INTIMIDATED by the hostile reviews of *Tales of a Traveller*, Irving began to feel “extremely anxious to secure a little income from my literary property, that shall put me beyond the danger of recurring penury; and shall render me independent of the necessity of laboring for the press . . . publishing is detestable.”¹ He was haunted by an “evil genius” in Paris who made a special point of telling him how roughly the critics were handling him in England and by an anonymous “friend” who sent him unfavorable notices from the United States.² For several months he did little writing. Meanwhile, financial setbacks dimmed his prospect of gaining freedom from authorship. Though he had no dearth of relatives and friends in business to suggest seemingly safe speculative schemes, too often he lost money on them. He had invested in a Rouen steamboat line³ and had had hopes for a “very pretty little sum annually” from “the Bolivar copper mine.”⁴ But profits did not materialize. The failure of a London bank wiped out a fund he had set aside for his brother Peter, now an invalid.⁵ And early in 1826 two British publishers failed—“severe shocks in the trading world of literature.”⁶

² See PMI, II, 218, 228, 253.
³ STW, I, 288.
⁴ See PMI, II, 240–41.
⁵ STW, I, 291.
⁶ Irving to A. H. Everett, 31 January 1826, PMI, II, 249. Murray, Irving’s own publisher, did not succumb. Irving worried, however; one of the failures, Constable and Co., had recently proposed that he write a life of Washington for it. PMI, II, 238.
In the midst of the bad news, in the latter part of 1825, he had begun working on a collection of essays treating aspects of American life. Apparently they were to be in part an answer to a growing tendency in the United States to criticize him as an expatriate who had been neglecting his own country. He had substantially written several of the essays by January of 1826, when he put them aside in favor of a literary endeavor that seemed to offer larger and more immediate financial returns. Alexander H. Everett, the American Minister to Spain, whom Irving had met previously in Paris and the Hague, urged him to come to Madrid in order to make an English translation of a book on Christopher Columbus which was about to be published by the Spanish historian Martín Fernández de Navarrete. Irving, who wanted to go to Spain anyway, took the word of Everett, one of the esteemed *North American Review* essayists, as to the significance of the book. When he arrived at Madrid, he discovered that it was a collection of source materials relevant to Columbus rather than a coherently developed narrative. But, shrewdly perceiving the need for a biography based on Navarrete’s researches, he set to work at once to write the *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. Thus began his transformation into a biographer, historian, and antiquarian purveyor of legends. From now on, circumstances would combine to pull him largely away from fiction. He would never make enough money to free himself from writ-

7 Irving’s “Note book containing extracts of poetry & prose, hints of a tale or farce...” (“bound as Memoranda in hand of Irving,” unpublished manuscript in the New York Public Library) contains quotations from Horace, Voltaire, Byron, and Irving’s friend Egerton Brydges, all offering consolation to authors beset by carping and laborious critics. Other passages, from Voltaire and Milton, have a bearing on the question of an author’s responsibility to his country. Williams believed that the essays would have contained strong criticism of America. STW, I, 292. Unfortunately, the manuscript has not survived.

8 Four days after hearing from Everett, Irving wrote his friend C. R. Leslie in London, asking him to offer the translation to Murray for a thousand guineas if the publisher was interested. Murray preferred to wait and see the manuscript first. PMI, II, 250–51.

9 The best account of Columbus available in English at the time was the very brief section on him in William Robertson’s *The History of America*. Irving designed his biography for “those who learn the history of Columbus... for the first time.” Letter to Everett, 23 April 1828, PMI, II, 312.
ing, but it would be easier to find historical subjects with popular appeal and to handle them in a way that was professionally acceptable than to write tales and sketches that would satisfy both the public and himself. The strain on the inventive faculty was not so great. And if antiquarianism finally proved a kind of trap, it was not in turning him into a grubbing little sublibrarian. There was a social side to scholarship that the little man in black had never suspected, the companionship of book-collectors, gentleman historians and bibliographers, academics, and government officials like Everett, all with a stake in high culture.

One sometimes regrets the change. *Tales of a Traveller* shows an insight into the nature and function of short fiction that might have taken him farther, even in spite of his reluctance or inability to look to the magazines as a vehicle for publication and to concentrate on the single story standing by itself. But doubts hover above such a surmise. Anxiety about keeping up his reputation would hardly have been diminished by his inability to vary significantly the one tale to which he tended to reduce all experience. His difficulty was both temperamental and intellectual. His literary vitality had always depended on his somehow fighting his own judgments and conclusions—fighting them in the very process of accepting them. If he found the world nonsensical, he had at least been able to laugh at it, often in the beginning in indignation. But now he was beginning to be resigned to the great world’s littleness. The joke was growing tiresome, almost ceasing to be a joke. And where laughter did not altogether subside in nostalgia, it threatened to become merely automatic.

Not that there was anything approaching a sudden collapse. Indeed, to the casual observer the transition from the middle to the final phase in Irving’s career, his evolution into the elder statesman of American literature, may seem to be contingent on little more than his return to America in 1832 and the shift of his interest from fiction to history. His six years in Spain were highly productive, and at least two of the four books that came out of that sojourn represent Irving at close to top form. It is only when the Spanish works are taken together that one
sees the gradual stifling of imagination in one single stock response.

Before that happened, the theme of mutability metamorphosed Columbus from a renaissance and neoclassical, into a romantic, hero. Emerging in 1828, almost midway between the Columbiad and Moby-Dick, Irving’s most important non-comic character has more in common with the morbid voyager Ahab than with Barlow’s enlightened discoverer. Here the “enchafed flood” begins to flow into American literature, and the original voyage of discovery, which had once seemed a fit subject for an epic celebration of America, comes instead to look like the beginning of American tragedy.

For three days there was a continuance of light summer airs from the southward and westward, and the sea was as smooth as a mirror. A whale was seen heaving up its huge form at a distance, which Columbus immediately pointed out as a favorable indication, affirming that these fish were generally in the neighborhood of land. The crews, however, became uneasy at the calmness of the weather. They observed that the contrary winds which they experienced were transient and unsteady, and so light as not to ruffle the surface of the sea, which maintained a sluggish calm like a lake of dead water. Every thing differed, they said, in these strange regions from the world to which they had been accustomed. The only winds which prevailed with any constancy and force, were from the east, and they had not power to disturb the torpid stillness of the ocean; there was a risk, therefore, either of perishing amidst stagnant and shoreless waters, or of being prevented, by contrary winds, from ever returning to their native country. (C, I, 149–50)

Beyond this ominous stillness, Columbus is to encounter difficulties which will in time make his years of controversy with those who doubted the possibility of finding the East by sailing west seem trifling. Endless storms and ships wrecked, warfare, cannibalism, rebellion, treachery, imprisonment await him. Arching over all, the rich illusion, the golden dream that it is the Indies that he has found or has to find is gradually to turn his life into an insane quest for the unattainable. And when the illusion subsides, he will be left exposed, in moments of doubt, to guilt and remorse for the suffering in which he has involved others.
Irving's *Columbus* is a diorama of shifting images, analogues, and archetypes. If the admiral is on occasion almost Ahab, he becomes, by the time misery has been piled upon malice in a "perfect jubilee of triumphant villainy" (II, 287–88), a scapegoat in irons, like Billy Budd in the darbies, ready, though innocent, to endure any sacrifice in the name of their Catholic majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella. Religious allusion—including his penchant for donning a monk's habit and going on penitential journeys—makes Columbus a perpetual pilgrim, though what he seeks most of the time is not the Celestial City but a terrestrial paradise. Allegorizing the geography of discovery, he leaves Bunyanesque names behind him on the map—"Cape Thanks to God," the "River of Disaster," the "Coast of Contradictions." Elysium is as far as to the New World, and there it is everywhere and nowhere. Each new island seems more beautiful than the last; exploration leads from one "Valle de Paraiso" to another. The "perfect nakedness" of the natives of Hispaniola seems like the "state of primeval innocence of our first parents" (I, 229). But that state does not endure. Technically, discovering Edens makes Columbus the first American Adam, and, though a comparative innocent, he is implicated in the fall, indeed in many falls. It is not only his original settlement at Hispaniola, La Navidad ("The Nativity"), which proves abortive. He brings the *meum* and *teum* of the Old World with him into every garden and valley.

