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# *The Moor's Last Sigh* :

## Washington Irving's American Tales of The Alhambra.

With their essentially marvelous connotations and easily-made associations with *The Arabian Nights*, the tales of *The Alhambra*<sup>1</sup> seem, at first glance, to stand apart in the fictional production of Washington Irving. Hastily — if at all — dealt with by biographers and critics, they are usually seen as a particularly eccentric answer to the author's often quoted craving for outlandish experiences and encounters with the remains of the past, even more so perhaps than the various tales that German folklore had previously inspired him to write:

Never need an American look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery. But Europe held forth charms of storied and poetical associations. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly-cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement — to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity, — to loiter about the ruined castle, — to meditate on the falling tower, — to escape, in short, from the commonplace realities of the present, and lose myself in the shadowy grandeurs of the past.<sup>2</sup>

In the closing chapter of *The Alhambra*, the narrator, who is on his way back to Madrid after a long stay in Granada, turns back on the road to catch one last glimpse of the city and the surrounding mountains. He stands on the opposite point of the compass from *la cuesta de las lagrimas* (the hill of tears), the place where Boabdil, Granada's last Moslem monarch, is said to have sighed with grief before leaving his Spanish kingdom forever after the 1491-92 Christian *Reconquista*. The

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<sup>1</sup>Washington Irving, *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832). Granada, Spain : Miguel Sanchez, 1978. All references will be read in this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book*, quoted by Lewis Leary, *Washington Irving*, 31.

fact that the American diplomat is going north and the ill-fated king back to Africa should not prevent us from noticing the common nature of their feelings at the moment of what both view as their exile. Confirming his special feeling for — and even identification with — the Moorish king, didn't the writer later have a statue of Boabdil erected at "Sunnyside", his house near the Hudson? (see Terramorsi 34) The first words of "The Author's Farewell to Granada" are already telling in that respect :

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. (299, italics mine)

The autobiographical nature of the opening and closing pages of *The Alhambra* amply justifies that we recognize Washington Irving under the *persona* of his narrator, and one cannot help being struck by the author's emotional ties and possessive relation to a place where he remained only for such a limited period of time: part of a spring and one summer. There is a strong and uncanny sense, throughout all the tales of *The Alhambra*, that in spite of their conspicuously foreign character, they remain fundamentally close, both thematically and rhetorically — to Irving's two most famous American stories: "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle"<sup>3</sup>.

It is common knowledge that Irving went to Spain in 1826, having been invited there by his friend, Alexander H. Everett, the American ambassador in Madrid. He was given temporary rank as attaché, but the real purpose of the journey was to work on a book project about New World voyages and discoveries in the age of Columbus. That this scientific work as an historian made him conversant with XVth century Spain is as important as the fact that it required of him to bridle his imagination in order to stick to facts and to achieve historical accuracy. In the same vein, but perhaps more in keeping with his newly rekindled boyish fascination for the Oriental world, he soon wrote *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (published in 1829). In the spring

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<sup>3</sup> Respectively read in *The Penguin Book of American Short Stories*, edited by James Cochrane. London: Penguin Books, 1984 (11-41); and *Nineteenth-century American Short Stories*, edited by Christopher Bigsby. London: Everyman, 1995. (3-19).

of 1827, accompanied by a Russian diplomat, Irving went on a trip to Granada and established his quarters in the palace of the Alhambra itself — a situation similar to that of the future narrator of the tales. Two sources of inspiration then offered themselves to the writer: 15th-century Spanish daily life, and especially that of the ordinary kind-hearted people who surrounded him, and the tales that he daily heard from them about Moorish times and their fabulous legends. Consequently, what we find in the somewhat puzzling collection of chapters is a series of various exotic scenes, either 19th-century Spanish, or 15th-century Granadine, or even downright legendary and immemorial, whose only esthetic coherence lies in their common setting: the Alhambra:

To the traveller imbued with a feeling for the historical and poetical, the Alhambra of Granada is as much an object of veneration as is the Kaaba or sacred house of Mecca to all true Moslem pilgrims. How many legends and traditions, true and fabulous, how many songs and romances, Spanish and Arabian, of love and war and chivalry are associated with this romantic pile! . . . I remained for several months, spellbound in the old enchanted pile. The following papers are the result of my reveries and researches during that delicious thralldom. (31)

