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Combative Transatlantic Literatures: An Analysis of Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*[1]

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This paper discusses the combative literary and cultural relations between the Old World of Europe and the New World of the United States. In analysing the use of irony within nineteenth-century renditions of the travelogue genre, I trace the transatlantic struggle as originating from an American post-colonial inferiority complex. By examining Washington Irving's 1820 The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. *and Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1860 text* The Marble Faun*, this paper will demonstrate the New World's advent of creative autonomy and self-perceived artistic decolonisation of the European forbears' traditions. I argue that within these texts, the subversion of the travelogue form enacts defiance of hegemonic European cultural assertion, producing literature that asserts its own existence and reflects the infant nation's political inception. This paper additionally interrogates and evaluates the literary epoch of the American Renaissance and its imagined status as being the beginnings of American artistry.*

In 1888, Walt Whitman asserted the unoriginality of Washington Irving's work, claiming that "Irving was suckled on the Addisonian-Oxford-Cambridge milk" (Whitman qtd. in Traubel 532). Here, Whitman articulates what he perceives as the American preoccupation with British literary ascendency. Harold Bloom identifies this preoccupation as the universally experienced "anxiety of influence" where literary autonomy necessitates deliberate rejection of poetic forbears (1). In America, anxiety of literary legacy derives from *transatlantic* forebears as Robert Weisbuch claims that "cultural earliness" in America and "the barrenness of their present scene" inspired anxiety of Anglo-European influence (103). America's infancy as a comparatively younger, inexperienced and thus more uncultured nation established an inferiority complex in contrast to the already established cultural Old World of Europe. This paper will argue against Whitman's claims of American literary preoccupation: in reading Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1820) alongside Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), I demonstrate how each text depicts literary independence. When read in dialogue, these texts decolonise that

[1] A version of this paper was presented at The Transatlantic Studies Association 18th Annual Conference in July 2019 at Lancaster University.

which Manning and Taylor refer to as the "nation's ongoing reliance on imported literary models," and I align with Larzer Ziff's reading of nineteenth-century American literature (122). For instance, Ziff asserts that this epoch established a literary tradition in which, although they utilised "the inherited…English language and with it British Literary conventions, these writers, in their achievement, declared the independence of American culture" (i). My primary texts exhibit artistic autonomy where Hawthorne and Irving break away from European literary tradition and legitimise American literature. Grounding each text in the American Renaissance – a period ranging from 1830 until the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861, which the twentieth-century critic Matthiessen called literature "for our democracy" (xv) – this paper will demonstrate how each text is a creative and combative act of independence where defiance of the hegemonic European cultural assertion produces literature that asserts its own existence.

Employing a transatlantic postcolonial framework will be crucial to defending Irving and Hawthorne's authorial originality. Both texts are subversive: they subtly confront and undermine the European tradition, and the cultural snobbery it produces, to promote a specifically *American* art. In particular, within a revolutionary-American postcolonial framework, each text becomes an Anglo-American version of Caliban's counter-discourse. Caliban's rebuke reads: "you taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse" (Shakespeare 44). Whilst Caliban uses the coloniser's language to usurp colonial power and logic, Irving and Hawthorne enact resistance through literature. The American artist's "curse" uses the "taught" legitimacy of the European "Old Masters" to legitimise American writing (Hawthorne 36). John Carlos Rowe, however, claims that we should not "conclude hastily that because the United States emerged from the eighteenth-century anticolonial struggle, it qualifies as a postcolonial state" (79). This paper will avoid what Rowe deems as the risk of confusing postcolonial "methods, models and terminology with geopolitical realities" (80) by reading America's anti-colonial revolution in conjunction with Kariann Akemi Yokota's assertion of a *cultural* postcolonial relationship (13).

The advent of American Romanticism, for Matthiessen, was "America's way of producing a renaissance" to affirm "its rightful heritage in … art and culture" (vii). In particular, American literature became a tool in the invention and defence of American democracy. Ziff communicates this sentiment in the assertion: "in short, why should not literature, like everything else in the new democracy, earn its way through

public service?" (57). Here, the history of national literature gives way to understanding the American artist's need for self-definition as a specifically *transatlantic* struggle for cultural independence. Matthiessen's idea of an American Renaissance primarily revolved around six writers: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. Published in 1820, Irving's *The Sketch-Book* predates the epoch considered the beginning of American literature by approximately a decade, and both Ziff and Matthiessen exclude Irving from this literary qualification. Matthiessen also disregards Edgar Allan Poe, whom Ziff would later consider. Exclusion of female writers such as Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson has also since been readdressed by the critics Christina Zwarg (5) and Nina Baym (13). Writers of colour, such as Phillis Wheatley, who in the 1760s was already establishing an African-American literature, were also disqualified from consideration. Therefore, the exact parameters of the American Renaissance have been, and are still, contestable. As such, this paper will reconsider Irving in light of William L. Hedges' reminder that "his achievements [came] significantly at the beginning of the age in which commercialization came to dominate literature" (2). I want to claim that, although Irving's writing career is incongruous with the temporal understanding of this Renaissance, the writing itself figures within its ideological confines.