Irving's shift from fiction to history was in a sense only nominal. While at work on *Columbus*, he wrote Brevoort that people suspected him, on account of his "having dealt so much in fiction," of being unable to "tell truth with plausibility." And if this was not actually his own suspicion, one at least wonders whether he was not aiming for the opposite effect—to tell truth implausibly. His open reversion to a pseudonym in his next "historical" work, *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada*, supports such an inference. He put *Columbus* together too hurriedly for it to be as accurate and original as historians

10 23 February 1828, *WiHB*, II, 204.
would like it to be.\textsuperscript{11} He was even inclined on occasion (perhaps to compensate for the impossibility of doing exhaustive research) to “let his imagination go completely,”\textsuperscript{12} reconstructing colorful scenes not only from what existing records clearly indicated had happened, but from what a knowledge of the era of discovery led him to believe might have happened. And he heightened diction, tone, and characterization to the point of inviting criticism.\textsuperscript{13}

Not that nineteenth-century historians dismissed \textit{Columbus} as unimportant. Stanley Williams’ verdict seems sound, that instances where Irving consciously invents facts or distorts what in his time was considered to be the evidence are “relatively rare.”\textsuperscript{14} In spite of its faults, the book proved to be usable until more detailed studies of the subject appeared.\textsuperscript{15} But, although literary historians agree that the book is well written, almost no one reads it today. Nor is the fact that it has been superseded historically the only reason. Gibbon, Prescott, and Parkman, for instance, continue to find readers in spite of the water that has flowed over or seeped through the dams they put up. In addition to style, their works all have bulk and solidity, which give a sense of authoritativeness, and they contain opinions which, because of the strength of the personalities behind them, need to be reckoned with even when they are wrong. The trouble with \textit{Columbus} as history is that there is not enough factual weight to hold it down. It has been praised occasionally, even in the twentieth century, but for the most part only after having been eased into virtually another category from that of history.

\textsuperscript{11} “How incredible,” remarks Williams, “to imagine this American more than the interpreter, during his twenty-one months in Madrid,” of materials Navarrete had spent 35 years gathering. \textit{STW}, II, 300. Most of the remainder of my discussion of \textit{Columbus} is taken, with slight changes, from my article “Irving’s \textit{Columbus}: The Problem of Romantic Biography,” \textit{The Americas}, XIII (October, 1956), 127-40.

\textsuperscript{12} Samuel Eliot Morison, \textit{Admiral of the Ocean Sea} (Boston, 1942), I, 117.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{STW}, I, 322-23.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 310.

or biography.16 Williams goes so far as to say it is really a romance.17

One can hardly believe that, even as rapidly as he was working, Irving could not, had he desired to, have packed the book with more information than it actually contains. The unassimilated information that he says in his Preface was at his disposal in Madrid in 1826–27 would have been an Eldorado for most scholars. He had access not only to Navarrete’s partially published Colección de los Viages y Descubrimientos but also to the manuscripts themselves, which it had taken Navarrete a lifetime to collect. Furthermore, he was allowed in Madrid to work in the personal library of the American collector Obadiah Rich, which contained several important unpublished histories of the period of colonization.18 Yet Irving considered such materials for the most part “minor.”19 What then was major?

Quite simply, what was already generally known about Columbus. For Irving, the story of Columbus did not need to be unearthed in Spanish archives. It simply needed retelling. Irving was to fill it out in certain places and in the end, by shifting emphases, develop an original interpretation. But he did not feel obligated to dig for new facts or question the basic soundness of the story as it had been told and retold countless times. Although he did rely heavily on certain unpublished manuscripts, by and large they were not primary documents, such as letters or state papers, but narratives of the career of Columbus by early writers like Bartolomé de las Casas.20


20 This attitude of Irving toward his materials and the approach to historical composition which it produced led Williams to the conclusion that he deserved
Versions of the story had appeared in long and studious histories of the Indies or of America, in collected and uncollected narratives of remarkable voyages and discoveries, and in anthologies of famous lives. Yet it had been told in a noticeably conventionalized way. The form had sprung in part, apparently, from the records Columbus had made of his own life in journals and letters, many of which had been available to both his son Ferdinand and to Las Casas, the original historians of the discovery of America. These two had composed in rather similar fashions, often quoting or paraphrasing Columbus himself. Antonio de Herrera in his turn had relied almost exclusively on Las Casas and Ferdinand; in form he was closer to Ferdinand. And since Las Casas’ *Historia de las Indias* remained unpublished, Herrera and Ferdinand had become the chief sources for most of the later accounts. After the early eighteenth-century translations of Ferdinand and Herrera, the words themselves, from one version to another (in English at least), begin to have a familiar ring.  

Time and again, whether they elaborated or condensed, writers arranged parts of the whole story in approximately the same relation to each other. The opinions of the ancients about geography and the New World usually came near the beginning, closely tied to the reasons that induced Columbus to infer the existence of lands to the west. During the second voyage there was apt to be a description of the customs of the natives of Hispaniola based largely on Fray Ramón Pane’s account left among the papers of Columbus. And Columbus’ reunion with his brother Bartholomew some time later was the occasion for the full story of the latter’s mission to England, begun many years previously. After (and not before or during) the narrative of the third voyage to the Gulf of Paria and
northward to Hispaniola, the theory that Columbus elaborated
that the earth is pear-shaped and crowned at the stem by the
terrestrial paradise was usually revealed. The end of the third
voyage introduced news of the discoveries of other navigators.
And the end of Columbus’ life brought the reader to his
character. 22

In spite of formal variations, the character of Columbus had
remained substantially the same. A wise man, in spite of kings
and administrators, he had led a life so little blameworthy that
it served to atone for the lusts and avarice of others. It is true
that Oviedo had accused him of being a cruel governor 23 and
that Las Casas had blamed Indian slavery on Columbus. 24 But
these charges had been largely ignored until they were revived
by Muñoz 25 and Navarrete; 26 it could be argued that as Span-
iards trying to exculpate their countrymen of the supposedly
unwarranted slaughter and exploitation of the Indians in the
early years of the colonization of Latin America, they were
overeager to shift responsibility to the Italian admiral. Other-
wise, Columbus was an unlucky viceroy in a wilderness, who
bestowed fatherly affection upon the natives until rebellion was
provoked by the refusal of his subordinates to obey his prudent
directions. He did not need Irving to make him a great man.