From the first line of the quotation, taken from the ultimate paragraph of the first chapter, one will have realized how the narrator's twofold interest — historical and poetical — finds an echo in the oxymoronic "true and fabulous," taken up again in the description of the narrator's double mental activity: "researches" and "reveries." In a movement akin to that of Horace Walpole more than half a century earlier, Irving announces his literary enterprise as one that will mingle a quest for historical knowledge and a desire to let himself be lulled by the spirit of the place into fertile daydreaming. A similar intention can be read in the opening lines of "Rip Van Winkle," "a Posthumous Writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker"<sup>4</sup> which brings together in the course of one sentence a mention of the alleged author's "historical researches" and "the legendary lore" on which he had found the old Dutch burghers to be so keen. Of course, Walpole was not totally serious when he declared that the writer of the text of *The Castle of Otranto* — a manuscript which

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<sup>4</sup> "Diedrich Knickerbocker" was a pseudonym that Irving had used to publish his 1809 *History of New York*.

Walpole pretended to have found and translated from the Italian — meant to reconcile the marvelous and the verisimilar:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. (Walpole 43)

Or if he was serious, his attempt was a failure. No reader of Walpole's gothic novel has ever been convinced of the psychological plausibility of his characters, nor of the verisimilitude of the situations with which they find themselves confronted. Irving, who may very well have read the preface to this book — given the extraordinary success gothic novels enjoyed in the United States in the late 18th century — went about the same task differently. Instead of *blending* the plausible and the legendary, he juxtaposed them in an embedding structure. His narrator is repeatedly told Arabian legends by contemporary Spaniards, and he reports them to us readers, frankly admitting to his fascination and hoping that we might share it. Thus is "The Adventure of the Mason" introduced by the closing lines of the preceding chapter:

when my humble historiographer, Mateo who was at my elbow, pointed out a spacious house in an obscure street of the Albaicin, about which he related, as nearly as I can recollect, the following anecdote. (97)

This story is totally matter-of-fact and nothing in it provokes the reader's disbelief. At most he will envy the good fortune of that poor workman who became extravagantly rich after having been so miserably poor, or be vaguely aware of the uncanny feeling of having already heard or read the same kind of story in a compilation of fairy-tales. It is to be stressed that the plot could be set in any period of history, no detail of any sort enabling us to date it. This story, the first embedded one in the writer's day-to-day description of his stay in Granada,<sup>5</sup> plays a key-role that passes easily unnoticed. It accustoms the reader to trusting the intradiegetic narrators in the book. Mateo, having related this verisimilar story, and given the trust with which the principal narrator reports his

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<sup>5</sup> With the exception of two historical chapters dedicated to King Boabdil, that aim to reestablish the truth about Irving's hero, after centuries of Spanish calumny.

words, becomes a potentially reliable narrator in his turn. Thus will the suspicious reader be more willing to "suspend his disbelief" when outwardly marvelous tales are told by the same Mateo, or other homodiegetic narrators. It even seems for some time in the progression of the book, that characters like Mateo, being perfectly accustomed to the place, will be more likely to resist its charm and help us remain on the right side of plausibility. Hadn't we started questioning the main narrator's earnestness and reliability when he had exclaimed on first entering the premises of the palace?

The transition was almost magical; it seemed as if we were at once transported into other times and another realm, and were treading the realm of Arabian story. (40) . . . It is impossible to contemplate this once favourite abode of Oriental manners without feeling the early associations of Arabian romance, and almost expecting to see the arm of some mysterious princess beckoning from the balcony or some dark eye sparkling through the lattice. (42)

Further evidence of Mateo's function can be seen in the chapter entitled "The Balcony" (immediately preceding that of "The Adventure of the Mason") : when the fertile imagination of the American attaché, after his having crossed the path of a sad-looking young novice, had already conjured up a whole Gothic-like story of live burial in a convent, it was his Spanish guide who gathered information and destroyed "in an instant the cobweb of [his] fancy" (94).

