsted stuffs, tassels, and saddle-cloths.³⁵

To Irving contemporary Spaniards had interesting, even fascinating appearances. Their faces and costumes were vastly different from the drab-faced, plain-dressed factory workers in England. They were as yet untouched by the industrial revolution. The peasants in different areas of Spain still retained wide variations in their dress. These differences added to the colorful attractions in Spain. Irving often placed his descriptions of attire close to each other to heighten the contrast. His description of a typical, graceful, and attractively dressed Andalusian is closely followed by one of the less attractively attired Valencian. The Andalusian man was

tall, vigorous, and well formed, with a clear olive complexion, a dark beaming eye, and curling chestnut whiskers that met under his chin. He was gallantly dressed in a short green velvet jacket, fitted to his shape, profusely decorated with silver buttons, with a white handkerchief in each pocket. He had breeches of the same, with rows of buttons from the hips to the knees; a pink silk handkerchief round his neck, gathered through a ring, on the bosom of a neatly-plaited shirt; a sash round the waist to match; bottinas, or spatterdashes, of the finest russet leather, elegantly worked, and open at the calf to show his stocking; and russet shoes, setting off a well-shaped foot.³⁶

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 37, 42.

In marked contrast to the Andalusian were the men from Valencia:

They wore round jackets (jalecos), wide linen bragas or drawers scarce reaching to their knees and looking like kilts, red fajas or sashes swathed tightly round their waists, sandals of espartal or bass weed, colored kerchiefs round their heads somewhat in the style of turbans, but leaving the top of the head uncovered; in short their whole appearance having much of the traditional Moorish stamp.³⁷

From a balcony in the Alhambra, Irving frequently and secretly observed the passing scenes and people in Granada at different times of the day. He loved to watch the lovely Spanish women pass by. The following passage shows Irving's ability to present an image not only pictorial, but poetical, emotional, and thoroughly charming as well:

And now steals forth on fairy foot the gentle señora in trim basquina, with restless fan in hand and dark eye flashing from beneath the gracefully folded mantilla; she seeks some well-frequented church to offer up her morning orisons; but the nicely adjusted dress, the dainty shoe and cobweb stocking, the raven tresses exquisitely braided, the fresh-plucked rose, gleaming among them like a gem, show that earth divides with heaven the empire of her thoughts.³⁷

The oriental, ornamental appearance of Moorish costume was fascinating to many romantics. Byron's 1809-1811 trip to Portugal, Spain, and the Near East (Levant) provided him with material for "The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," and "The Corsair," all of which introduced an exotic note into English poetry. In a letter to his mother from Prevesa he writes of the "magnificent" and "delightful spectacle" presented by the costumes of the Albanians, Tartars, and Turks. Years later he wrote

³⁷Ibid., pp. 42, 153.

to John Murray that a Mussulman's ornate turban was a "more poetical" object than a plain, naked savage.³⁸

Eugène Delacroix, who was as much interested as Irving in Moorish themes and costumes, also reflects the taste of the times for the exotic and oriental. Many of Delacroix's paintings may be viewed as companion pieces to Irving's verbal descriptions of the same subject matter. Long before he traveled to Morocco in 1832, Delacroix became fascinated by Egypt, Assyria, and Persia. He was especially interested in fabric and rug designs. Inspired by the war then raging between the Greeks and Turks, he painted The Massacre at Chios (1824). The costumes of the Turks so interested Delacroix that he painted them in such great detail that the horror of the war appears secondary to his presentation of fabrics and designs.

His 1832 trip to Morocco is recorded in a water-colour sketch-book which served as a guide for future paintings. One of them, Women of Algiers (1834), parallels Irving's detailed description of Moorish women, their clothes and jewelry. This oil shows in detail the women's dresses, jewelry, and slippers. They are seated on ornate tiled floors and fabric rugs in a room with tiled walls. The painter's main interest was obviously in the various designs and patterns. Delacroix shared Irving's interest in Moorish customs as well as costumes. This interest is seen in the lovely oil painting Jewish Wedding in Morocco (1839).

³⁸Quoted from English Romantic Poets, edited by Stephens, Beck and Snow (New York, 1961), pp. 374, 371.

Both men were also interested in events of the Middle Ages. Irving wrote about the Christian conquest of Moslem Granada. Delacroix portrayed another medieval conflict between Christian and Moslem in the oil painting The Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople (1840).

The American West offered a variety of picturesque, unique people. The Canadian voyageurs, as in Charles Deas' painting Voyageurs, were gay, jauntily dressed canoe experts. Their counterparts on land were the brave, horseback traveling mountaineers who trapped beaver, as in Deas' Long Jakes, Mountain Man. All of these frontiersmen were viewed with awe because of the dangerous life of adventure they led in the wild West. They were far removed from the ills of the industrial revolution. Irving portrays their spirit and hardiness as well as their interesting costume. All of his descriptions have a natural setting that adds to their picturesqueness. In addition to Deas' paintings, George Caleb Bingham's Fur Traders Descending the Missouri (1845) presents a scene similar to Irving's descriptions with as much detailed presentation of costume. The lack of minute description of the rangers' outfits shows Irving's disdain for their unattractive, unpicturesque attire. They wore "marvellously ill-cut garments . . . every kind of uncouth garb."³⁹ The rangers conformed to governmental uniformity and were out of place in a romantic, free land. Supplementing Irving's descriptions of the fur trappers, their habits and yearly meetings, is

³⁹A Tour of the Prairies, in The Crayon Miscellany (New York, 1895), I, 14, 48.

Alfred Jacob Miller's painting, Fur Trappers Rendezvous (ca. 1840). Interest in the picturesque life of hunting was still strong in the 1890's, as seen in Winslow Homer's Huntsman and Dogs (1891).

The romantic characteristics of sympathy with humble lives and interest in natural men unspoiled by civilization are expressed in Irving's portrayal of the North American Indian. He sustained his romantic attitude toward the Indian throughout his literary career, in four books and three essays, from 1809 to 1840. He glorified the Indian as a truly noble man, grievously wronged by the white man. The Dutch in Knickerbocker's History cleverly dealt with the Indian to their own advantage and hastened his extermination. "Traits of Indian Character" presents the sterling, virtuous qualities of the Indian, unrecognized and unappreciated by the New England settlers. "Philip of Pokanoket" expounds a mighty Indian's heroic qualities and bold achievements, which Irving considered worthy of being immortalized in history and literature. A Tour of the Prairies, Astoria, and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville suggest that the hostility of the Indian was provoked by misdeeds of the white man. "The Seminoles" further illustrates the encroachments of the white man on the Indian.

Until his trip beyond the Mississippi in 1832, Irving's Indians are colorless. Their physical characteristics, appearance, and costume are barely described, if at all. In Knickerbocker's History the Indian is simply "a red man, crowned with feathers."⁴⁰ In "Traits of Indian

⁴⁰ Knickerbocker's History of New York, I, 126.

Character" he dressed in skins "of the bear, the panther, and the buffalo."⁴¹ The single mention of appearance or costume in "Philip of Pokanoket" is Chief Canonchet's blanket, silver-laced coat, and belt of peag. However, once he saw them in the frontier, Irving was fascinated and hurried to his literary paint box and brushes. Nowhere is he a greater artist than in his picturesque Indian descriptions. Using every color of his rainbow palette, he created a vast mural of more than a dozen tribes. Taken singly, each Indian on the mural is a vivid, regal portrait, rich in color, design, and expression. The galleries in which they hang are A Tour of the Prairies, Astoria, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, and "The Seminoles."

The following descriptions of Osage and Creek Indians show Irving's artistic ability in creating complete portraits. The Osages, striking for their physical attractiveness, were

stately fellows; stern and simple in garb and aspect. They wore no ornaments; their dress consisted merely of blankets, leggins, and moccasins. The heads were bare; their hair was cropped close, excepting a bristling ridge on the top, like the crest of a helmet, with a long scalp-lock hanging behind. They had fine Roman countenances, and broad deep chests; and, as they generally wore their blankets wrapped round their loins, so as to leave the bust and arms bare, they looked like so many noble bronze figures.⁴²

What the Creek Indians lacked in natural beauty they made up for in exuberant attire:

⁴¹The Sketch Book, II, 162.