With all the heroism, however, there remained in the center
of the life of Columbus a common core of suffering. The
meaning lurks in a brief summing up such as the following:
“Thus died the great and glorious Columbus whose Fame will
always encrease, but whose Life was a remarkable Instance on
what a sandy Foundation they build their Happiness who de-
pend upon the Gratitude of Princes.” 27 And it is most explicit

22 All of these arrangements are followed by Irving. For a list of works in
which their incidence is very high, see my “Irving’s Columbus,” p. 132, n. 21.
23 Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Historia General y Natural de las
24 Historia de las Indias (Mexico City, Buenos Aires, 1951), Bk. I, chaps. c, cii,
civ–cv.
in Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, who says that the life of Columbus was

plus qu’aucune autre mêlée de bonheur & d’adversités, d’opprobres & d’applaudissements; de ce que la fortune peut procurer de Grandeurs à un Particulier, & de ce qu’elle peut lui faire essuyer de revers. Il jouit peu de sa gloire, & des dignités, dont il fut revêtu; au contraire, il ne fut presque pas un jour sans avoir à souffrir, ou les douleurs les plus aiguës, ou les contretêts les plus fâcheux, ou les chagrins les plus cuisans.28

The historiography of Columbus, then, had been largely an accumulation of testimony in acceptance of a set of primitive beliefs. A lover of folklore, Irving had in Columbus a full-fledged legendary hero. And his aim in retelling the story, although he introduced some new material and tried to be accurate, was apparently to make sure that his hero was not forced to descend out of the realm of myth. Thus he preserved the general framework or conventions within which Columbus’ life was usually exhibited.

In his *Life and Voyages*, however, he did uncover an internal source of failure in his hero, a flaw of potentially tragic proportions. He is careful, as we have seen, to emphasize the names Columbus gave to landmarks in his travels. The name reflects the idea of a thing, which, for Columbus, is apt to become the thing in itself. When he is forced to turn back from his quest for the passage to India on the last voyage, it is more important to this biography that he believes he is stopped just short of the Ganges than that the world subsequently knows he is only coasting along Central America. By fully documenting the piety of Columbus, which earlier published writers had only mentioned, Irving makes more inevitable the ultimate failure of his hero. His hopes go far beyond the exploration of a few paltry islands to the liberation of Jerusalem and the christianizing of the Grand Khan.

Columbus loses himself in a sort of quixotism, through which, even though Irving adheres rather closely to most of the conventions of the story, his hero is transformed into something

28 *Histoire de l’Isle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue* (Amsterdam, 1733), II, 43–44.
other than what he had been for preceding centuries—renaissance theory put into practice. In the end his life becomes what, though it had largely been forgotten, Las Casas originally christened it, "un luengo martirio."29 History here does not outgrow myth, but the myth becomes richer. Irving was almost the first writer to have Columbus embark not so much to discover lands unknown to the west as to find a convenient way of converting spices to gold and the Grand Khan to Christianity (I, 131–32). More than his predecessors, he helped his hero build illusions of the Orient out of misconstrued allusions to the Caribees.30 And the details of vows and castings of lots, which earlier historians, impressed by the modernity of Columbus, had had to pass over quickly so that he might not seem over-superstitious, in this account make his plans for a crusade more plausible.31 It had been traditional, for instance, to emphasize the craftiness of Columbus in sealing an account of his discovery in a barrel against the possibility of the ship’s going down during the storms which accompanied the first voyage home. But to Irving it is important that when the weather became severe lotteries were held, each man promising that if the lot fell to him he would, if he got home safely, make a pilgrimage to a shrine. More than once Columbus, as though singled out by Heaven, himself drew the bean marked with a cross and subsequently fulfilled the vow.

The third voyage, to the verge of what Columbus thought was literally the earthly paradise, though it might have seemed somewhat out of the line of the renaissance hero as seen by the neoclassical historian, comes now as no great surprise.32 And when finally we see his visions and hear a voice urging Colum-

29 I, 393.
30 This is a good example of how Irving selected material. Where Columbus in his "Journal" seems more often than not preoccupied with recording geographical data, Irving’s summary of the first cruise among the islands serves chiefly to swell Columbus’ hopes that he had actually reached Asia. Cf. C, Bk. IV; Navarrete, I, 19–123. For the crusading spirit, Irving relies on a letter from Columbus to the Pope. Navarrete, I, 280–82.
32 C, II, 139–47. Sources here are Las Casas (II, 40–61) and a letter from Columbus to the King and Queen in Navarrete, I, 242–64.
bus to persevere, promising his mission's ultimate fulfillment, we are fully prepared for the obstacles which intervene between him and the completion of the last voyage.  

In François Antoine Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages*, it is true, Columbus and his few real followers, representing righteousness, had begun to seem dwarfed by the forces of evil. And later in Muñoz, Columbus became slightly quixotic in his search for Japan and India and his exacting from his followers an oath that defined Cuba as the beginning of a continent. It was like the Don's asking someone who hadn't seen her to swear that his Dulcinea was the most beautiful woman in the world—Irving was to make this scene even more dramatic (I, 442). In Muñoz also the islands of the New World seemed heavenly until mortalized by avarice. But Prévost's account was only the beginning of a biography. And Muñoz, whose first volume stopped at 1500 and who never completed the rest of his work, was writing not a biography but an entire history of the New World.

It was by utilizing more fully than any of his predecessors the unpublished history of Las Casas and the writings, especially the journal, of Columbus himself that Irving was able to complete the reinterpretation of Columbus. These works were the most important of the "minor" materials in Rich's library and Navarrete's Coleción. Irving may carefully prepare nineteenth-century readers with such statements as this:

Days of constant perturbation, and nights of sleepless anxiety, preyed upon a constitution broken by age, by maladies and hardships, and produced a fever of the mind, in which he was visited by one of those mental hallucinations deemed by him mysterious and supernatural. (II, 394–95)

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34 Paris, 1754, Vol. XII.
35 *Historia*, Bk. V, pars. 15–16; Bk. III, pars. 15–25; Bk. V, par. 9; Bk. VI, the very beginning and the very end.
36 In fiction up to Irving's time Columbus seems to have been little different from the character implied in previous history.
But there have been too many voices and visions explaining Columbus to himself and to us, too many storms and afflictions at crossed moments as apparent punishments for sins and presumptions, too many predictions come true, and altogether too many points of similarity between this hero and other godridden figures in literature for us to believe any longer that the motivation is altogether accidental or human. Irving has adapted from romance the device of symbolic coincidence to set this story back on a providential basis.

The stereotype suggested by Williams for Irving’s Columbus, “man of sensibility,”37 is probably illuminating enough if it is broadly interpreted. Perhaps the one quality he never loses is his quixotism, the quixotism of the nineteenth century, which involves the pathos (as opposed to the bathos) of mistaking illusions for reality. It must be observed, however, that though Columbus, according to Irving’s interpretation, is a man of moods, he has not the diseased will of a Werther or of a nineteenth-century Hamlet. Some of his moods elevate him to an altogether different role: “As the evening darkened, Columbus took his station on top of the castle or cabin on the high poop of his vessel, ranging his eye along the dusky horizon, and maintaining an intense and unremitting watch.”38 And to his crew, the heroism of the admiral was apt to appear less super- than inhuman.