In much the same way, the concluding lines of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," allegedly written by Mr Knickerbocker, a knowledgeable historian, bring to light the oral source of the whole tale. An anonymous story-teller has told Ichabod Crane's story to the scholar. When the learned gentleman declares himself somewhat skeptical as to some of the more extravagant points in the story, the story-teller declares: "I don't believe one-half of it myself" (41), thus not only questioning his own fable, but proving himself — like Mateo — more trustworthy than the narrator himself.

"The Adventure of the Mason" serves a second — this time, thematic — purpose. It adds credibility to the various mentions, present in the book as early as the chapter dedicated to the description of the journey to Granada, of the existence of hidden treasures under every

stone in town and inside every cavern in the neighboring mountains. The text soon establishes a symbolic equivalence between, on the one hand, these hidden treasures and other chimerical occurrences, and the widely-circulating tales about them on the other. It functions as if the above-mentioned missing elements drilled holes in the very cloth of reality that yarn-spinning activities were meant to patch; or perhaps, as if their illusory existence were so present in the actual world that it blurred the boundaries between imagination and reality, between legend and facts, between 19th century Spain and the fabulous Moorish kingdom.

Let us take the example of *El Belludo*, a spirit that visits Granada in the shape of a galloping headless horse pursued by howling dogs — somewhat reminiscent of the headless horseman who haunts Sleepy Hollow. When he first hears Mateo tell him about it, the narrator has an incredulous reaction which channels the reader's own:

"But have you ever met with it yourself, Mateo, in any of your rambles?" demanded" (103). "No señor, God be thanked! but my grandfather, the tailor, knew several persons that had seen it, for it went about much oftener than at present (104).

The hobgoblin horse then disappears from the text, to surface only in the second part, in which the narrator is now self-admittedly reporting incredible fairy-tales. In "The Legend of the two discreet statues," the miserable Lope Sánchez, guided by his daughter who had chanced to find a forgotten talisman among ordinary pebbles in the gardens of an old Moorish fort, unearths a hidden treasure. A cunning priest manages to extort a good part of the money from Lope Sánchez's gullible wife, and is punished for his greed by being taken away on a galloping horse, that in the end reveals itself to be no other than *El Belludo*. The reader, already familiar with the spirit, is hardly surprised by its reappearance in the legend. The point is not only that a marvelous element is thus retroactively integrated into the realm of the possible, but also that the world of Mateo and the narrator is denied any superiority in terms of reality since the same "nightmare" rides through the same streets. In almost the same way, Mateo's telling Tío Nicolás's vision of Boabdil's hobgoblin army marching past him in the mountains is prompted by a "real-life" occurrence: a funeral procession that the narrator and Mateo watch passing by with feelings of dread and awe:

As the procession passed by, the lugubrious light of the torches falling on the rugged features and funeral-weeds of the attendants had the most fantastic effect, but was perfectly ghastly . . . It put me in mind of the old story of a procession of demons bearing the body of a sinner up the crater of Stromboli. (108)

Mateo then tells Tío Nicolás's story and casts a doubt on the veracity of the tale by reporting that "some said he had dreamt it all, as he dozed on his mule. Others thought it all a fabrication of his own" (110). In a typical "fantastic" fashion — to use Todorov's definition of the genre — the narration thus oscillates between the pole of the marvelous and that of a rather trite rational explanation.<sup>6</sup> But here again, when Boabdil's ghost-army reappears in the course of several legends, and in the realistic historical piece entitled "Governor Manco and the Soldier" (see 263), the reader is bound to suspect that he had unwittingly entered the world of legends as soon as the narrator he followed had set foot in the Alhambra.