⁴²A Tour of the Prairies, pp. 14-15.

They dress in calico hunting shirts, of various brilliant colors, decorated with bright fringes, and belted with broad girdles, embroidered with beads; they have leggins of dressed deerskins, or of green or scarlet cloth, with embroidered knee-bands and tassels; their moccasins are fancifully wrought and ornamented, and they wear gaudy handkerchiefs tastefully bound round their heads. . . . One had a scarlet handkerchief bound round his head, surmounted with a tuft of black feathers like a cock's tail; another had a white handkerchief, with red feathers; while a third, for want of a plume, had stuck in his turban a brilliant bunch of sumach.⁴³

These descriptions show Irving's sensitivity to the color of their skin and costumes, the form of their bodies and heads, the cut of their costumes, and the pattern or design of the decoration on the costume. By placing these descriptions on the same page in consecutive paragraphs, Irving employs the use of contrast to emphasize the difference in physical characteristics and costume to make them more striking.

The Indian is not painted against a blank background, but against elements of his environment: the wild scenery, his horse, and the bleak and barren prairie. The mild color of the background heightens the color of the picturesque Indian in the foreground. Irving frames his pictures by giving exact details in sufficient quantity to form a unified, balanced, complete picture. This results in a finished oil portrait rather than a hazy pencil drawing. His finished work of art is not a penetrating analysis of his subject, but a pleasing, superficial portrayal. Nevertheless, it has merit in evoking pleasure by its beauty of color and design.

⁴³Ibid., p. 25.

By the time Irving wrote Astoria and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, he was very adept at describing picturesque people. Combining what he read in journals of men who had traveled in the Rocky Mountains and Far West with his own interrogation of eyewitnesses, he painted vivid portraits of Indians he had never seen. He was careful to describe characteristics and objects unique to certain tribes and locations, such as the Oriental-Eskimo appearance of the Chinooks, and the Seminoles' fans, "feathers of the beautiful pink-colored crane, or the scarlet flamingo,"⁴⁴ used to relieve the Florida heat. Irving was fascinated by the various designs the Indians painted on their bodies, such as the black and white stripes of the Sioux. He describes each tribe with real enthusiasm, as a painter who has found his favorite subject is impulsively compelled to cover canvas after canvas. His main interest was in their picturesque costume, shown in the following description of the "gala" dress of the Arickara. They

generally go naked, but they have their gala dress, of which they are not a little vain. This usually consists of a gray surcoat and leggings of the dressed skin of the antelope, resembling chamois leather, and embroidered with porcupine quills brilliantly dyed. A buffalo robe is thrown over the right shoulder, and across the left is slung a quiver of arrows. They wear gay coronets of plumes, particularly those of the swan. He who has killed an enemy in his own land, is entitled to drag at his heels a fox-skin attached to each moccasin; and he who has slain a grizzly bear, wears a necklace of his claws, the most glorious trophy that a hunter can exhibit . . . the warrior often has to paint himself from head to foot, and is

⁴⁴Washington Irving, "The Seminoles," in Reviews and Miscellanies (New York, 1897), p. 323.

extremely capricious and difficult to please, as to the hideous distribution of streaks and colors. . . . Some had the stamp of a red hand across their mouths, a sign that they had drunk the life-blood of a foe.⁴⁵

This word-painting is illustrative of Irving's artistic ability and can be compared to a painting by George Catlin of the Arickara Mah-To-He-Ha (1832). Catlin traveled throughout the West in the 1830's and produced over six hundred paintings of Indians and their villages. The aspects of Indian life that most appealed to Irving coincided with those that enchanted Catlin. Mah-To-He-Ha seems dull when compared to Irving's vivid description. Catlin's Indian looks old, worn-out, bored, and lifeless; whereas Irving's seems proud, cocky, and ready for exciting adventure. In Catlin's portrait the buffalo robe is simply resting over the shoulder, and the fox skins are behind the heels. The use of strong, dynamic words gives Irving's literary portrait more spirit. The buffalo robe is "thrown" and the quiver of arrows is "slung" over the shoulders; the fox-skin is "dragged" at the heels. In addition, Irving's portrait gives the significance of the fox skins and claw necklace, thereby enhancing and emphasizing them. This is achieved only by the use of words; nevertheless, Irving's Indians are superior in a pictorial sense to actual paintings of the same decade.

⁴⁵ Astoria or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains (New York, 1895), I, 306-307.

CHAPTER III

PICTURESQUE ARCHITECTURE

Architecture of the Greek revival, such as the Virginia Capitol designed by Thomas Jefferson, was an expression of eighteenth-century classicism. The symmetry, simplicity, and austerity of classical style gave way to asymmetry, clutter, and warmth in nineteenth-century romanticism. Romantic taste preferred a quaint English cottage or weathered Dutch house over the majestic Parthenon. Also pleasing to the romantic tastes of the times were Moorish temples and Swiss chalets. One of the most important architectural revivals was the Gothic, expressed most strongly on a monumental scale in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City. In the British Isles, Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford was a striking symbol of the romantic interest in the Middle Ages.

Washington Irving did not aspire to be an architect as he did to be an amateur painter. However, he did have the eye of an architect in his sensitivity to methods and materials of construction and to form and design. He was aware of the various styles of architecture and could easily see the structural parts of an edifice as well as its embellishments. Edward Wagenknecht points out Irving's interest in architecture by his "fondness for making drawings of buildings" and his home, Sunnyside, which he planned in detail, even to furnishing the architect George Harvey with sketches.¹

¹Washington Irving: Moderation Displayed (New York, 1962), p. 44.

Irving's writings are uncommonly full of descriptions of picturesque architecture and interior design. Several edifices figure as subjects or titles of his essays and books: "Westminster Abbey," Bracebridge Hall, The Alhambra. Others serve as background or are merely incidental to the stories. Most of his descriptions approximate a pencil sketch of all or part of the edifice or interior; some are comparable to a watercolor, with color as important as line; a few approach blueprints for exactness of dimensions. Often he describes only a segment of the edifice, but it is an interesting and important part of the whole structure. Generally, he presents to his readers a picture showing distinct characteristics and picturesqueness, to give his story illustration, charm, and a definite location.

Interest in picturesque architecture spread to America from England. Castles as residences were no longer useful or practical because people demanded more comfort. But they suddenly became objects of interest when the increasing leisured middle-class discovered the picturesque. Similar buildings, such as Tudor manor houses and Gothic churches, already old-fashioned, were sought as a contrast to Georgian or classical architecture.² Literary and artistic endeavors paralleled each other in reflecting the spirit of the times and in influencing public taste. Scott's novels made the Middle Ages the time of "highest chivalry and romance." The English painter John Turner created a "nostalgia for the castles and ancient manor-houses that seemed so livable

²R. H. Mottram, Old England (London, 1937), pp. 63-64.

and human in the pages of Scott."³

England was full of "those picturesque morsels of Gothic architecture."⁴ Irving's descriptions of manor houses and churches reflect the growing interest in picturesque architecture. English manor houses are pictured in Bracebridge Hall, "Abbotsford," "Newstead Abbey," "Stratford on Avon" and "John Bull." English churches are described in "Westminster Abbey," "Abbotsford," Bracebridge Hall, "The Country Church," "Stratford on Avon" and "The Widow and Her Son." Irving's awareness of the distinction between pure Gothic style and the corruption often found in Gothic-revival style is demonstrated in Bracebridge Hall. He compares the mixture of good sense and eccentricity in the squire's mind to "modern Gothic, where plain brick-work is set off with pointed arches and quaint tracery. Though the main groundwork of his opinions is correct, yet he has a thousand little notions, picked up from old books, which stand out whimsically on the surface of his mind."⁵

The church in "Stratford on Avon" had "a Gothic porch, highly ornamented, with carved doors of massive oak."⁶ In "Westminster Abbey" time had taken its toll on the decorations: "The sharp touches of the chisel are gone from the rich tracery of the arches; the roses which

³Brooks, The World of Washington Irving, p. 157.