In their secret conferences they exclaimed against him as a desperado, bent, in a mad fantasy, upon doing something extravagant to render himself notorious. What were their sufferings and dangers to one evidently content to sacrifice his own life for the chance of distinction? . . . How much further were they to go in quest of a merely conjectured land? Were they to sail on until they perished, or until all return became impossible? In such case they would be the authors of their own destruction. (I, 153)

37 STW, I, 324.
38 C, I, 161. To Columbus himself, a swelling of the sea which unexpectedly interrupts a prolonged calm “seemed providentially ordered to allay the rising clamors of his crew; [like] that which so miraculously aided Moses when conducting the children of Israel out of the captivity of Egypt.” I, 150–51.
Irving allows for as much variation in the temperament of Columbus and in opinions about him as there is change in fortune and the weather. His gentleness, patience, and intelligence in pointing out to his crew that what they read as bad omens are signs of the nearness of land—these qualities in Columbus inspire confidence that he, like Odysseus, has the sort of perseverance necessary for getting safely home. But what seems right and righteousness one moment becomes "obstinacy" the next, "in tempting fate by continuing on into a boundless sea" (I, 150, 158). It did not take much to metamorphose Homer's Odysseus into the Dantesque Ulysses, who passed beyond the Pillars of Hercules to his sorrow. And the boundless ambition of Columbus is occasionally almost Faustian. Indeed it is his intractable resolution to take the crew on with him against their will, though it is from his point of view of divine rather than diabolic inspiration, that most strongly suggests the later, sea-going Faust, Ahab. When his men are boisterous, Columbus "assumed a decided tone. He told them it was useless to murmur; ... he was determined to persevere, until by the blessing of God, he should accomplish the enterprise" (I, 158–59). His offering (and finally claiming for himself) the reward (a doublet rather than a doubloon) for the man who first sights land (I, 160–61) also suggests Ahab.

In the process of calling new experiences and new-found lands by old names, Irving expatiates to the point of sustaining a Columbus who is not only partially but almost exclusively mythical. For the biography is inescapably general. The events that it describes always resemble or represent one another, and in it a man is always typical of a class, a society, an age, an idea, or of humanity at large. Because the exploration of similitude and dissimilarity is the essence of Irving's method, he, to a much greater extent than most historians, refuses to treat par-
ticular events in isolation. He is general to the point of destroy­
ing the significance of particulars. The details of this life are actually unimportant: what we are concerned with is its “char­acter,” its meaning as a whole. History here is completely ex­ternal or superficial because we view the subject at a distance, where only a total significance appears. Irving makes little at­tempt to get inside the subject, to deal with intricate matters of fact or motive. Economic, social, political, and intellectual con­siderations are not investigated. It suffices to assume that at this time, Spain and Portugal were jealous of each other, without explanation. As far as Irving is concerned, Columbus is de­tained by the Portuguese on his return from his first voyage be­cause it is his role to meet and overcome opposition until finally overcome himself. This is the rationale behind the secondary figures in the story, Roldán, Bobadilla, and Porras. They are all representatives of the same force, the principle of evil, which ruins paradises and stains the careers of the best of men.

For Irving, history remained fiction, even though his tone shifted from the comic to the romantic. *Columbus* is—as much as any American novel—a romance. It makes the career of the discoverer of America a fabulous quasi-allegorical quest. It sees the New World as a land of wonder and enchantment, where nature contrives effects with bewildering lavishness. In one sense the newness turns out to be an illusion, part of the enchantment. Irving, however, remains unsure of the values of the ordeal of innocence to which he subjects his early American hero. Thus despite the tragic implications that Irving begins to bring out in Columbus, his biography gives us a pathetic world but not quite a tragic hero. The sense of inevitable ruin still closes down his horizon. Could one ask anything more of the author of *Knickerbocker*?

Without what is called a tragic vision, Irving’s one tale, as the sound and the fury of his early work had suggested, ran the risk of signifying nothing, at least if retold once too often. Small wonder, then, that his next book was a partial parody of history developed around the character of a sort of Spanish
Knickerbocker, the bigoted Christian chronicler Fray Antonio Agapida. Irving called this book “a kind of experiment in literature.” He could not contemplate it as “a grave historical production, or a work of authority.” Neither did he mean it to be of “a mere light amusing kind”; instead he tried to aim at “something . . . between a history and a romance.” He claimed to have “introduced nothing . . . not founded on historical authority”: “every fact is drawn from historical sources.” But when we stumble over his Bolingbroke-like assertion that the book is a digest of early chronicles and contains “the striking facts and achievements, true or false, of them all,” we begin to wonder what a “fact” is.

The Conquest of Granada begins as a joke. Irving pretends to be presenting parts of an old chronicle compiled by Fray Agapida. Many of the early readers thought it was a bad joke: they took Agapida for a real person and read on expecting accuracy in small details. When some readers tried, and failed, to find an original manuscript by Agapida, the cry went up that Irving had taken the name of history (or at least of Chronicle) in vain. But such readers seem to have been overly inclined to be fooled, for the first function of the joke is to make it obvious that the criterion of literal fidelity to the sources does not apply in this context. Agapida is fictitious. The editor’s (Irving’s) equivocation on the first page of the Introduction ought to leave no doubt.

But to go from the book to the sources is to be surprised by its substantial reliability—that is, if one has assumed that when an author bothers to invent a chronicler he may as well invent the chronicle to go with him. As a contemporary study of Prescott wisely observes, however, “Historians of a later day too easily

40 Letter to Prince Dmitry Dolgorouki, 10 January 1829, PMI, II, 366.
42 Letter to Thomas Aspinwall, 4 April 1829, quoted in STW, I, 344–45 (my italics).
44 Letter to Everett, PMI, II, 348 (my italics).
assumed that the romantic school was seduced away from the truth" by glamorous materials. Prescott himself asked readers to compare Irving’s account of the wars of Granada with his own in Ferdinand and Isabella, to prove, not the soundness of the latter, but the usefulness of the former—as history. The two writers relied on essentially the same sources. Like Irving, Prescott was fond of “a good, gossiping chronicle or memoir”; he actually defended such materials as major and generally reliable historical sources and justified the technique, used in both Columbus and Granada, of building a history on a foundation of earlier narratives.