In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the headless Hessian rider is introduced as early as the third page:

Such is the general purport of this legendary superstition, which has furnished materials for many a wild story in that region of shadows; and the spectre is known, at all the country firesides, by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow. (13)

Just like *El Belludo*, the Horseman is clearly presented as a legend, and more precisely as one originating in oral fireside tales. But when the rider reappears in the central Ichabod plot, threatening the schoolmaster away from town, the reader is bound to forget, at least for a short while, that he had been clearly warned against the local propensity to believe in chimeras:

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<sup>6</sup> "Dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre, celui que nous connaissons, sans diables, sylphides, ni vampires, se produit un événement qui ne peut s'expliquer par les lois de ce même monde familier. Celui qui perçoit l'événement doit opter pour l'une des deux solutions possibles : ou bien il s'agit d'une illusion des sens, d'un produit de l'imagination et les lois du monde restent alors ce qu'elles sont ; ou bien l'événement a véritablement eu lieu, il est partie intégrante de la réalité, mais alors cette réalité est régie par des lois inconnues de nous. . . . Le fantastique occupe le temps de cette incertitude" (Todorov 29).



On mounting a rising ground, which brought the figure of his fellow traveller in relief against the sky, gigantic in height, and muffled in a cloak, Ichabod was horror-struck, on perceiving that he was headless. (37)

The fact that the key to Ichabod's illusion is given so soon should not lead us to underrate the construction of the episode as one which powerfully mingles the marvelous and the real, thus blurring once again the limits of the verisimilar and refusing to relegate the supernatural to the realm of legends. Inside the framework of the story, it matters less to know that his rival in the competition for the heart of the beautiful Katrina had played a trick on Ichabod than to realize the power of superstition over an apparently rational "human being." Irving takes matters even further by having his narrator suggest later that Ichabod may at least partly have used the legend and his supposed fear to flee from the town with "dignity":

he had left the neighborhood, partly through fear of the goblin and Hans Van Ripper, and partly in mortification at having been suddenly dismissed by the heiress. (39)

In *The Alhambra*, as in "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the most important point to be made about the circulating legends is that they are directly connected with the place in which they are told and heard. Here again, the fact that the former was inspired by a 14th-century Moorish palace, and the two earlier pieces by the Dutch settlements in the New World, has obscured their fundamental similarity in terms of literary technique.

The story of Rip Van Winkle is totally incredible: no-one can remain asleep for some twenty years, however potent the beverage that induced him to sleep. However, Mr. Knickerbocker, the same knowledgeable historian who reported the legend of Sleepy Hollow, attaches faith to it precisely because he knows "our old Dutch settlements to have been very subject to marvelous events and appearances" that "the story therefore is beyond the possibility of doubt." (18). As Bernard Terramorsi suggests, more than credibility and verisimilitude, what matters here is the existence in the New World, and precisely inside those enclosed Dutch settlements, of a sedimentary ground composed of successive layers — Indian and Germanic — from which a new form of literature —

the American fantastic — could be born (Terramorsi 36). The formula may be summarized in a nutshell. Placed in an environment that is rich with legends and superstitions, a given character — and the reader after him — will start unearthing fables and they will blend into his "actual" life in such a way that a reality of a new kind will be generated: that of his perceptions — which after all, is no less real than the tangible world of facts. Of Ichabod Crane, the sophisticated narrator declares:

His appetite for the marvellous, and his powers of digesting it, were equally extraordinary; and both had been increased by his residence in this spellbound region. (17)

In spite of this smug warning, it is properly amazing to see how we will be tempted into believing in the supernatural existence of a headless rider less than ten pages later.

In *The Alhambra*, direct addresses and injunctions, in the manner of 18th-century English novels, lead the reader, from the very start, to share the American attaché's experience in an almost physical way:

Come then, worthy reader and comrade, follow my steps into this vestibule. . . . Have a care! Here are steep winding steps and but scanty light; yet up this narrow, obscure and winding staircase the proud monarchs of Granada and their queens have often ascended to the battlements of the Tower. (45)

The narrator even goes as far as imagining and describing the reader's reaction: "You start! It is nothing but a hawk that we have frightened from his nest" (47). How are we then supposed to react when he chooses to live in what he calls "the haunted wing of the castle" (66), in "so solitary, remote and forlorn an apartment" (67)? He himself, without actually using either of the two references, summons up echoes from chivalric romances and Gothic tales by declaring that it "reminded [him] of those hobgoblin stories, where the hero is left to accomplish the adventures of an enchanted house" (68). Although a "vague and indescribable awe" is creeping over him, he shows a distance that one would not have found in the early Gothic novels, but that is reminiscent of the works of Irving's American predecessor, Charles Brockden Brown, and anticipates Edgar Allan Poe's best-achieved tales:

In a word, the long-buried impressions of the nursery were reviving and asserting their power over my imagination. Everything began to be affected by the working of my mind. (68)

As was to be expected, but need not have been so candidly stated, the morning after, he can hardly "recall the shadows and fancies conjured up by the gloom of the preceding night" (69). The reader is then meant to laugh at the ridiculous terrors that had kept the narrator awake through most of the night. Having being taken by the hand into those premises, there are good chances that he will call upon his personal experience of nightmares to share the protagonist's relief. But the narration is given one more 'turn of the screw': the "dismal howlings" were not a mere product of his imagination. They were the ravings of a poor maniac, subject to violent paroxysms, "during which he was confined in a vaulted room beneath the Hall of Ambassadors" (70). This final explanation, in no way more reassuring than the supernatural suppositions that had crowded the narrator's vigil, reintroduces a *topos* of early English Gothic literature: a character's confinement beneath the surface of the Earth<sup>7</sup> echoes the narrator's imprisonment right above. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), Poe will use a similar situation and locate his narrator's apartment right above the vault in which Lady Madeline has been buried and may be coming back to life. In what may easily remain an unconscious process, this presence of an imprisoned maniac below the narrator's apartment in the Moorish palace will be associated by the reader with the buried treasures already referred to, and will suggest the usual ambiguity of the representation of depth in fiction (Durand 269-72). Riches can be hidden in caves and cellars, but there lurks also the disquieting possibility of madness and death. In the same way, the recurring mentions of Boabdil's ghost army and the King himself being shut up in the caves of the near-by mountain can be read in two apparently contradictory ways: either, the fabulous past of the Moors is still at hand, accessible for whoever has remained open to the world of childhood and magic, or that foreign presence can be interpreted as a constant threat to the peace of the Christians who decided to send back to their native country the people that had made Andalusia what it is.

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<sup>7</sup> On the subject of the somewhat formulaic recipes of Gothic novels, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, and particularly chapter 1, "The Structure of Gothic Conventions" (9-36.)

Even within the context of the legends themselves, some elements may appear more disquieting than the marvelous tone of the whole would lead us to expect. Take for example "The Legend of the Three Beautiful Princesses." Three sisters are enclosed in a tower by their tyrannical father, who obviously wanted to protect them from the dangerous world of men. Unfortunately for their father's projects, from their latticed windows, the three princesses spot three Christian prisoners with whom they immediately fall in love. With the help of their Christian if converted faithful servant, two of them manage to escape and run away with their lovers to the Spanish town of Córdoba. The only obstacle being their Moslem faith, they conveniently remember that their mother was a Christian converted to Islam by force to marry their father. So that now, what could be seen as a treacherous conversion to Christianity becomes an honorable return to their mother's original religion. A question remains: what happened to the third princess, Zorayda? Being the youngest, she was the one who most sincerely loved her father, and thus implicitly the best daughter — a situation already present of various myths (Psyche is more beautiful than her two sisters), fairy-tales ("Cinderella"; "The Beauty and the Beast"...), not to mention Shakespeare's *King Lear*<sup>8</sup> — and she decided at the last minute not to elope with her sisters:

Now and then she was seen leaning on the battlements of the tower and looking mournfully towards the mountains in the direction of Cordoba, and sometimes the notes of her lute were heard accompanying plaintive ditties, in which she was said to lament the loss of her sisters and her lover, and to bewail her solitary life. She died young and, according to popular rumour, was buried in a vault beneath the tower, and her untimely fate has given rise to more than one ordinary fable. (162)

Nothing more is heard from her for the following fifty pages... until, in "The Legend of the Rose of the Alhambra," when the poor Jacinta, whom her lover has also left behind, seeks solace near a fountain, she suddenly beholds the figure of a Moorish lady rising to her view in the troubled waters of the basin. Jacinta's maiden aunt, who understands little of her niece's sorrows, rapidly convinces the young girl that she knew the legend of the three Moorish princesses and must have dreamt about it. At midnight however, the figure reappears and asks

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<sup>8</sup> See S. Freud: "The Theme of the three Caskets" (1913) in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII, pp. 291-301.