Within scholarship, Matthiessen remains the standard authority on the solely *literary* aspect of the American Renaissance. Rooted in the peak of New Criticism, Matthiessen's "close analysis" (xi) examines the "aesthetic surfaces" and thematic density within "the text itself," but lacks social context (480). His literary criticism does, however, reflect his own cultural politics (x) whereby in retrospectively categorising nineteenth-century literature, Matthiessen risks, as Eric Cheyfitz puts it, becoming "the victim, or vessel of a revolution in critical taste" (342). Matthiessen is "instigator" of a twentieth-century analysis of texts that have since been considered as the beginnings of the American Renaissance. In using a retrospective term, it is necessary to consider whether that which is under discussion is self-conscious. The intellectual boundaries in which Matthiessen operates derive from his writing during the interwar period. Paul Giles argues that traces of Cold War influence are discernible in Matthiessen's "cherishing [the] birth right of freedom and self-determination" (4). The way in which Matthiessen intertwines literary critique with nationalistic agendas articulates Cold War rhetoric, and nationalisation of American literature as

a "higher culture" permeates throughout Matthiessen's work (40). For instance, American Exceptionalism, defined as belief in the nation's unique position and role within the world, lies at the heart of his study. Ziff, however, interrogates the gaps in Matthiessen's analysis, in that his argument, though it "greatly benefit[s] from his work", crosses "into Matthiessen's terrain on a different errand" (viii). Ziff demonstrates how "literature is a particular concentration of cultural forces continuous with, rather than apart from society" (viii).

The Sketch-Book and *The Marble Faun* exhibit transatlanticism in the form of the travelogue genre, a form of travel writing that "evoke[s] a virtual space incorporating information, practical advice, and…the experience of travel" (Manning and Taylor 282). *The Sketch-Book* is a miscellany of essays, tales and sketches narrated predominately by "Irving's representative" Geoffrey Crayon (Eberwein 154), and the text follows the fictional American writer on his "poetical pilgrimage" (225) around the literary shrines of "Old World" England (Irving 57). *The Marble Faun* is a romance about "New England maiden" Hilda, and the effects "old Rome" (340) has on her artistic values (Hawthorne 273). Hawthorne's text is heavily invested in the historical, architectural, and material reality of Europe, and his touristic gaze is discernible in repeated use of the collective pronouns "our" and "we" (83). *The Marble Faun* even "became popular as a companion and guide for Anglo-American travellers in Italy, its moral fable read as an enriching source of aesthetic associations" (Manning, Introduction, *The Marble Faun* xviii). Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor's transatlantic consideration of American literature argues that "understanding of the United States can only take place in the context of a wider hemisphere" (27). When "American literature appears in a different light when read against the grain of British cultural imperatives" it is necessary to consider how "formal and ideological dimensions are apt chameleonically to change their shape when refracted through the spectrum of alternative cultural traditions" (Giles 1). Irving and Hawthorne refract the touristic gaze by resisting the ways "guidebooks claim that their version of the European tour provides…improvement far superior to anything available at home" (Stowe 303). Each author subverts the form's adherence to hegemonic European cultural notions to suggest artistic privilege within America.

For Hedges, American cultural assertion during the nineteenth-century derived from the fact, that "the American Revolution" required "literature commensurate with its lofty political ideas" (Introduction, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* xi). The