Through Agapida, Irving simply excuses himself from having to take infinite pains. The pen name of an historian frees him

48 So did Miguel Lafuente Alcántara in Vols. III and IV of Historia de Granada (Granada, 1845-46). The following are the chief sources of the Conquest of Granada (the editions in which I have examined them are not necessarily those used by Irving): Andrés Bernáldez, Historia de los Reyes Católicos Dn. Fernando y Da. Isabel (Seville, 1870), Vol. I (Irving consulted this in manuscript at Rich’s); Gerónimo Curita, Los Cinco Libros Portreros de la Segunda Parte de los Anales de la Corona de Aragon (Zaragoza, 1610), Vol. IV; Estevan de Garibay y Camal-loa, Compendio Historial de las Crónicas (Barcelona, 1628), Vol. II; Juan de Mariana, Historia General de España (Madrid, 1734), Vol. II; Hernando del Pulgar, Crónica de los Señores Reyes Católicos (Valencia, 1780); José Antonio Conde, Historia de la Dominación de los Arabes en España (Madrid, 1821), III, 211-65; [Denis Dominique] Cardonne, Histoire de l’Afrique et de l’Espagne, sous la domination des Arabes (Paris, 1765), III, 250-320. For detailed discussion of Irving’s use of sources, see Louise M. Hoffman, “Irving’s Use of Spanish Sources in The Conquest of Granada,” Hispania, XXVIII (November, 1945), 483-98; STW, II, 309-10.
49 Charvat and Kraus, p. liii. The connection between Samuel Rogers’ “The Voyage of Columbus” (Poems [London, 1814]) and Irving’s work in both Columbus and Granada may be fairly close, especially since the two writers were friends as early as 1820. The “Columbus” of Rogers is only a “fragment,” and in its machinery it is dependent primarily on the epic tradition. But he defended its extravagance on the ground that the conception of Columbus in his poem was true to the “spirit in the old Spanish Chroniclers of the sixteenth century.” Poems (London, 1820), p. 175. “Columbus was a person of extraordinary virtue and piety, acting under the sense of a divine impulse” (p. 171). Rogers had read much of the historical literature on Columbus, as his notes show. He pretended that his poem was a translation of a manuscript found in the convent at La Rabida. One is intrigued by the similarity in sound between “La Rabida” and “Fray Antonio Agapida.” The Analectic had discussed Rogers’ “Columbus” in a review of his Poems published during Irving’s editorship. AN, II, 472-83.
from the pretense of being an impartial scientific scrutinizer and enables him to tell the story in whichever way it sounds best, without having to worry about refined criteria for testing the reliability of evidence. The story becomes not so much what actually happened—the truth—as what Agapida reports, as Irving is apt to remind us, for instance, by placing next to Agapida’s explanation of certain occurrences a quite incompatible explanation by Arab chroniclers (G, pp. 35, 433–34). The book, however, is not a mock-history like Knickerbocker. Agapida is mildly amusing, but although Irving is still poking fun at historians, he is trying to take fiction fairly seriously.

In the long run one regrets the lack of historical detail. The recurrence of disaster tends to wear the book down. Irving opens before us a panorama of Andalusia as a constant reiteration of high, sterile sierras intersected by green valleys, each one of which is like paradise. Each is controlled by one town strongly fortified, usually built from the top of a hill to the gardens and orchards surrounding it. Each town is attacked or besieged successively by an army; in every garden there are desperate battles, in which the Christians tangle themselves up in Moorish irrigation ditches. Almost all of the war can be comprehended through any one of these encounters, for this history amounts to little more than many repetitions of the fall of Alhama, the first city taken. From our distant position the knights all look alike, and we recognize the whereabouts of the leaders only by their larger tents or longer trains of attendants.

The short chapters of the book are well adapted to the landscape. Often one of them is just long enough to cover a raid through a valley, the capture of a fortress, a battle in a garden, or some other sally or adventure. Their shortness and regularity emphasize the resemblance of the actions to one another, and it is this resemblance, this repetition, which Irving exploits to unify

\[60\] In a note (G, p. 85) Irving says he prefers to Pulgar, Bernáldez, “that most veracious and contemporary chronicler,” whom he had, nevertheless, rejected in the matter of Ali Atar’s age, without any explanation (G, p. 72). Mariana (II, 485) and Çurita (IV, 321) differ with Bernáldez (I, 172) on this point. Elsewhere (G, p. 31, note) Irving claims to be following “the most reliable authorities” but doesn’t even say who they are, let alone why they are reliable.
his story, since it lacks the cohesiveness of constantly present and steadily developing characters or plot.

The prediction inspired by the birth of the last King of Granada, Boabdil el Chico, in the very beginning puts the *Conquest* into the same category of literature as any story whose ending is predestined or presupposed; all are like the "book of fate," wherein it is written "that this child will one day sit upon the throne, but that the downfall of the kingdom will be accomplished during his reign" (p. 29). Arabian fatalism gives history a meaning with a familiar ring. The end of the story will be a fall, and what leads up to the end will be a falling.

As long as it is a question of mortality, truth is the same for orthodox Christian, Mohammedan, and skeptic. Thus Irving, while smiling at the excesses of bigotry in the old chroniclers, nonetheless can rely to a large extent on their formulations of events, their style, tone, and imagery, to convey his own feelings about the story. The effort to universalize, to capitalize on a wealth of suggestive language and detail in order to turn the fall of Granada into an emblem of mutability, is the chief significance of the book. "In a word, so beautiful was the earth, so pure the air, and so serene the sky, of this delicious region, that the Moors imagined the paradise of their Prophet to be situated in that part of the heaven which overhung the kingdom of Granada" (pp. 19–20). Granada is, quite simply, Eden, no longer Granada. The unqualified epithets of fable, proverb, and Oriental tale almost reduce it to a pure symbol. Its entire existence is in the implication of something beyond it. Its loss will be exile from paradise.

Other events in the story get their primary meaning only in relation to this crowning loss. Thus Zahara "is but a type of Granada" (p. 36). And Alhama is "the key of Granada" (p. 48). When the Christians take it in retaliation for Zahara, and a Moorish horseman rides to Granada with the news, "'Woe is me, Alhama!' was in every mouth; and this ejaculation of deep sorrow and doleful foreboding, came to be the burthen of a plaintive ballad, which remains until the present day" (p. 48). When Irving repeats something like this burthen after almost
every loss, chapters of his book begin to seem like the stanzas of the ballad.\footnote{The Alhama ballad (of which there is a famous translation or adaptation by Byron) contains a prediction of the fall of Granada. See Eugenio de Ochoa, \textit{Tesofo de los Romanceros y Cancioneros Españoles} (Paris, 1838), pp. 369–90. Ballads may well be a source of inspiration for the form or structure of \textit{Granada}. Irving undoubtedly knew numerous ballads about the wars of Granada. There are many in the famous sixteenth-century romance by Ginés Pérez de Hita, \textit{Historia de las Guerras Civiles de Granada}, which Irving had read several years earlier and which may first have stimulated his interest in the subject. STW, I, 498.}

For a time, Moorish and Christian forays balance one another, sometimes chapter by chapter. And Agapida’s manner of speaking transforms a series of defeats on both sides into examples of the unprofitableness of certain vices—haste, avarice, pride, unwillingness to learn from the mistakes of others. Yet, because it is Agapida rather than Irving speaking directly, one doesn’t feel a heavy-handed didacticism; it is in character for an old chronicler to moralize.

The history of the war thus reduces to little more than a series of fables, if not simply the repetition of one parable. Granada seems doomed because the Moors are weak internally; they fight among themselves; the possession of paradise means luxury, effeminacy, jealousy, and eventual betrayal. Just as Boabdil is the personification, not of cowardice and cruelty, but of indecision and weakness of will,\footnote{In his anonymous article on the book in the \textit{Quarterly Review} (XLIII [May, 1830], p. 69), Irving points out that this is a new interpretation of Boabdil.} so in the whole kingdom the same frailties are nationalized. This means that specific fluctuations of public opinion are not remarkable; we learn to expect them periodically; the fact of instability alone is important. Individuals tend to lose personality and substance. The usurper El Zagal, Boabdil’s uncle and one of the three alternating monarchs of Granada, becomes little more than “a new idol to look up to, and a new name to shout forth” (p. 183).