⁴"Christmas Day," in The Sketch Book, I, 286.

⁵Bracebridge Hall, I, 139.

⁶The Sketch Book, II, 124.

adorned the keystones have lost their leafy beauty."⁷ Assuming that his readers had seen a picture of the outward appearance of this famous building, he dwells on sketching the interior. He does not give complete descriptions, but his mention of so many objects and parts of the interior imparts a good visual image: the cloisters, the square of the cloisters, arcades, gray walls, vaulted passages, buttresses, arches, transepts, aisles, clustered columns of gigantic dimensions, pillars, fretwork of the roof, steps, gates, arched doors, windows, circular perforations in the massive walls, painted windows, the various chapels, Poet's Corner, railings, stalls, the organ, the bell, abbey clock, niches, statues, busts, friezes, mural monuments, chair of coronation, banners, sepulchers, effigies in relief, gravestones, inscriptions of tombstones, funeral emblems, and medallions. These items show his knowledge of architectural terms and awareness of functional items as well as embellishments.

Irving loved the sight of a large Gothic cathedral looming above a small English town. The emotional effects of such a scene were as important as the visual aspects:

I was much struck with the peculiarities of this reverend little place. A cathedral, with its dependencies and regulations, presents a picture of other times, and of a different order of things. It is a rich relic of a more poetical age. There still linger about it the silence and solemnity of the cloister. In the present instance especially, where the cathedral was large, and the town small, its influence was the more apparent. The solemn

⁷Ibid., I, 267.

pomp of the service performed twice a day, with the grand intonations of the organ, and the voices of the choir swelling through the magnificent pile, diffused, as it were, a perpetual Sabbath over the place. This routine of solemn ceremony continually going on, independent, as it were, of the world; this daily offering of melody and praise, ascending like incense from the altar, had a powerful effect upon my imagination.⁸

The paintings of Salisbury by Constable and Glastonbury by Prout further illustrate the interest in large Gothic churches.

Small country churches also evoked warm feelings for times past. Sketching of old, quaint churches was very popular. One book, W. Spreat's Picturesque Sketches of the Churches of Devon, 1842, contains sketches "drawn from nature and on stone," with descriptive paragraphs, of seventy-four churches. This popular type of picture-book approximates Irving's verbal descriptions of picturesque country churches.

As the Lucy family mansion in "Stratford on Avon" was unfamiliar to his readers, Irving presented a sketch of its outward appearance:

It is a large building of brick, with stone quoins, and is in the Gothic style of Queen Elizabeth's day. . . . A great gateway opens from the park into a kind of courtyard in front of the house, ornamented with a grassplot, shrubs, and flower-beds. The gateway is in imitation of the ancient barbican; being a kind of outpost, and flanked by towers; though evidently for mere ornament, instead of defence. The front of the house is completely in the old style; with stone-shafted casements, a great bow-window of heavy stonework, and a portal with armorial bearings over it, carved in stone. At each corner of the building is an octagon tower, surmounted by a gilt ball and weathercock.⁹

⁸Tales of a Traveller, I, 294.

⁹The Sketch Book, II, 136-137.

Bracebridge Hall is a typical manor house, mainly Tudor, but showing different styles in additions or wings. Descriptions of various rooms and architectural features appear throughout the book, as the characters move from room to room. There are large rooms, such as the great hall and servants' hall, a dining room, a library with carved oaken bookcases and stained-glass windows, various sitting rooms and apartments. Irving describes the many ancestral portraits, faded tapestries, huge fireplaces, heavy furniture, and bow windows with small diamond-shaped panes of glass. English paintings of the period showing picturesque manor houses are Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire by Nash, and Parham Hall by Stanfield.

Irving's considerable knowledge of furnishings as well as architecture would have made him a competent set designer for the theatre. This skill is apparent in his descriptions of Goldsmith's apartments, such as the one in old Canonbury Castle with its picturesque Gothic windows, and the expensive one in London which contained mahogany sofas, card tables, and bookcases, and a lovely Wilton carpet. Irving used this knowledge for humor as well as setting in his stories, as in the following description of chairs in his room in a Flemish inn:

Every kind and country had a representative. No two chairs were alike. Such high backs and low backs, and leather bottoms, and worsted bottoms, and straw bottoms, and no bottoms.¹⁰

Irving disliked crowded slum areas in the cities. This dislike

¹⁰ Tales of a Traveller, I, 58.

was a reflection of the romantic's turning away from the ills of the coming industrial age. Visiting Greenarbor Court, where Goldsmith had lived, he was appalled at the squalor and noise. He described a scuffle between two women who lived there and expressed his pity for Goldsmith because he had to live there. The court was composed of

tall and miserable houses, the very intestines of which seemed turned inside out, to judge from the old garments and frippery fluttering from every window. It appeared to be a region of washerwomen, and lines were stretched about the little square, on which clothes were dangling to dry. . . . Poor Goldsmith! what a time he must have had of it, with his quiet disposition and nervous habits, penned up in this den of noise and vulgarity!¹¹

Equally distasteful was stark simplicity in architecture and surrounding landscape, reflecting the romantic's dislike of the classic. An old French chateau was

standing naked and alone in the midst of a desert of gravel walks and cold stone terraces; with a cold-looking formal garden, cut into angles and rhomboids; and a cold, leafless park, divided geometrically by straight alleys; and two or three cold-looking noseless statues; and fountains spouting cold water enough to make one's teeth chatter.¹²

The romantic preferred a softer, warmer style of architecture, such as a vine-covered cottage.

Particularly picturesque and romantic in Irving's writings are the many quaint English cottages, exemplifying the interest in humble lives and abodes. Curiously, they are picturesque, not for architectural

¹¹Ibid., p. 172.

¹²Ibid., p. 22.

style, but for their setting, amidst flowers and trees; for being cluttered with vines, and usually surrounded by a picket fence. All evoke sweet, sentimental images that are as important as the stories or essays themselves. In "Rural Life in England" Irving lists the items used to embellish a plain thatched cottage to make it charming and picturesque: "The trim hedge, the grass plot before the door, the little flower bed . . . the woodbine trained up against the wall and hanging its blossoms about the lattice, the pot of flowers in the window." He says that "every antique farmhouse and moss-grown cottage is a picture."¹³

The cottage of "The Angler" has many qualities of the picturesque, with "a small garden in front, stocked with kitchen herbs, and adorned with a few flowers. The whole front of the cottage was overrun with honeysuckle."¹⁴ He provides a complete picture of the interior, stressing the nautical theme suggested by the old ship used as a weathervane on the roof. He describes the hammock, the model of a ship hung from the ceiling, the nautical pictures on the walls, the sea shells on the mantel, the quadrant hanging above it, and the woodcuts of naval commanders.

Another picture of a quaint cottage is drawn in "The Wife." This illustration is used to reinforce the sentimental theme of his story:

¹³The Sketch Book, I, 96, 100.

¹⁴Ibid., II, 243.

After turning from the main road up a narrow lane, so thickly shaded with forest-trees as to give it a complete air of seclusion, we came in sight of the cottage. It was humble enough in its appearance for the most pastoral poet; and yet it had a pleasing rural look. A wild vine had overrun one end with a profusion of foliage; a few trees threw their branches gracefully over it; and I observed several pots of flowers tastefully disposed about the door, and on the grass-plot in front. A small wicket gate opened upon a footpath that wound through some shrubbery to the door.¹⁵

Illustrative paintings of romantic cottages are Constable's A Cottage in a Cornfield, Crome's Earlham, and Currier and Ives' A Home on the Mississippi.

The Alhambra was one of the greatest discoveries in Irving's search for the picturesque. Built as a pleasure palace and fortress by the Moors from 1353 to 1391, the Alhambra stands today as the supreme example of late Islamic architecture. The building served Irving in two ways. As inspiration for his literary creativity, it provided the atmosphere for flights of his imagination. As an object to be described accurately and pictorially, it provided subject matter for his literary paint brush.