'lofty political ideas' that Hedges refers to includes America's founding belief in its pioneering democratic inception, to act as an example for how the rest of the world should conduct itself. When political independence required cultural independence, the advent of American literature as a means of self-assertion becomes an act of artistic decolonisation. *My* postcolonial approach to transatlantic studies interprets early American literature as depicting the former colony's disenfranchisement from the artistic European forefathers. The problem of independent artistic identity stems from claims of cultural inferiority. In Irving's sketch "English Writers on America," Crayon discusses the "literary animosity…between England and America," (50) where prejudices of "artificial distinctions" (51) between authors of the New World and the Old derive from a cultural "affectation," (130) which Hawthorne's text similar diagnoses as continental "pride" (209). Infamously, in 1820 literary critic Sydney Smith asked: "in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American Book?" (79). Here, transatlantic pretension determines America's status as a "comparatively unimportant country" (Irving 52). Yokota claims that "the process of self-understanding" in early America "entailed wrestling with the legacy of their colonial identity" (11). She explains: "these colonial-turned-citizens had to create an interstitial space between their former identity as British subjects and the new political and cultural context in which they now found themselves" (11). Yokota argues that the Declaration of Independence not only signified the formation and founding of a new country, but it was also a moment of *cultural* decolonisation. The process of "unbecoming British" is one that "could be called America's postcolonial period," (10) as this political transition necessitated an overthrowing of Anglo-European colonial influence. For Irving, the New World was seen as an imitative aberration of Old World "charms" (213) as Yokota's "experience of being judged by the standards of a distant metropole as inferior and uncivilized" manifest in Crayon's feelings of intrusion (Yokota 239). Crayon explains how upon entering a British library the librarian "demanded whether I had a card of admission" (Irving 74). Here, he becomes a transatlantic poacher, as Irving claims that "English critics…examine the credibility of the traveller" with "suspicion" (74). In particular, the Old World "literary 'preserve'" renders him "subject to game laws" whereby as an American writer, Crayon cannot "hunt there without special license and permission" (74). This metaphor of illicit activity creates anxiety and accusation around American literature's potential appropriation of pre-existing literary form.

Artistic "animosity" is also the structuring metaphor of Hawthorne's text when Hilda measures her own artistic endeavours against the "mighty Old Masters" of Rome (113). The "puritan" (280) painter feels "unworthy" (47) when the "tyrannous race" of European artistic forbears taunt the American artist (260) and resultantly their "might" establishes Hilda as a "copyist" (47). Crayon and Hilda exhibit William Carlos Williams' claim: "American writers have never recognized themselves" (226). As American artists operating within the epicentre of "refinements" and "ancient…custom" (Irving 12) of "former masteries," the attempt to produce unique work *appears* redundant (Williams 221). The weight of the parent tradition removes artistic autonomy; as Hilda states, "the old masters will not set me free!" (Hawthorne 260). Confinement to producing "repetitions," (47) even though these are "indeed marvellous," leads Hilda "to have entirely lost the impulse of original design" (45). As such the artist becomes powerless. Williams argues that only in engaging with "scrupulous originality" can "colonial imitation" be "swept away" (216). When postcolonialism "calls attention to the negative heritage of colonial or national practices," (Rowe 79) white America's "colonial heritage" becomes the British imperialists and then, genealogically-speaking, the European immigrant-turned-settler (Yokota 20). Irving views the hegemonic cultural imperatives toward American progenitive literature as damaging to creative agency; he deems them "attacks" (53). For Crayon, artistic "prejudice" is the "negative" impact posed by "the land of wonders…from which" Americans are "degenerated" (12). According to Williams, national literature must "not [be] hung by usage with associations" (221) and Hawthorne's form performs the ultimate American sin of literary expression. For instance, whilst Hilda's fraudulence as "copyist" is "superficial," Hawthorne similarly occupies a position of "copyist" (48). Hawthorne's textual composition mirrors the description of Hilda as "sacrificing herself to devout recognition of the highest excellence in art" (48). In centring his narrative upon already established examples of European art, Hawthorne, "to careless eyes" exhibits subjugation to hegemonic cultural imperatives (48). The novel is an artistic allegory demonstrating how when Americans belong to "a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity," European appropriation becomes necessary (4).

Although crucial to my argument, Ziff's consideration of Irving within the early generation of American writers is rather scathing. As a pre-American Renaissance writer, Irving "followed English literary models that were conservative in their reflection of English society" (ix). This, Ziff asserts, was due to the fact that "although