Subsequently the war means the multiplication of Moorish losses. The tone of the tale becomes more sorrowful as the “right wing of the Moorish vulture” is torn off, the “right eye of Granada is extinguished” and its “shield . . . broken” (pp.
Happiness cannot last, lessons cannot be learned, or if learned, not remembered long enough. With the Moors unable to unite in their own defense, the Christians have only to mutilate the kingdom by wrenching away single fortified towns until the city itself, the heart of Granada, is exposed unprotected.

At Ronda, defeat of the Moors is made even more certain by the conversion of gunpowder to the Christian cause. By the end, the loss (or attainment) of what is most cherished becomes a ritual. The strongest wall can always be demolished, undermined, or scaled, which makes the denouement a lengthy lamentation. Every character has set gestures to make or speeches to give. The war becomes a spectacle seen from the outside. The inner emotions are taken for granted. Or they are left to the reader’s imagination, where they can be occasionally evoked by a formal word or movement, as when we, the public, witness the long procession of Isabella’s arrival at Ferdinand’s camp before Moclin, symbolizing the union and unity of the Catholic monarchs in a crusade: they bow three times to one another out of respect for their respective sovereignties and then embrace symbolically as man and wife (p. 252).

In much the same way, El Zagal, after being an idol and a name, finally becomes an exemplum for the benefit of anyone who can read: a sign he bears outside explains his life inside. Having surrendered his territories to Ferdinand, he is given the small kingdom of Andarax so that he may remain a monarch at least in name. But he finds “his little territory . . . and his two thousand subjects, as difficult to govern as . . . the distracted kingdom of Granada.” Thus he loses Andarax as well: “His short and turbulent reign, and disastrous end, would afford a wholesome lesson to unprincipled ambition, were not all ambition of the kind fated to be blind to precept and example.” Appropriately he is punished by being blinded. And in Africa, near death, he stumbles about carrying “a parchment” bearing the legend, “This is the unfortunate king of Andalusia” (pp. 478–80).

Boabdil also plays out his part as he should. In the final ceremony he initiates the surrender of Granada with these words:
“Go, Senor, and take possession of those fortresses in the name of the powerful sovereigns, to whom God has been pleased to deliver them in reward of their great merits, and in punishment of the sins of the Moors” (p. 522). Yet for Boabdil now there is nothing to look forward to, and Irving is careful to describe the last act, which severs king and kingdom forever. Leaving the fabulous palace of the Alhambra, Boabdil orders the gate through which he passes to be walled up behind him. Turning toward Africa, he begins his exile. Then from a hill beyond the city he faces around for one more look at what has been lost. As Irving reminds us, the site of this token of homage still bears the name of “The last sigh of the Moor” (p. 526).

For Irving a consciousness of human experience eternally repeating itself both makes and unmakes history. At his best (in Columbus) his work heightens, through his predilection for analogy and symbolic connection, an impression that Chateaubriand regarded as inevitable in a confrontation with the past: “Celui qui lit l'histoire ressemble à un homme voyageant dans le désert, à travers ces bois fabuleux [sic] de l'antiquité, qui prédisaient l'avenir.” This was typical of the attitude of many romantic scholars. Searching for patterns of similarities and reading historical remains in the same way a modern critic reads a poem or a novel, some historians, for instance, were ready to convert every fragment of the past into an indication, a symbol, or an expression of the nature of the forces that had produced it. Thus a later scholar was intrigued by Barthold Georg Niebuhr’s “wonderful ingenuity in combining scattered facts, his piercing eye for the detection of latent analogies, . . . his power of recomposing the ancient world by just deduction from small fragments of history, like the inferences of Cuvier from the bones of fossil animals. . . .” But, although the “science” of historical criticism, the foundation of modern historiography, may have developed through this sort of analogical process, “the

history of Niebuhr, according to one authority “opened more questions than it closed”—a statement that, if liberally interpreted, is applicable to the whole period.

Questions as to the meaning or worth of documents were apt to become, by implication, questions as to the nature of things in general. Beyond suggesting, for instance, what primitive societies had thought, believed, and lived for, ancient myth, poetry, or law might ultimately be looked at as clues to the intention or the purpose of whatever was responsible for history or existence itself, of whatever underlay everything, was inmost, most significant, most real. This was the direction in which much romantic scholarship pointed. In looking for the interconnections among bits of historical evidence, it was apt to discover a virtual identity among art, science, and philosophy.

For an example that will bring us back closer to Irving, we may take the brothers Grimm, who found the fairy tales they collected from different regions especially meaningful in groups, where they seemed to enlighten or reflect one another. Fairy tales, legends, and folklore in general, the spontaneous expression, according to the Grimms, of a people who belonged together and to the same place, gradually appeared to them to reduce to a very few ideas or to one fundamental myth. The signs led Jacob Grimm, through his studies of German etymology and mythology, to a glimpse of popular (or human) expression as hardly more than the continual opposition and combination of two primary observations or points of view (or ideas) mirrored in the concept of gender in nouns or names. What were male and female symbolized in turn, or were symbolized by, sky and earth, life and death, soul and body, heaven and hell, or good and evil. History, then, or human experience in general, seemed but the constant repetition of these two antithetical notions or motions in slightly varied forms.

56 At times Eduard Fueter’s judgment seems sound, that romantic historiography was too hastily built on Burke and philology. *Histoire de l'historiographie moderne*, trans. Émile Jeanmaire (Paris, 1914), pp. 524–25.
That Irving had at least a casual familiarity with some of
the higher metaphysics of folklore-collecting there can be no
doubt. If his conversations with Scott had steered clear of ab­
stract speculation, he surely knew, if only through the Analectic,
about the ideas on comparative mythology underlying Chateau­
briand’s defense of Christianity. He had also gone to Germany
with the avowed purpose of gathering legendary material and
may well have encountered there romantic doctrine as far­
reaching as that advanced in Phantasus, where Tieck, whom he
met in Dresden, insists on the basic allegoricalness of fiction and
history, and, indeed, of all experience. Most revealing, how­
ever, is an article by Francis Cohen (later Sir Francis Palgrave)
that Irving appears to have read in the Quarterly Review in
1820. In reviewing several books on medieval legends and
myths, including the Grimms’ Deutsche Sagen, Cohen expressed
amazement at the “degree of uniformity . . . in the ideal world,”
that is, in the realm of imagination, where “the fables of popular
superstition” are created. He found an “affinity” in all folklore,
if not in all nature. In going on to describe it he made explicit
a conception of experience that is implicit in much of Irving’s
work from Tales of a Traveller through The Alhambra, and gives
it a considerable cumulative force, for all that he ultimately over­
works it. The conception is of a constantly recurring fable,
whose moral can never be realized:

... all mythology has been governed by a uniform principle. . . .
Divested of its mythic or poetic garb, it will be found that the creative
power is the doctrine of fatality. Oppressed by the wretchedness of
its nature, without some infallible guide, the human mind shrinks
from contemplation, and cowers in its own imbecility; it reposes in
the belief of predestination, which enables us to bear up against
every misery, and solves those awful doubts which are scarcely
less tolerable than misery.—The Gordian knot is cut, and the web is
unravelled, when all things are seen subordinate to Fate, to that stern
power, which restrains the active intelligences of good and evil,

58 Tieck makes such assertions in speaking through his character Ernst at the
end of the introductory dialogue of Phantasus. The extent of Irving’s familiarity
with Tieck’s works is uncertain. See Walter Reichart, Irving and Germany (Ann
59 Writing to Brevoort, Irving reports meeting Cohen, whose articles in the
Quarterly he has read. Letter of 15 August 1820, WIB, II, 131–32.
dooming the universe of spirit and of matter to be the battle-field of endless strife between the light and the darkness. — Whether the rites of the "false religions full of pomp and gold" have been solemnized in the sculptured cavern or in the resplendent temple, in the shade of the forest or on the summit of the mountain, still the same lesson has been taught. Men and Gods vainly struggle to free themselves from the adamantine bonds of destiny. The oracle or the omen which declares the impending evil, affords no method of averting it. All insight into futurity proves a curse to those on whom the power descends. We hear the warning which we cannot obey.  