Here were tangible remnants of a time of high romance, including both Gothic and exotic elements. He could admire the accomplishments of a culture long since passed from the scene, project himself imaginatively into a highly refined world of beauty, and escape from contemporary upheavals:

¹⁵Ibid., I, 40.

Perhaps there never was a monument more characteristic of an age and people than the Alhambra; a rugged fortress without, a voluptuous palace within; war frowning from its battlements; poetry breathing throughout the fairy architecture of its halls. One is irresistibly transported in imagination to those times when Moslem Spain was a region of light amid Christian, yet benighted, Europe; externally a warrior power fighting for existence; internally a realm devoted to literature, science, and the arts; where philosophy was cultivated with passion, though wrought up into subtleties and refinements; and where the luxuries of sense were transcended by those of thought and imagination.¹⁶

Certainly many of Irving's happiest moments were spent in the Alhambra. Out of this experience grew several of his most delightful stories. The many rooms of this earthly paradise and the legends surrounding them served as springboards for ecstatic responses:

The peculiar charm of this old dreamy palace is its power of calling up vague reveries and picturings of the past, and thus clothing naked realities with the illusions of the memory and the imagination. As I delight to seek those parts of the Alhambra which are most favorable to this phantasmagoria of the mind; and none are more so than the Court of Lions, and its surrounding halls. Here the hand of time has fallen the lightest, and the traces of Moorish elegance and splendor exist in almost their original brilliancy . . . all the fairy fretwork of these domes, apparently as unsubstantial as the crystal fabrics of a morning's frost, exist after the lapse of centuries, almost as fresh as if from the hand of the Moslem artist. . . . Everything here appears calculated to inspire kind and happy feelings, for everything is delicate and beautiful. The very light falls tenderly from above, through the lantern of a dome tinted and wrought as if by fairy hands. . . . It needs but a slight exertion of the fancy to picture some pensive beauty of the harem, loitering in these secluded haunts of Oriental luxury.¹⁷

¹⁶The Alhambra, II, 268-269.

¹⁷Ibid., I, 102-103.

The romantic atmosphere of the Alhambra also inspired some of Irving's most effective poetical descriptions. His artist's eye was particularly sensitive to the effect of moonlight on the old palace. It hid the damage of time and let the original beauty shine forth:

The moon . . . at length rolled in full splendor above the towers, pouring a flood of tempered light into every court and hall. The garden beneath my window, before wrapped in gloom, was gently lighted up; the orange and citron trees were tipped with silver, the fountain sparkled in the moonbeams, and even the blush of the rose was faintly visible. . . . Who can do justice to a moonlight night in such a climate and such a place? The temperature of a summer midnight in Andalusia is perfectly ethereal . . . when moonlight is added to all this, the effect is like enchantment. Under its plastic sway the Alhambra seems to regain its pristine glories. Every rent and chasm of time, every mouldering tint and weather stain is gone; the marble resumes its original whiteness, the long colonnades brighten in the moonbeams, the halls are illuminated with a softened radiance, --we tread the enchanted palace of an Arabian tale!¹⁸

Besides his evocation of the magical spirit permeating this picturesque ruin, he also contributed abundant objective descriptions of the architectural reality of the building. He devotes several chapters to a presentation of the origins and development of the styles and methods of construction. These include the use of tiles and arabesques, the artisan's mode of diapering the walls, and the process of stuccoing the vaults with grotto work. His graphic descriptions of the various rooms succeed in acquainting the reader with the interior.

When Irving lived there for one summer, the Alhambra had been neglected for centuries and damaged by earthquakes, the last of which had

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 126-128.

occurred only five years before his visit. His ability to see its original beauty without the benefit of the late nineteenth-century restoration attests to the accuteness of his architect's eye.

The dwellings of the American Indians which Irving described show his particular ability to present structure. As these dwellings were unique and had never been seen by most of his readers, he was careful to describe them correctly and precisely to evoke clear pictures or images. Remaining in a deserted Osage camping place were "The frames of the tents or wigwams . . . consisting of poles bent into an arch, with each end stuck into the ground; these are intertwined with twigs and branches, and covered with bark and skins."¹⁹ His sketch of the Arickara's spacious council lodge shows the materials and method of construction as well as the function of the building,

formed of four forked trunks of trees placed upright, supporting cross-beams and a frame of poles interwoven with osiers, and the whole covered with earth. A hole sunken in the centre formed the fireplace, and immediately above was a circular hole in the apex of the lodge, to let out the smoke and let in the daylight.²⁰

His description of an Omaha lodge is a complete picture, showing the geometric design of a wigwam, its dimensions and proportions, the materials used to construct it, and the patterns, designs, and colors used to embellish it:

of a circular and conical form, and about sixteen feet in diameter; being mere tents of dressed buffalo skins,

¹⁹ A Tour of the Prairies, p. 33.

²⁰ Astoria, I, 290.

sewed together and stretched on long poles inclined towards each other so as to cross at about half their height. Thus the naked tops of the poles diverge in such a manner that, if they were covered with skins like the lower ends, the tent would be shaped like an hourglass, and present the appearance of one cone inverted on the apex of another. . . . The exterior of the Omaha lodges have often a gay and fanciful appearance, being painted with undulating bands of red or yellow, or decorated with rude figures of horses, deer, and buffaloes, and with human faces, painted like full moons, four or five feet broad.²¹

Irving's consistently favorite architecture was the Dutch style.

He has left a delightful, colorful picture-book of Dutch houses and interiors in his thorough descriptions in Knickerbocker's History, "Rip Van Winkle," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and "Dolph Heyliger." His charming descriptions are especially worthy because there are so few antique Dutch colonial homes remaining today. His affection for this style culminated in his home, Sunnyside, which he describes in "Wolfert's Roost" and "Letter to the Editor of 'The Knickerbocker.'"

The Dutch style which Irving so vividly pictures came from Flanders, which in the sixteenth century was ruled by Charles I of Spain. Hence many elements of Dutch style show a Spanish cultural influence, which in turn shows Moorish influence.²² For example, the Moors excelled in the ceramic tile which was used to decorate Spanish floors and walls. This influenced the decoration in Flanders and Holland, where the Dutch perfected their own Delft tiles, which crossed the

²¹Ibid., p. 226.

²²Sherrill Whiton, Elements of Interior Design and Decoration (Philadelphia, 1951), p. 335.

Atlantic to ornament Dame Heyliger's fireplace. The red-tiled Dutch roofs are an obvious example of this migration of style and material from Moorish Africa to Sleepy Hollow by way of Spain and Flanders. Weathervanes on Dutch roofs are adaptations of Spanish wrought-iron ornaments. Dutch interior decoration was essentially Spanish provincial. Majolica ware was placed on high shelves around the walls of Spanish kitchens. The Dutch employed this same decorating technique, using their own Delft ware. The furniture was primitive, heavy, massive, and rather clumsy. Enormous chests, cabinets, and wardrobes were placed in nearly every room. A bedchamber in Antony Vander Heyden's home at Albany had "clothes-presses, and mighty chests of drawers."²³ Baltus Van Tassel's Sleepy Hollow home had "a long dresser" and "a corner cupboard."²⁴

In Knickerbocker's History Irving devotes one chapter to describing a typical quaint Dutch house and a tea party held there. His details of the brick construction, gables, glazed windows, tiled roof, "fierce little weathercock," and wrought-iron figures denoting the date of erection of the house present its outward appearance. Inside, he pictures the small windows and large doors, huge fireplaces "decorated with blue and white tiles," and immaculate rooms, such as the kitchen and "grand parlor." Tea was served out of a "majestic delft tea-pot."²⁵

²³Bracebridge Hall, II, 284.

²⁴The Sketch Book, II, 266-267.

²⁵Knickerbocker's History of New York, I, 250-257.