these Americans wrote about their own nation, they were constrained by adherence to their models to trim their work to foreign dimensions" (ix). Irving's ironic act of self-effacing illustrates this seeming conformity towards Old World literary tradition. In the preface, the author presents himself as "peculiarly unfitted" as an American writer (7). Comments about the inadequacy of his sketches for a British audience validate the Euro-centric snobbery of art, as in "being conscious that much of their contents could be interesting only to American readers," (5) Irving appears to remain in the "shadow of the empire" (Yokota 14). However, *The Sketch-Book* defies the hegemonic European prejudices since its apparent adherence to, and imitation of, existing cultural opinions actually becomes a tool to undermine them. Replicated positions of artistic inferiority are deliberate, and the use of the travelogue illustrates such mockery. For instance, the notion that foreign cultural capital is 'far superior' is radically undermined by Irving and Hawthorne. In particular, Irving's rendition of Caliban's counter-discourse employs irony as a subversive device to undermine the demands of literary entry, then simultaneously allows Irving to create his own distinct literature. As Eberwein states, "although a superficial reading discerns" an "impulse in Crayon towards everything that is English," a "more attentive study discovers a tendency to debunk assumptions of British superiority" (155). This statement elucidates the Janus-faced narrative that directly contradicts Irving's suspected ironic self-effacing subordination, evident in Crayon's initial idol-worship of the "wizard influence of Shakespeare" (238). In the sketch addressed to "Stratford on Avon" (234), the home of this "wizard" and what Bloom would interpret as the holy grail of "anxiety," Crayon's acknowledgement of English "creative powers of genius" falters (117). Whilst town "chroniclers" are "assiduous in exhibiting the relics" (225) of Shakespeare, "they have nothing new to impart" and the present renders past literary achievements unimpressive (227).

Both texts communicate the weight of owning such a long tradition and how that leads to creative stasis. For Hawthorne, the "heaped up…marble and granite" of the Old World "*Roman* past will pile upon the spot and will crush" artistic ability (318, emphasis added). For Irving, "commonplace realities of the present" and its ability to "lose" sight of creativity establish these epicentres of culture as burdensome (12). Boasting "absolute dominion" within the European literary and artistic sphere becomes arbitrary (Irving 224). When past artistic achievements are only "celebrated [as] shrines," prior "undirected genius" (225) demonstrates only "the *history* of

ideas" (Bloom 7) whereby artistic engagement ceases. Thus European fear over American replication of Old World creative traditions is redundant. Hawthorne and Irving reveal how once pre-eminent sites of "cultural capital" (Yokota 236) become "ruins" (Hawthorne 58) that betray contemporary artistic "neglect" (Irving 227). Each text resists what Alfred Bendixen identifies as "American travel" writing's convention of "an aesthetic desire to affirm and celebrate the achievements of art and culture embodied in European scenes" (103). The "material decay" of artistic endeavour provides a means of usurpation (Hawthorne 318). Crayon's former self-abasement is ironic as the initial placing of "England before us as a perpetual volume of reference" (57) becomes the weapon with which to demonstrate how his "native country was full of youthful promise" (12). For Linda Hutcheon, irony is a subversive force; it can legitimate or undermine power relations because the "cutting" edge of irony includes "its targets and … what some people call its 'victims'" (4). Drawing on speech concepts forwarded by Mikhail Bakhtin, Hutcheon deems irony "the most ill-behaved of all literary tropes" that can have both "social and political" implications (3). In each text, self-mocking ridicules the hegemonic standards' misjudgement of American talent. The British reader is made "victim" when Crayon professes his American ignorance and lack of talent, whilst simultaneously seeking to "annihilate the copied" (Williams 223). Crayon's humbling presentation is, in fact, an act of humility *topos*.

To "annihilate," Williams argues, qualifies authentic American authorship as American authors must "recognise themselves." American expression no longer takes heed from that which Crayon calls "ages of experience" to "embellish…national character" (Irving 57). Sketches such as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (291) and "Rip Van Winkle" (33) are a reclamation of that which hegemonic cultural definitions seek to diminish. Both sketches tell "the Dutch history of the province," (33) and these two distinctive pieces of American folklore become confrontational when placed next to sketches containing the "distinguished authors of this [parent] intellectual nation" (21). For Lawrence Buell, the establishment of American literary genre is akin to political and linguistic liberation from the English colony. Buell's synchronic analysis of "the marks of postcolonialism in American Renaissance writing" reads the act of writing in post-revolutionary America as allegorical of language expression in historic moments of racial decolonisation (149). As "testimonies to the American landscape's impact on imagination," according to Eberwein (158), Irving

equalises the prior disbalance in the opinions of literature deriving from the "peak of the Alps" on "to [the] highlands of Hudson" (Irving 283).