It did not, of course, take Francis Cohen or German historiography to bring Irving to reduce history to a series of ups and downs. Such a reduction had always been implicit in the vogue for ruins and mutability. Romantic historiography, whether, as with Michaud, Barante, Thierry, and Turner, it simply stressed narrative and pageantry, or, as especially in Germany, it became more deeply speculative, undoubtedly helped make Irving less self-conscious about his interest in the past than he had been in *Knickerbocker*. Since the romantics granted considerable license in the use of the past, the pretense to objectivity and dispassionateness now had less relevance. The didactic drive had diminished: to expect the lessons of the past to be put to use directly was coming to seem naïve. The romantic historian now stood ready frequently to exploit the subjectivity which had made virtual nonsense of Knickerbocker’s "history."

But the full transcendental leap or plunge was something that Irving could not make. The higher (or inner) reality, if it existed, was beyond him. He might read the past symbolically, but he would not have believed with Jules Michelet that the idea "qu’enferme toute symbole, brule d’en sortir, de s’épancher, de redevenir infinie."  

Chateaubriand might argue for the development in historiography of "cette philosophie qui tient à l’essence des êtres, qui, pénétrant l’enveloppe du monde sensible, cherche s’il n’y a point sous cette enveloppe quelque chose de

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But Irving did not see through the physiognomy or phenomenology of experience to a permanent reality. The symbols in the enchanted forest of the past kept mirroring his own insecurity. The sublime was too close to the ridiculous for his comfort.

Inadvertently his history finally comes close to seeming a parody of the speculative impulse behind the work of many of his contemporaries. For the search for higher meaning in history carried the risk of oversimplification. And reductivism threatened to redefine history as stasis. Chateaubriand offered a system of history as the function of only three basic truths or concepts or forms. And his friend Pierre-Simon Ballanche went further:

En effet, sous un certain rapport, le genre humain pourrait être considéré comme le même individu passant par une suite de palin­génesies.

Mais en remontant à l'origine, il fallait bien rencontrer le dogme un et identique de la déchéance et de la réhabilitation, ce dogme sévère et unanime qui explique la suite des destinées humaines, leur développement sous forme d'initiations successives, chaque initiation précédée d'une épreuve, et toute épreuve infligée comme expiation.

One is puzzled whether to see in Ballanche’s sense of ordeal and initiation, death and rebirth, an archetypism potentially as profound as Jung’s, or a view of history just the reverse of Agapida’s and virtually as naïve. It took romanticism a long time to shake off altogether the dust of “ruins.” Ballanche boasted that “il est impossible de pousser plus loin la synthèse historique.” But, as Chateaubriand himself said, with an accent faintly suggestive of Agapida, “L’Histoire dans tous les siècles, a fait de pareils rapprochements qui ne prouvent rien, sinon la ressemblance des adversités parmi les hommes.”

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64 *Oeuvres*, III (Paris, 1830), 16.
66 *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 185. One of Chateaubriand's slighter works is closer to Irving's *Columbus* and *Granada* than anything else I have been able to find. By this I do not imply an “influence” but a common body of impulses in the time pushing writers in similar directions. Only in Chateaubriand's *Mémoires, sur S. A. R. Monseigneur le Duc de Berry* (*Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. III) do I find the sense of representativeness and the need to analogize pushed to a point comparable to
According to Gertrude Stein, "Romanticism is then when everything being alike everything is naturally simply different, and romanticism." She was not talking about an historical period but about "composition." For her, romanticism is a state of liberation which the writer reaches if he is fortunate: "In the beginning there was confusion there was a continuous present and later there was romanticism which was not a confusion but an extrication. . . ." A good many allegedly "romantic" writers of the nineteenth century might find it hard to qualify under such a conception. If romanticism is extrication, is anyone, except in rare moments, a full-blown romantic? But while the search for the true romantic (according to Gertrude Stein's definition) may be endless, it is not futile. For it compels a recognition of the extent to which romanticism historically was an epistemological ordeal, an effort of accommodation to a self-reflecting world. Out of "everything being alike" comes not only the pathetic fallacy but romantic organicism, the macrocosm in the microcosm, and nineteenth-century "metaphysical" and symbolist styles—whether Gertrude Stein would see extrication here or not.

Washington Irving, in any case, did not cross over into "and romanticism." Salmagundi and Knickerbocker had developed a comedy of confusion in which the ordinary distinctions of common sense seemed to disappear before one's eyes. And pre-romantic impulses made him something of a symbolist, a wayfaring spectator in a world not of facts but of signs, in part a pilgrim, in part a picaro (in his whimsy), in part an exile. But while he had continual trouble distinguishing between "self" and "not-me" because of the way they kept reflecting each other, he never got close enough to Concord to bring them fully together, either by absorbing all nature into the Self or by surrendering the self completely to a merger with Nature. A largely

that found in Irving, where the subject or substance threatens to dissolve in pure formality and symbolism. As in Irving, the controlling idea is the inevitability of loss and defeat, though Chateaubriand has a much stronger sense of a social institution's outliving individuals and gaining authority and even beauty through the sacrifices of devoted public servants.

67 What Are Masterpieces (Los Angeles, 1940), pp. 35, 37.
passive observer, he saw signs, but without sufficiently varied meanings. He never allowed imagination to create its own world. His sense of sameness never became acute enough to make a real difference.

Shortly after completing the Conquest, he was on the road through the mountains to Granada, a sort of Quixote, as he pictures himself in The Alhambra, looking for adventures (attacks by bandits), with a muleteer who was a ringer for Sancho Panza. In Irving's mind the trip became a kind of flight from time, his personal quest for a terrestrial paradise, doomed, however (as he knew in advance), to failure. For the Alhambra proved to be only one more inn, even if it was by far the most beautiful one in which he was ever to sojourn, the one in which he was treated with greatest deference—because it was all one royal suite, and he had it to himself. The doors seemed to open magically to admit him, but a few weeks later they reopened routinely for his expulsion.