The houses in Rip Van Winkle's village were "built of small yellow bricks brought from Holland, having latticed windows and gable fronts, surmounted with weathercocks."²⁶

When poor Ichabod entered Katrina Van Tassel's house and saw the picturesque interior, "the conquest of his heart was complete." Irving was undoubtedly expressing his own feelings in these words as he, too, was captivated by quaint Dutch homes. He paints in two long paragraphs the Van Tassel estate, its setting, grounds, buildings, mansion, and interior. The background of his picture is the natural setting on the banks of Hudson in a fertile nook, with elm trees, a spring, and a bubbling brook. To delineate the house and interior, he gives the style of the architecture, names different rooms and pieces of furniture, and draws out in detail the colorful decorations of the walls and mantel:

It was one of those spacious farmhouses, with high-ridged, but lowly sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers, the low projecting eaves forming a piazza along the front, capable of being closed up in bad weather. . . . From this piazza the wondering Ichabod entered the hall, which formed the center of the mansion and the place of usual residence. Here, rows of resplendent pewter, ranged on a long dresser, dazzled his eyes . . . ears of Indian corn and strings of dried apples and peaches hung in gay festoons along the walls, mingled with the gaud of red peppers; and a door left ajar gave him a peep into the best parlor, where the claw-footed chairs and dark mahogany tables shone like mirrors . . . mock oranges and conch shells decorated the mantelpiece; strings of various colored birds' eggs were suspended

²⁶The Sketch Book, I, 45.

above it . . . and a corner cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china.²⁷

The barn had a wooden weathervane which Baltus Van Tassel would gaze at in the evening, "watching the achievements of a little wooden warrior, who, armed with a sword in each hand, was most valiantly fighting the wind on the pinnacle of the barn."²⁸ Irving paints another picture of a Dutch house in "Dolph Heyliger," which was somewhat more elegant than the Van Tassel house. He describes its characteristically Dutch furnishings: "Its chambers were furnished with good old mahogany; the beaufets and cupboards glittered with embossed silver and painted china. Over the parlor fireplace was, as usual, the family coat-of-arms, painted and framed."²⁹

²⁷Ibid., II, 266-267.

²⁸Ibid., p. 271.

²⁹Bracebridge Hall, II, 281.

CHAPTER IV

PICTURESQUE ANIMALS

The romantic interest in humble lives included animals. They were viewed with a humane attitude, became great objects of interest, and increased in popularity as pets. Poets like Goldsmith, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats celebrated them. Biologists sought out unusual animals for more accurate descriptions and classifications. The general public enjoyed accounts and pictures of their findings. Animals which managed to survive in the adverse conditions of the wilderness were admired. Domestic animals were treated with more kindness. As people endowed them with more admirable attributes, they became picturesque. Stories and paintings portraying the charm of little creatures were popular and eagerly received.

Throughout his life Irving had a fond interest in animals. His city child's fascination for farm animals extended to wild ones as well. His humane attitude toward lesser creatures is shown in "The Angler," where he says that fishing would be more enjoyable "if we could forget, which anglers are apt to do, the cruelties and tortures inflicted on worms and insects."¹ When he kills a buffalo, he expresses the same feeling: "It was the fall of a hero, and we felt somewhat ashamed of the butchery that had effected it; but, after the first shot or two, we had reconciled it to our feelings, by the old plea of putting the poor

¹The Sketch Book, II, 241.

animal out of his misery."²

Irving's writings are full of descriptions of picturesque animals. They tell of each animal's appearance, as well as an account of its habits and unusual features. Particularly vivid and attractive are his images of the farm animals in the Van Tassel barnyard. Porkers, geese, ducks, turkeys, and guinea fowls are busily engaged in their daily activities. A gallant cock with burnished wings gleefully crows and enthusiastically "tears up the earth with his feet," as he hunts for food. The effect Irving produced resembles an animated Technicolor cartoon. His delightful picture of the pigeons on the barn roof resembles drawings of a muscular figure in different positions. Instead of making a row of stylized pigeons, he has placed some in repose, others in action; some silent, others cooing. Endowed with human attributes, they enjoy sunshine as people do, and bow to their ladies as gentlemen do: "Rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof."³

Although Irving's contemporary, John James Audubon, strove to paint animals and birds with scientific accuracy, he definitely painted them with emotion. He endowed them with elegance, beauty, and magnificence, as seen in his Wild Turkey (1825). Many glow with fiery life.

²A Tour of the Prairies, p. 180.

³The Sketch Book, II, 263-264.

The most scientifically accurate photograph of an animal or bird could never equal the vivid color and spirit of Audubon's creations. Irving, also, endowed his animals with spirit, charm and human characteristics. The beaver is shown outsmarting the trapper by carrying to the set trap a stick with which he ingeniously springs the trap, drags it away, and conceals it in mud.⁴ His intelligence, alertness, playfulness, and skill as an architect are also presented. A painting comparable to Irving's detailed description of the beaver's shape, color, and habitation is Audubon's Mink.

In Bracebridge Hall Irving devotes a whole chapter to rooks, sable-colored aristocratic members of the crow family. This descriptive presentation primarily portrays their movements as they carry on the business of living. Usually they swing on the breezy tree-tops and avoid contact with the earth. In the spring they come down to the ground in search of building materials. Every now and then Irving's path would be crossed by "one of these busy old gentlemen, worrying about with awkward gait, as if troubled with the gout, or with corns on his toes; casting about many a prying look; turning down first one eye, then the other, in earnest consideration, upon every straw he meets with." Irving also pictures the movements of a whole gang of them as they attack the nest of one of their own currently out of favour. Other descriptions present the motions of two rooks engaged in a private fight, groups of them as they soar, wheel, and circle around in the sky, and

⁴The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, I, 292.

individuals as they hover over the trees, partially alight, and precariously balance, see-saw fashion, on weak branches.⁵

Irving carried his easel on his excursion to the prairies and had a painter's holiday with all the wild and unusual animals. The many animals, birds and fishes sketched in his three Western books include wild horses, buffaloes, deer, wolves, antelopes, bighorns, eagles, wild turkeys, owls, buzzards, and salmon. He gives many sketches and paintings of horses, primarily depicting their freedom and spirit. He devotes one chapter in A Tour of the Prairies to his first view of the catching of a wild horse and recounts his own thrill at seeing the wild and beautiful creature:

After a time, the horse suddenly made his appearance to our right, just ahead of the line, emerging out of a small valley, on a brisk trot; having evidently taken the alarm. At sight of us, he stopped short, gazed at us for an instant with surprise, then tossing up his head, trotted off in fine style, glancing at us over one shoulder, then over the other, his ample mane and tail streaming in the wind. Having dashed through a skirt of thicket . . . he paused in the open field beyond, glanced back at us again, with a beautiful bend of the neck, snuffed the air, and tossing his head again, broke into a gallop, and took refuge in a wood. It was the first time I had ever seen a horse scouring his native wilderness in all the pride and freedom of his nature. How different from the poor mutilated, harnessed, checked, reined-up victim of luxury, caprice, and avarice, in our cities!⁶

When the horse is caught, he seems to submit; but when a light pack is put on his back, he shows his pride and independence by rearing,

⁵Bracebridge Hall, II, 74-81.

⁶A Tour of the Prairies, pp. 137-138.

plunging, kicking, and finally throwing himself on the ground. Irving saw grandeur in the animal's behavior and was disappointed when the horse eventually gave in and became docile and tame. Irving felt compassion for "this fine young animal, whose whole course of existence had been so suddenly reversed," and points out his transformation: "one day, a prince of the prairies--the next day, a pack-horse."⁷ Eugène Delacroix shared Irving's sympathetic interest in horses and painted them in natural settings. His admiration for their active, untamed spirit is seen in his watercolor Horse Terrified by a Storm (1824).

Other wild horses Irving encountered were sketched in positions of action or movement, always showing their spirit: "They pranced about with heads erect, and long flaunting tails." Others "gave signs that they scented an enemy; snuffing the air, snorting, and looking about."⁸ On one occasion a black mare pranced toward Irving, unaware of him until she was close:

At sight of me she started back, then turning, swept at full speed down into the valley, and up the opposite hill, with flowing mane and tail, and action free as air. I gazed after her as long as she was in sight, and breathed a wish that so glorious an animal might never come under the degrading thralldom of whip and curb, but remain a free rover of the prairies.⁸

He continues his study of the graceful motions of a horse in his picture of a coal-black steed who was "a magnificent object, in all the pride

⁷Ibid., p. 149.

