

“Latent Preparedness”:

Allusions in American Travel Literature on Britain

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In 1857, his consular duties in Liverpool at an end, Nathaniel Hawthorne took his family on a tour through the Scottish Highlands. All of the Hawthorne family were devoted readers of Walter Scott, and in her *Notes on England and Italy* (1869), Sophia Hawthorne described their arrival at Loch Katrine, and her son Julian’s delight at finding himself in the land of the Last Minstrel. Mrs. Hawthorne recalled that:

Julian ran on before us, and just as we were coming opposite an enormous cliff, we heard him shouting aloft—”And like a sheet of burnished gold,/ Loch Katrine lies before me rolled.” How little he supposed he should repeat those lines in the very place Fitz-James himself stood, perhaps, when he first heard them read in Leamington.¹

Julian, eleven years old at the time, was enacting a central convention of American travel writing on Britain at midcentury: frequent allusion to the literature of the land. Certainly literary allusion is a general feature of all travel writing—witness Boswell’s reciting *Macbeth* on his way to the Hebrides, or Paul Theroux’s references to the novels of Hudson and Traven on the Patagonian Express—but given the peculiar qualities of American travel to Britain, allusion in the records of such travel invites special examination.

The American experience of travel in Britain was attended by an enchantment of the familiar. American travelers arrived there prepared to see sights and hear voices already well known to them. It is a familiar irony that people travel

to confirm their expectations of the foreign. But in no other avenue of travel were those expectations so vivid as for the nineteenth-century American en route to Britain. "The Old Home" might thrill Americans but it could rarely surprise, rarely defy their expectations. The narrator of James's "A Passionate Pilgrim" despaired of understanding the source of these expectations:

The latent preparedness of the American mind for even the most delectable features of English life is a fact which I never fairly probed to its depths. The roots if it are so deeply buried in the virgin soil of our primary culture, that, without some great upheaval of experience, it would be hard to say exactly when and where and how it begins.²

Actually, this "latent preparedness" was not such a mystery. American travelers to the Continent or the Holy Land might have had a fair idea of what to expect there—as would, say, a literate Spaniard traveling to Britain—but Americans had been preparing themselves for Britain literally since they learned to read. As Richard Harding Davis wrote near the end of the century, "The Englishman takes nothing to America but himself. The American takes to England . . . the accumulated reading of a lifetime."³ Americans, of whatever political stamp, knew what to expect in Britain and how to tailor the reality of the nation to their own preconceptions of it. Through the allusions by which these preconceptions were voiced and confirmed we may assess the different ways in which "latent preparedness" conditioned the American experience of travel in Britain.

The principal texts for this assessment will be travel narratives published around midcentury, during what might be called the second phase of American travel to Britain. Up till around 1840 most of the Americans who came to Britain did so for reasons other than pure tourism. Benjamin Silliman, for example, came in 1805 to procure books and laboratory equipment for Yale College; Washington Irving arrived in 1815 on an errand for his family's New York hardware concern. After 1840 (the year in which Samuel Cunard's shipping line was established) American tourism in Britain increased dramatically. Encouraged by the relatively cheap and rapid steam ship passages, and attracted by the London Exhibition of 1851, Americans annually went to the Old Home in thousands. For the most part, this second wave of Americans came purely to see the sights, many to write about them. It was these tourists who were responsible for the great proliferation of British travel accounts at midcentury, and who participated wholeheartedly in the conventions of literary allusion that characterize those accounts.⁴

The functions of allusion in these travel accounts were several. Allusions acted, first of all, to counteract the cultural insecurity that American travelers experienced in Britain. After all, what made Britain as encountered so hauntingly familiar to Americans was the prestige, indeed the cultural hegemony, of its literature. Many Americans appear to have felt that travel in Britain constituted

a sort of examination in cultural literacy. Behind the literary references in their books there was a nervous desire to display conversancy with the canon of British literature.

These allusions also operated in such a way as to emphasize the presence of the alluder on the landscape. (Remember the shape of Julian's reference to Scott: the Loch *is* like a sheet of burnished gold, and it does lie before *me* rolled.") Tallying the familiar landscape against the literature that made it so, American travelers located themselves on British terrain through literary reference. Granted, this rhetorical placement of the speaker is a common activity for literate travelers, but given the "latent preparedness" of the American mind for Britain, it was an activity revealed to perfection in these travel books.