Hawthorne's "cultural confrontation" (Manning xi) manifests in Hilda's "spiritual revelation" of her "own potency" (265). Hawthorne likens artistic subservience to death in the simile explaining how such adherence to artistic "influence …will assuredly consume [her] like a flame" (260). When Hawthorne "bade her go back to her own country" (260), the "little American artist" is born (261). With artistic potential lying an ocean away from Rome's "crumbly magnificence," (267) the "luscious juice" in the "New England vintages" enables organic expression (214). Thus, employment of the quasi-travelogue and touristic gaze become a means of reproach enabling artistic decolonisation. The artistic European "race from which" Hawthorne and Irving are "degenerated" becomes the object of mockery (12).

In both pieces of literature, the reader is constantly made aware of the texts' status as artifice. Irving's American sketches were supposedly "found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker" (33 and 291) whilst Hawthorne's unnamed narrator disclaims: "it is now seven or eight years…since the Author of this Romance last appeared" (3). With Irving's disclaimer, the relationship between American history and literature becomes uncertain. Authorial interruptions such as "we now proceed with our narrative" (12) and appeals to the "gentle reader" in *The Marble Faun* draw attention to its textual composition. These "distancing tactics" illustrate a metafictional insurgency (Kemp 211) that Patricia Waugh qualifies as "writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as artefact" (2). In professing the tale to be purely "fiction," Hawthorne's text bares its artificial construction (5) as Knickerbocker's re-iterative statement "I profess not to know" (320) destabilises the ability to trust the "articulate father of the burly, bluff burlesque" (Giles 152). Second-hand information once "heard" and retold blurs distinction between reliability and craft (319).

The Marble Faun is self-reflexive of Hawthorne's status as an American author whereby simulation facilitates authorial "wishes to restore the above-mentioned beautiful pieces of sculpture to their proper owners" (5). The "scene of irony" that usurps "power relations" within a transatlantic framework is one of colonial rebuke (4). Fiction and uncertainty of narrative authorship remind the reader that Hawthorne's textual structure is deliberately imitative. Hawthorne's anonymous framing represents how it "has been re-written and prepared for the press, in England" (5).

For Kemp, there is "a political purpose to this artistic retreat," (224) in that "'actualities' can no longer be avoided in the U.S. or in writing about it" (211). As such, Hawthorne revolutionises the means by which American authors have previously had to operate, in order to appeal to readerships; it *now* requires politicisation. The "cunningly arranged" narrative teaches American writers how to subvert artistic hegemony and its oppressive forces (Hawthorne 353). It is the "public service" to which Ziff refers and autonomous American literature "finds its form and force because in it the cultural concerns of the new literary democracy find theirs" (xii). Irony forges a Calibanesque counter-narrative where structural ironies operate as an analogue measuring the strides which these two American authors have had to take in order to reach a "conscious force" of "firm statements" (Williams 219).

Finally, to return to Ziff: 'achievement' determines identification of nineteenth-century autonomous literature. *The Marble Faun* reached "staggering international success" according to Brenda Wineapple, to the extent that "in the late 19th century, no self-respecting American tourist would think of visiting Rome without taking along Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel" (n.p.). When Ziff asserts that the American Renaissance is measured "not by prevailing provincial standards but by the standards of world literature," (x) by this definition, Irving also succeeds. According to Hedges, his American sketches became "the basis on which Irving is generally credited with inventing… American classics" (Hedges vi) and seven months after Smith's declaration of American literary irrelevance, *The Edinburgh Review* anticipated that *The Sketch-Book* would go on to "form an era in the literature of the nation to which it belongs" (Jeffrey 160). Furthermore, Charles Dickens, in his own travelogue, depicts American literary merit as inextricable from the America landscape. Dickens identifies "the Kaatskill mountains" as "where Rip Van Winkle and the ghostly Dutchmen played at ninepins" (235). Here, Irving's use of literary demarcations to navigate England becomes inverted; sites of American literature now become cultural signifiers, where the symbiotic relationship between two literary continents justifies Irving repositioning as a pre-emptively subversive American author of European literary modes.

To conclude, the notions of co-authorship and collaboration in each text can be seen in the act of subversion, where Irving and Hawthorne's acts of recreating older forms of literature aid in the formation of a new literary movement. European appropriation in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and *The Marble Faun*,

is intentional and akin to cultural insurrection. Both Irving and Hawthorne invest in demonstrating the American author's condition and pressures. They are able to 'curse' their European forebears by deconstructing the 'national slight' of artistic 'prejudice' and in doing so, push for progenitive literature. Therefore, within a trans-atlantic postcolonial framework, Whitman's detection of unoriginality upon stating that "Irving was suckled on the Addisonian-Oxford-Cambridge milk" overlooks the metafiction inherent in the counter-discourse.

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