Jacinta to deliver her from the magic spell that causes her spirit to roam the earth until a pure Christian has baptized her. Although she willingly accepts, to Jacinta later "the whole appeared like a distempered dream" (234). But this time "the truth of the vision was established, for beside the fountain she beheld the silver lute glittering in the morning sunshine" (234). Irving here introduces a device which Hawthorne will soon use when writing "Young Goodman Brown" (1835). The protagonist tries to convince himself that he has dreamt, that his wife Faith was never in the forest, on her way to meeting the devil. But he does find one of her pink ribbons hanging from a tree that invalidates the theory of the dream. Of course, this does not stop the whole story from having been totally made up by Young Goodman Brown who may have dreamt the scene with the ribbon along with the rest. Similarly, in Irving's text, the presence of the lute confirms the reality of a dream-like episode, but in the context of a totally unrealistic narrative, and clearly presented as a legend. The point is that Irving, by having his narrator imply that the lute was actually left from the dream, once again erases the frontier between material and immaterial worlds.

The fact that the narrator finishes his tale on a contemporary note, suggesting that the lute's strings were later transferred to Paganini's fiddle, is certainly another example of the porosity of the border between the realm of fiction and that of reality that characterizes Irving's vision. In a singularly modern fashion he does seem to imply that reality can only be encapsulated in a material element inside a tale on which one would be foolish to base certitudes. Likewise, but in a more conspicuously derisive fashion,<sup>9</sup> his own head that the Hessian rider had supposedly hurled at Ichabod, left its trace in the "real" world in the shape of a shattered pumpkin. Emblematic of the Founding Fathers, but also associated with the imaginative world of children through Halloween and "Cinderella," the pumpkin, thus scattered, may be considered as a simple practical joke. But one can also read the comparable instances of the lute

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Terramorsi, in his very convincing analysis of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", has noted that the fantastic tale is always on the verge of staging its own derision.: "Le récit fantastique est toujours à la limite de sa propre dérision, et cela participe à cette terreur particulière que la chose — dérisoire ou pas — arrive malgré tout !" (Terramorsi 87)

and the pumpkin as yet another characteristic of Irving's fiction, common to *The Alhambra* and the Dutch settlements tales: humor.

Countless examples of the writer's use of a playful tone that verges on satire can be found in the two sets of stories. In *the Alhambra*, one reads bilingual puns mocking the Spanish aristocrats ("a legitimate Spanish grandee being rarely above three cubits in stature" 284), as well as good-humored caricatures of some Spanish stock characters like the *dueñas* ("ladies who have least cause to fear for themselves are most ready to keep a watch over their more tempting neighbours" 229) and downright corrosive attacks on certain aspects of Spanish society ("When nothing is to be gained by the conviction of a prisoner, justice even in Spain is apt to be impartial" 210). Irving draws in like fashion an exceedingly funny portrait of Dutch farmers and their sense of merriment (See "Sleepy Hollow" 28-29) and shows himself frankly critical when Rip Van Winkle recognizes on the sign of his favorite inn the portrait of King George, only slightly modified, in that of General Washington (13).

Fundamentally different from Brockden Brown in that respect, Irving carefully avoids taking his own creations too seriously, and paves the way for Poe and Hawthorne's self-derision and self-parodying enterprises. The chosen premises may well be Granada or the Hudson valley, the fictional edifices built by Irving definitely have in common both an actualisation of the potentially marvellous in the consciousness of seduced characters, narrators and readers, and the rescue of the latter through the recourse to humour. The reader is thus almost simultaneously induced to question his own sense of reality and made to laugh at himself for having been foolish enough to do so.

All things considered, there may be more self-directed irony than actual melancholy in having the statue of a Moorish king eternally sighing after Granada in one's American garden. It nevertheless remains a sure sign of Irving's commitment to writing, even on the soil of the New World, in the shadow of a legendary past.

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