⁸Ibid., pp. 170, 184, 193-194.

and glory of his nature. It was admirable to see the lofty and airy carriage of his head; the freedom of every movement; the elasticity with which he trod the meadow."⁹

Irving's descriptions of horses owned by the Indians resemble oil painting for their heavy, vivid color. The Indians decorated their horses, making them as colorful and picturesque as themselves:

Some of them made a striking display when mounted, themselves and their steeds decorated in gala style; for the Indians often bestow more finery upon their horses than upon themselves. Some would hang around the necks or rather the breasts of their horses, the most precious ornaments they had obtained from the white men; others interwove feathers in their manes and tails.¹⁰

An Osage Indian was mounted on "a beautiful piebald horse, a mottled white and brown, of the wild breed of the prairies, decorated with a broad collar, from which hung in front a tuft of horse-hair dyed of a bright scarlet."¹¹ The most gaily decorated horse was owned by the Indian wife of a trapper. His "head stall, breast-bands, saddle, and crupper are lavishly embroidered with beads, and hung with thimbles, hawks' bells, and bunches of ribands."¹²

In his descriptions of the buffalo, Irving gives the animal vividness and life, against a natural setting on the prairies, as

⁹Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁰Astoria, I, 325.

¹¹A Tour of the Prairies, p. 28.

¹²The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, I, 163.

Audubon did in American Bison. The buffalo is far from the old, broken-down, mangy, dull-colored animal so often seen in zoos, or as depicted by sympathizers as he grows closer to being extinct. The following description is somewhat comical:

Of all animals, a buffalo, when close pressed by the hunter, has an aspect most diabolical. His two short black horns curve out of a huge frontlet of shaggy hair; his eyes glow like coals of fire; his mouth open, tongue parched and drawn up into a half crescent, his tail erect, tufted and whisking about in the air; he is a perfect picture of mingled rage and terror. . . . There is a mixture of the awful and the comic in the look of these huge animals, as they bear their great bulk forwards, with an up and down motion of the unwieldy head and shoulders, their tail cocked up, the end whisking about in a fierce yet whimsical style, their eyes glaring venomously with an expression of fright and fury.¹³

One of Irving's most delightful Spanish stories concerns a lonely, tower-confined Moorish prince who spoke the language of the birds. The other major roles in the tale are played by several charming, very talkative birds who are endowed with human characteristics. Irving's vivid descriptions of them reveal his close scrutiny of them. A swallow was a "smart talker, but restless, bustling, and forever on the wing; seldom remaining long enough for any continued conversation. He turned out in the end to be a mere smatterer, who did but skim over the surface of things, pretending to know everything, but knowing nothing thoroughly." Within the tower resided an owl, "a mighty wise-looking bird, with a huge head and staring eyes, who sat blinking and goggling

¹³A Tour of the Prairies, pp. 218, 224.

all day in a hole in the wall, but roamed forth at night." His nights were taken up in "study and research," his days in ruminating upon all that he learned. He devoted his whole time to "meditation and the moon." A parrot with a "bright green coat, pragmatical eye, and consequential top-knot," occasionally would "burst into a fit of dry rickety laughter." A wit who quoted poetry and cracked jokes, the parrot greatly annoyed the owl, who would "scowl and sulk and swell, and be silent for a whole day together." Even the bat that resided in the tower was charming. He "hung all day by his heels in the dark corner of a vault." To a question from the prince, the bat "wrinkled up his nose into a most snappish expression."¹⁴

In his later years, after he settled at Sunnyside in 1835, Irving continued his interest in wildlife and became an avid bird-watcher. His observations and descriptions of four friendly birds who annually visit his trees appear in "The Birds of Spring." They included a pair of phoebe-birds and a sociable bluebird. The earliest to arrive in the spring was a "modest little sad-colored bird, much resembling a wren," that Irving was unable to identify by type. Perched on a tree just outside a window, the bird "sang early in the dawning, long before sunrise, and late in the evening, just before the closing in of night, his matin and his vesper hymns."¹⁵

¹⁴The Alhambra, II, 6-33.

¹⁵The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, II, 272-281.

CHAPTER V

PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPE

In the eighteenth century interest in the raw natural world and appreciation for wild, uncultivated landscape was late in developing. The sophisticated taste of the neo-classical age preferred stiffness and artificiality in gardening, as in the formal garden described by Irving in "Christmas Eve":

The grounds about the house were laid out in the old formal manner of artificial flower beds, clipped shrubberies, raised terraces, and heavy stone balustrades, ornamented with urns, a leaden statue or two, and a jet of water.¹

Rationalism generally prohibited an emotional response to untamed nature. Painters stayed indoors in their studios; landscape painting suffered and has an unreal appearance. Like the painters, poets like Alexander Pope divorced themselves from close observation of nature.

The return to nature, a reaction against the preceding century, was one of the strongest expressions of nineteenth-century romanticism. As portrayed by romantic painters and writers, nature was beautiful, warm, friendly, and inspiring. Most traces of stiffness and artificiality in gardening disappeared. Irving refers to the new manner as "imitation of nature in modern gardening."¹ To counteract the encroachment of the industrial revolution on their lives, men sought solace in nature. They searched for picturesque landscapes which pleased them,

¹The Sketch Book, II, 18.

evoked emotion, and brought them spiritual comfort. Walking tours to remote areas of the British Isles became popular. Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes reflects the increasing interest in walking tours and uncultivated scenery. Like Wordsworth, Irving believed that much was to be learned outdoors from nature: "Information received in that way often makes a deeper impression than when acquired by poring over books."²

Men of means moved from the crowded, dreary cities to seek the wholesome country life. In mid-century America, Andrew Jackson Downing encouraged tasteful cottages and grounds so that the owners could derive the best emotional and spiritual benefits from their country residences. Irving himself became a country gentleman when he retreated to Sunnyside in 1835.

Painters actually moved outdoors to paint directly from nature. In a realistic manner Turner and Constable painted the beauty of natural landscapes to which they had reacted emotionally. The major English romantic poets closely observed the natural world. They sought and described the beauties of uncultivated landscapes. Wordsworth described individual parts of nature--birds' nests, daisies, budding twigs, butterflies, and withered leaves blown by the wind. Byron and Shelley found companionship with the larger, more general elements of landscape--mountains, oceans, forests, and skies.

Of all the picturesque subjects treated by Irving, landscape descriptions are the most abundant. His fondness for the picturesque in

²Tales of a Traveller, I, 271.

nature had its beginning in his childhood, as he played in his family's garden, which teemed with flowers and fruit trees.³ As he roamed outside the city, ever farther, eventually to Sleepy Hollow, his sensitivity to nature found nourishment. He was enthralled by the neighboring Hudson River, the near-by mountains, and especially the lush meadows. In his adult travels he loved every new scene and was receptive to the variety of beauty in landscapes. He filled his journals with notes to be remembered later:

a ruined castle with ivy on the walls, a broad mass of light falling on the towers, a silver sheet of water, a rainbow on a misty morning, a stream that fell over black rocks, a hill that was mottled with sunshine. His journal was quite Turner-esque. He noted--especially in Scotland, for there the journal overflowed--all manner of aerial effects, clouds thick with rain, the sun gleaming among the mountains, a knoll that appeared through the mist, a brook like a shower of diamonds as it fell through the trees.⁴

A turbulent river was excitingly beautiful; a placid lake, just as thrilling. He managed to feel emotion in every scene, and he was equally pleased by a majestic mountain or a flower-enamelled meadow. As long as nature outdid herself, he was elated. The barren prairies, however, were too bleak, desolate, and monotonous for his tastes. His ideal was a luxuriant meadow with a stream or pond, a near-by river, and mountains in the distance. He needed all three for perfection.

Irving seized every opportunity to insert into his writings

³Williams, I, 7.