My serene and happy reign in the Alhambra, was suddenly brought to a close by letters which reached me, while indulging in oriental luxury in the cool hall of the baths, summoning me away from my Moslem elysium to mingle once more in the bustle and business of the dusty world. How was I to encounter its toils and turmoils, after such a life of repose and reverie! How was I to endure its commonplace, after the poetry of the Alhambra! (AL, p. 422)

By adding and rearranging material, Irving managed in the revised edition of The Alhambra to intensify the suggestion, already apparent in parts of the original, that his temporary withdrawal from the "dusty world" was a kind of enchantment.\(^68\) His imagination seems to transform landscapes and interiors into settings for romances and Arabian tales. Transports of joy lift him out of the present and carry him back into a timeless fictitious past, although he likes to think that he is only playing with illusions, temporarily keeping the everyday world at a safe distance. He still has one eye on a present which

\(^{68}\) The passage just quoted, for example, is not contained in the original editions (Philadelphia, London, and Paris, 1832). My references are all to the revised text (AL). Where I cite passages that do not occur in the original, I so indicate in my discussion.
lives in the shadow of the past he now inhabits; he amuses himself by observing the petty retainers and vagabonds who swarm about the premises. Thus he says, typically,

It is a whimsical caprice of fortune to present, in the grotesque person of this tatterdemalion, a namesake and descendant of the proud Alonzo de Aguilar, the mirror of Andalusian chivalry, leading an almost mendicant existence about this once haughty fortress, which his ancestor aided to reduce; yet such might have been the lot of the descendants of Agamemnon and Achilles, had they lingered about the ruins of Troy! (pp. 71–72)

This is, after all, part of the charm of the place—the contrast, the sense of loss, paradise seen through the dilapidations of time. Irving likes to look down from his lofty balcony at what is going on in the real world of Granada; he is still a "spectator," who wants to watch "the drama of life without becoming an actor in the scene." He forms "conjectural histories" for himself to explain what he sees, and takes a Crayon-esque pleasure in seeing himself, as always, somewhat mistaken—the nervous narrator once more passing time in a rural inn (pp. 118–20). As only a would-be, not an actual, Quixote, however, he is not about to deny the existence of the outside world. Thoreau in his retreat at Walden might fish for stars. Irving at the Alhambra, though a long-time friend to anglers, only thinks about it (p. 74).

Actually his enchantment was only beginning. His return to the United States in 1832, the same year in which The Alhambra was initially published, was to accelerate the process. Then, under the spell of being "earnestly, devotedly, and affectionately caressed" by the public, he would begin to turn into that "man of quiet pursuits"69 of whom we have heard so much, the old bachelor of the mellow years at Sunnyside, as charmed by the bevy of nieces who surrounded him as he had been by the cool seclusion of a Moorish courtyard. Gradually he would cease to be the anxious Geoffrey Crayon and become Wash-

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69 Dickens thus describes him at a reception at the White House in 1841, shortly after Irving's appointment as American Minister to Spain. American Notes for General Circulation, chap. viii.
ingston Irving as he has been preserved for us, a serenely uncomplicated self, resting in semiretirement on a good many laurels, regretful at having had to abandon the Alhambra physically but quite comfortable in his memory of it. Having accepted his celebrated name,\textsuperscript{70} he would now be dedicated as a writer to perpetuating charm, grace and wistfulness, elevating these qualities into genteel elegance when the occasion demanded, as in his biography of Washington (1855–59). In the offing was the drowsiness of Sleepy Hollow, where he already planned to sleep out the centuries.

In the end, Irving, to use Philip Young’s words, seems to have “fallen from time,” like a figure from the Moorish-Spanish tales that, obviously charmed by their resemblance to the German legends of enchanted sleep underlying “Rip Van Winkle,” he had stuffed into \textit{The Alhambra}. The mountain on which the Moorish palace is situated, like the famous Kyffhäuser mountain, was the legendary repository of numerous heroes who waited “motionless as statues, maintaining a sleepless watch for ages” (p. 164). Many of them had overly treasured the possibility of a permanent possession of worldly goods and thus in a sense had sought to cheat the voracity of time. Now they waited, sealed in a living tomb, where time both passed and stood still, since nothing ever happened.

For Irving there was no rebirth of creative power in the withdrawal to the Alhambra, no imaginative rejuvenation. He left the Moorish paradise, at best a man with much of his youth and vigor behind him, a man to whom time now seemed to make less difference, who was becoming more content or resigned to seeing it pass, a man satisfied, like Van Winkle, to tell charming but inconsequential stories. The final version of \textit{The Alhambra} suggests that there had been a kind of death; the

\textsuperscript{70} Although initially published as the work of Crayon or the author of \textit{The Sketch Book}, or as the “new sketch book,” \textit{The Alhambra} was much more loosely associated with Crayon than were the earlier works. It very soon began appearing in Irving’s own name. The revised edition of his works eventually confirmed this difference between the later and the earlier Crayonesque books: Irving now listed \textit{The Alhambra} in his own name, while retaining the pseudonym for \textit{The Sketch Book}, Bracebridge, and the \textit{Tales}. See under individual titles in Williams and Edge, \textit{A Bibliography of the Writings of Washington Irving} (New York, 1936).
procession that escorts Irving from the palace, past his own last sigh and into an exile like Boabdil’s, is almost a funeral: “Humble was the cortege and melancholy the departure of El Rey Chico the second” (p. 425). In the final analysis, occupying the Alhambra in memory and living out the magic spell in the mountain underneath amounted to virtually the same thing.

The Alhambra of 1850 is a better book than the original because it is unified around the author’s often poignant identification with Boabdil. “The Author’s Farewell to Granada,” for instance, was not a part of the original book; instead Irving had ended with two historical sketches. A melancholy sense of loss, it is true, does dominate the first third of the 1832 text, but thereafter an unevenness of tone becomes a distraction. A breezy comic element figures more prominently in the style than it is allowed to in the final version, where changes of phrasing have been made and additional material has tipped the balance in another direction. It is in the 1850 version, especially as a result of two new stories, the “Grand Master of Alcantara” and the “Legend of the Enchanted Soldier,” that one gets the stronger sense of Irving repeating his one basic story of loss and disillusionment. In 1832 there was still something in him which resisted complete surrender to sentimental melancholy. Nevertheless, even in the original text there is a thinness of material and a casualness of tone which tend to give the impression that he is only going through the motions of storytelling. In the end, in the final version, he seems too preoccupied with enshrining a memory, coating it over with a glossy prose, to attend to commonplace details. Imaginative escape from the mundane was the religion he had been flirting with all his life, the religion now fully tolerated in an increasingly sentimental age by an emotionally indulgent public, which, for all its surface convictions, had its own deep uneasinesses.

The sense of time had helped make his fiction. He had prized time enough to pay careful attention to recording its passage. His ability in the better stories and sketches to get the illusion of time right was part of an important development in the history
of fiction. But in *The Alhambra*, even in the original version, the sense of inevitability tends to inundate time. The stories, one knows, are all going to be pretty much the same. Irving was no longer interested in lingering over them.

The irony on which both history and art depend does not exist where there is insufficient dissimulation or dissimilation—that is, at least the pretense or appearance of dissimilarity in sameness. Irving eventually lost his sense of how eccentric and *un*-common common things can appear—at least at first sight. In “The Stout Gentleman” a traveling salesman had become a latter-day knight-errant only after every visible mannerism and accoutrement on or about him had found its ironical counterpart in the world of chivalry—“changing the lance for a driving-whip, the buckler for a pattern-card, and the coat of mail for an upper Benjamin” (*B*, p. 76). But even by 1832 one could become for Irving a “son” of the Alhambra (p. 51) without seeming to do much more than eat and sleep there.