⁴The World of Washington Irving, p. 155.

descriptions of picturesque landscapes which especially pleased him. He first celebrates the beauties of the American landscape in Knickerbocker's History. Nature plays a large role and is treated as a jolly, lusty old dame who made the New York area a rich paradise. Smiling down on the city, the sun had the full, fat face of a Dutchman and "the waveless bosom of the bay presented a polished mirror, in which nature beheld herself and smiled."⁵ Nature is treated with affection, as shown in his attitude toward trees: "the lordly oak, the generous chestnut, the graceful elm--while here and there the tulip-tree reared its majestic head, the giant of the forest."⁶

Irving uses two Dutch excursions on the Hudson to present his sketches of picturesque river landscapes. In one chapter, as the early settlers of Communipaw float around, he describes all the picturesque elements: "the rural beauties of the scene . . . green shores . . . wonderful little isles . . . that boisterous point of land . . . rich winding cove . . . wanton eddies . . . impending rocks, mantled with the flaunting grape-vine, and crowned with groves."⁷ In the chapter on Peter Stuyvesant's voyage up the Hudson, he describes the surrounding mountainous areas:

the lordly Hudson . . . cliffs of the mountains . . .
the dizzy heights . . . azure vault of heaven . . .

⁵Knickerbocker's History of New York, I, 280.

⁶Ibid., p. 167.

⁷Ibid., pp. 156-175.

beetling brow of some precipice . . . thickets of the forest . . . embowering trees . . . the different periods of the revolving day seemed each, with cunning magic, to diffuse a different charm over the scene. . . . But when the sun sunk amid a flood of glory in the west, mantling the heavens and the earth with a thousand gorgeous dyes--then all was calm, and silent, and magnificent.⁸

In "The Angler" Irving presents a mountain brook among the highlands of the Hudson and shows the variety in its course:

It was one of those wild streams that lavish among our romantic solitudes unheeded beauties, enough to fill the sketch book of a hunter of the picturesque. Sometimes it would leap down rocky shelves, making small cascades, over which the trees threw their broad balancing sprays, and long nameless weeds hung in fringes from the impending banks, dripping with diamond drops. Sometimes it would brawl and fret along a ravine in the matted shade of a forest, filling it with murmurs; and after this termagant career, would steal forth into open day with the most placid demure face imaginable.⁹

Irving's treatment of the Catskill mountains is particularly lovely. In Knickerbocker's History they appear as haunted regions containing treasures of golden ore.¹⁰ In "Rip Van Winkle" he paints them in the manner of Constable and Turner, sensitively presenting the atmospheric conditions and their effects on the landscape. The opening paragraph of the story describes the size and shape of the mountains as seen from afar, against a background of sky, while in the foreground lie the lowlands. He presents two pictures of the same scene just as land-

⁸Ibid., II, 168-173.

⁹The Sketch Book, II, 233-234.

¹⁰Knickerbocker's History of New York, II, 41.

scape painters frequently paint the same scene in different seasons or at different times of day. The first picture has a green foreground, blue and purple mountains, and a clear evening sky in the background. In the second picture the colors are essentially the same, except that the setting sun makes the gray vapors about the summits "glow and light up like a crown of glory." He is presenting the effects of different positions of the sun as well as weather and atmospheric conditions on the scene:

Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day produces some change in the magical hues and shapes. . . . When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but, sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory . . . the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape.¹¹

As Rip ascends the mountains on his fateful day, Irving presents close-up sketches of the rugged scenery, describing the glens, rocks, cliffs, precipices, knolls, brows, ravines, twisting vines, various trees in the woods, torrents, pools, and the near-by Hudson River. He also mentions the herbage and wild flowers and shows the effect of sunlight filtering through the trees and narrow spaces to the glens within the mountains.¹²

Irving's word-paintings of the Hudson River and Catskill

¹¹The Sketch Book, I, 44-45.

¹²Ibid., pp. 53, 55, 59.

Mountains are particularly interesting as forerunners of a school of painting. America's first significant contribution to world art was the Hudson River school of painting, which originated in 1825. The same atmospheric effects on similar scenic and close-up areas are seen in Thomas Cole's The Catskill Mountains (1833) and In the Catskills (1837), and in John Frederick Kensett's River Scene (1870).

Irving continues his depiction of these magical mountains in "The Catskill Mountains," written as a contribution to Putnam's Home-Book of the Picturesque (1850). He describes the "beautiful atmospheric effects which constitute one of the great charms of Hudson River scenery," as well as the wildness of the physical properties of the mountains. He also recounts his emotional reaction as a small boy when he saw the Catskills for the first time, clothed in different tones of colors throughout the day.¹³

In The Sketch Book and Bracebridge Hall Irving inserts idyllic pictures of English rural landscapes. He lauded the English for their ability to cultivate such a pleasing, rural landscape without letting their method show:

The rudest habitation, the most unpromising and scanty portion of land, in the hands of an Englishman of taste becomes a little paradise. . . . The sterile spot grows into loveliness under his hand; and yet the operations of art which produce the effect are scarcely to be perceived.¹⁴

¹³Reviews and Miscellanies, pp. 249-250.

¹⁴The Sketch Book, I, 95-96.

As he walks through the countryside or looks out of windows, he describes the landscapes before his eyes, as in "Christmas Day":

The window of my chamber looked out upon what in summer would have been a beautiful landscape. There was a sloping lawn, a fine stream winding at the foot of it, and a track of park beyond, with noble clumps of trees and herds of deer. At a distance was a neat hamlet, with the smoke from the chimneys hanging over it, and a church with its dark spire in strong relief against the clear, cold sky.¹⁵

Again the atmospheric effects are shown in the "clear, cold sky" and "the smoke from the chimneys" settled over the hamlet. As he walks to this hamlet, he describes the whiteness of the snow and the greenness of small spots where the snow has melted, adding the effect of the sun on the scene and the appearance of a thin haze near the ground. He also paints a rural picturesque landscape as he walks in "Stratford on Avon" to the Lucy family mansion. This picture has a river winding through a valley, with blue hills in the background.¹⁶

Irving's emotional response to a lush, panoramic scene was intense. Like Shelley and Byron, he found the Italian landscapes rich and inspiring. To heighten his description of the Naples landscape, he uses the reaction of his fictional young priest who had been shut up all his life in a monastery in sterile volcanic heights. The gloomy scenery the young priest had been accustomed to was in marked contrast to the beauty of Naples. Leaving the monastery, the priest finally

¹⁵Ibid., II, 33-34.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 133-134.

emerged upon the voluptuous landscape that spreads itself about the Bay of Naples. Heavens! how transported was I, when I stretched my gaze over a vast reach of delicious sunny country, gay with groves and vineyards; with Vesuvius rearing its forked summit to my right; the blue Mediterranean to my left, with its enchanting coast, studded with shining towns and sumptuous villas . . . the beauty of nature intoxicated--bewildered me . . . my soul responded . . . my heart danced.¹⁷

Although much of Spain was barren, the landscape around Granada was lovely. The Moors had irrigated the plain so successfully that the whole area was "a vast garden of delight." The planting and ornamentation included orchards, vineyards, gardens, and groves.¹⁸ Elsewhere in Spain, the area around the ruins of an old Moorish castle presented a landscape scene to be captured by Irving's literary paint brush:

The Guadaira winds its stream round the hill, at the foot of these ruins, whimpering among reeds, rushes, and pond-lilies, and overhung with rhododendron, eglantine, yellow myrtle, and a profusion of wild flowers and aromatic shrubs; while along its banks are groves of oranges, citrons, and pomegranates, among which we heard the early note of the nightingale. A picturesque bridge was thrown across the little river, at one end of which was the ancient Moorish mill of the castle, defended by a tower of yellow stone; a fisherman's net hung against the wall to dry, and hard by in the river was his boat; a group of peasant women in bright-colored dresses, crossing the arched bridge, were reflected in the placid stream. Altogether it was an admirable scene for a landscape-painter.¹⁹

Many of Irving's descriptions resemble those of John Keats. The above passage contains a piling-up of the senses similar to that employed by

¹⁷Tales of a Traveller, I, 271.

¹⁸Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada, I, 5.

¹⁹The Alhambra, I, 13-14.

Keats in Stanza XXX of "The Eve of St. Agnes." The smell and sight of the flowers, the taste of the fruit, and the sound of the bird capture the senses. The interest of contemporary painters in scenes down by the old mill stream is seen in John Constable's Dedham Mill (1820).

Irving's three Western books contain one description after another of the multitude of picturesque, natural scenes in the West. The succession of so many scenes produces an effect approximating a color motion picture. In all, he describes the sizes, shapes, and colors of objects in the scene as well as the emotional effect on the beholder. He praises the variety of landscapes and the magnificence of nature's creations. Irving reveals his own emotional reaction and awareness of the diffusion of light while in a forest on his way to the prairies:

We were overshadowed by lofty trees, with straight, smooth trunks, like stately columns; and as the glancing rays of the sun shone through the transparent leaves, tinted with the many-colored hues of autumn, I was reminded of the effect of sunshine among the stained windows and cluster-columns of a Gothic cathedral. Indeed, there is a grandeur and solemnity in our spacious forests of the West.²⁰

Irving also produced lovely descriptions of the sky:

It was a splendid autumnal evening. The horizon, after sunset, was of a clear apple-green, rising into a delicate lake which gradually lost itself in a deep purple blue. One narrow streak of cloud, of a mahogany color, edged with amber and gold, floated in the west, and just beneath it was the evening star, shining with the pure brilliancy of a diamond.²¹

²⁰ A Tour of the Prairies, p. 39.

²¹ Ibid., p. 256.

Particularly emotional, colorful, and dramatic was Irving's portrayal of Captain Bonneville's arrival at the continental divide, completely awed by the magnificent scenery surrounding him on all sides.²² In Astoria Irving delights in painting colorful scenes of abundant foliage:

The prairies bordering on the river were gayly painted with innumerable flowers, exhibiting the motley confusion of colors of a Turkey carpet. The beautiful islands, also, on which they occasionally halted, presented the appearance of mingled grove and garden. The trees were often covered with clambering grapevines in blossom, which perfumed the air. Between the stately masses of the groves were grassy lawns and glades, studded with flowers, or interspersed with rosebushes in full bloom.²³

²²The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, I, 279.

²³Astoria, I, 257.

CHAPTER VI

SUNNYSIDE

On one of his many boyhood walks beyond the confines of New York city, Irving ventured as far north as Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown. What he found there greatly affected his life. The sleepy atmosphere permeating the charming Dutch villages and farms completely enthralled him. He was never able to escape this enchantment.

He returned often as a young man to visit a friend in Tarrytown. The quaint Dutch houses, old church and its burial ground sparked his curiosity about local Dutch history. From this interest came his first major literary success, Knickerbocker's History, and his two most famous stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." In the old Dutch burying ground he read tombstones with fascinating family names-- Van Winkel and Van Tassel: "With pious hand would Diedrich Knickerbocker turn down the weeds and brambles which had overgrown the tombstones."¹ A rather new tombstone recorded the death of Catrina Ecker Van Tassel in 1793.²

Certainly in his youthful wanderings he found one spot more charming than all the rest, a modest farmhouse built in the seventeenth century which had been occupied for several generations by the Van

¹"Wolfert's Roost" in The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, II, 241.

²William Perry, The Old Dutch Burying Ground of Sleepy Hollow (Boston, 1953), p. 33.

Tassels. Perhaps even the Catrina Van Tassel resting in the burying ground had lived there. This house high on the banks of the Hudson and the natural beauties of the surrounding landscape captivated Irving. The image of the cottage and its surroundings would never leave his mind. Surely this was the home of his heart. Later, he would vividly recall the details of this place as he sat in England describing the Van Tassel home in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

When Irving returned years later from his lengthy stay abroad, he had the means to purchase a home of his own. His heart naturally led him to Sleepy Hollow. In 1835 he bought the Van Tassel cottage and spent two years remodeling and enlarging it. His excitement must have been great as he transformed the modest cottage into an authentic Dutch home. He joined to the back of the original farmhouse an addition equally large, which more than doubled the interior space. The basic architecture and ornament were antique Dutch. This included the tiled roof and five, large stepped gables, all topped with weathervanes. Other elements were Gothic arches, as on three sides of the front porch, Tudor windows, and ornamental Gothic chimneys. To relieve the somewhat austere outside of the house, he planted ivy from Abbotsford, and other climbing vines, such as wisteria and trumpet-creepers. Soon they hugged the sides of the house.

Inside, he planned unusual architectural features, such as arched alcoves and arched ceilings. Some of the floors were laid with Minton and Spanish tiles. The furnishings were in the many revival styles popular in that time. They reflected Irving's varied interests

and included cabinets from Spain, dining chairs with Gothic backs, and furniture in rococo, transition Empire-Victorian, Federal, and delicate, provincial cottage styles. In an age when there was so much bad taste and random eclecticism, Irving's lifelong interests in different countries and peoples justified the combination of elements he chose to incorporate in his home. Every room, practically every brick in the house, had significance. His affection for his home is obvious in his description of it. It was

a little, old-fashioned stone mansion, all made up of gable ends, and as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat . . . called Wolfert's Roost probably from its quaint cockloft look, and from its having a weather-cock perched on every gable. . . . Years and years passed over the time-honored little mansion. The honeysuckle and the sweet-brier crept up its walls; the wren and the Phoebe-bird built under the eaves; it gradually became almost hidden among trees, through which it looked forth, as with half-shut eyes, upon the Tappan Sea. . . . Such was the state of the Roost many years since, at the time when Diedrich Knickerbocker came into this neighborhood. . . . The exterior of the eventful little pile seemed to him full of promise. The crow-step gables were of the primitive architecture of the province. The weather-cocks which surmounted them had crowed in the glorious days of the New Netherlands. The one above the porch had actually glittered of yore on the great Vander Heyden palace at Albany. The interior of the mansion fulfilled its external promise. . . . The Roost still exists. Time, which changes all things, is slow in its operations on a Dutchman's dwelling.³

Outside, Irving had all the elements he needed for perfection in landscape. Far in the distance, across the river, were the Catskills. He had his own flower-enamelled meadow, a spring, brook, and small lake.

³The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, II, 241-271.

The lawn near the house had a well manicured look, and was dotted with delicate fruit trees. Flowers grew in abundance. In the garden, "the rose, the marigold, and hollyhock, grew sociably with the cabbage."⁴ He was completely surrounded by the picturesque. The house was in his favorite style of picturesque architecture. The spirits of the picturesque Dutch settlers lingered in the air and whirled around the countryside at night. Picturesque birds flew in every spring. His dog was his faithful companion. He had picturesque landscapes to view from every window. He could finally tarry at length where his thoughts and dreams had always lingered. And like Wordsworth, he could lie on his couch and recall the pleasure of all the picturesque sights he had seen through the years.

Irving's home was as much his own creation as were his stories. His interest in and knowledge of architecture, interior design, and furnishings attest to his artistic capabilities. He truly made art as much a part of his life as literature. Sunnyside was the material realization of his artistic ideals. It stands today as one of the most romantic, picturesque homes in America.

⁴Ibid., p. 265.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Irving was conditioned by his environment to be romantic in outlook and emotionally receptive to what he saw. His inclination toward painting and his knowledge of art and art techniques sharpened his visual perception. He was genial in temperament and loved the many picturesque things he saw. He wished others to enjoy what he enjoyed; so he described his pleasures in a moderate, cheerful manner, without being didactic. With his ability to write, he was able to describe precisely what he saw and felt.

His emotional reaction to a picturesque landscape, for example, was pleasant, sentimental, or inspiring. He selected exactly what impressed him or caught his eye--the colors, shapes and lighting in the scene--and wrote it down so that his reader, too, could visualize the scene and react accordingly.

In many of his descriptions, Irving pictured the same subjects in the same manner as his contemporary painters. His depiction of people, architecture, animals, and landscapes clearly show that he was an artist. He was a master of description, and he has left vivid, charming accounts of what was the picturesque in life in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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