Finally, the literary references of American travelers in Britain had the effect of keeping a familiar landscape familiar. American expectations of Britain were often at variance with the realities of the nation at midcentury. Travelers came expecting to see rural cots, wimpling burns and quaint Dickensian characters. And they got what they came for. Americans reinforced through allusion the image of a placid rural England—the England, in short, of Irving's *Sketch Book*. Through the allusions they made—allusions which, as we shall see, actually shaped their itineraries in Britain—Americans shielded themselves from the contemporary realities of nineteenth-century Britain.



An illustration in Irving's sketch, "Rural Life in England," from the 1880 edition of *The Sketch Book*.

Robert Weisbuch's recently proposed model for American "cultural time" provides a useful vocabulary for discussing the escape from contemporaneity that American travelers enacted through allusion. Weisbuch defines "cultural time" as "the collective metaphor that expresses an age's view of itself in relation to all

of history.”⁵ The cultural time of midcentury America was, Weisbuch suggests, paradoxically plural. Emerson’s contemporaries saw themselves simultaneously as belated and early—belated in the general course of Western civilization, early in the development of American history and culture.⁶ As metaphors for cultural development, both lateness and earliness carry mixed messages. Implicit in the metaphor of lateness are connotations of rich cultural maturity as well as of exhaustion and decadence. Earliness suggests both the crudely inchoate quality of American culture that James complained of in his biography of Hawthorne, and the promise of innocent liberty implicit in the myth of the American Adam.⁷

Weisbuch argues that the genius of American Renaissance literature consists in the creative use of the plural times available to the American writer.⁸ Through what Weisbuch calls American “actualism,” Emerson’s contemporaries exploited the simultaneous metaphors of earliness and lateness by “inventing histories out of the self or by making the self tantamount to history.”⁹ Weisbuch’s model of cultural time allows us to identify the attitude to history that characterized American travelers to Britain. What is revealed in their books—specifically through the habits of allusion in those books—is a powerful sense of belatedness, of enervating distance from cultural origins. This sense of belatedness runs counter both to the Emersonian program of self reliance and to the Berkeleyan motif of westering empire, but it is nevertheless vividly apparent in midcentury American travel books. British travel was for these Americans a return to origins, a chance to reclaim earliness; above all, it was a flight from the contemporary.

The bulk of allusions in American travel books was to British literature of a vintage comfortably remote from contemporary concerns. Invocations of Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Pope and Scott were much more frequent than were nods to the Victorians. It is also interesting to note that the literary references made by these Americans rarely performed the traditional documentary function of allusion in British or Continental books of travel. The allusions in Hippolyte Taine’s *Notes on England* (1872), for example, acted as corroborating data for a series of observations about contemporary society and culture. Taine wrote of the cartoons in *Punch*—as he did of the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hughes—as interpretive tools by which “one can perceive the fact as it actually exists.”¹⁰ “The fact” for Taine was contemporary social reality in Britain, and his references to current literature were meant to document that fact. American travelers, on the other hand, were hardly concerned at all with documenting contemporary Britain through allusions to contemporary British literature. They sought to evoke the storied Britain of Falstaff and Sir Roger De Coverley—the England of their reading—not the Britain of midcentury that concerned Taine.

Many American travelers used allusion simply to identify themselves as readers of the British canon, and thus to compensate for their sense of belatedness as Americans. For example William Wells Brown, fugitive slave and abolition lecturer, filled his *American Fugitive in Europe* (1855) with a battery of allusions that can only be described as apologetic in intent. Here Brown described himself

during his visit to London in 1849, weary after a day of self-improvement at the British Museum:

It was eight o' clock before I reached my lodgings. Although fatigued by the day's exertions, I again resumed the reading of Roscoe's "Leo X.", and had nearly finished seventy-three pages, when the clock on St. Martin's church apprised me that it was two. He who escapes from slavery at the age of twenty



William Wells Brown, from the frontispiece of his *Sketches of Places and People Abroad* (1855)

years, without any education, as did the writer of this, must read when others are asleep, if he would catch up with the rest of the world. "To be wise," says Pope, "is but to know how little can be known."¹¹

More than ten years after Emerson had advised his countrymen to close their ears to the courtly muses of Europe, Brown was apologizing for being a belated American—one who must struggle to catch up with what all the world has read before. Brown's insecurity was obviously compounded by his being a black man. But in his use of allusion to compensate for belatedness, and to reveal himself as a conscientious student of British literature, Brown behaved exactly as many white American travelers did.

More than thirty years earlier, the allusions in Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* were arrayed to reveal the Geoffrey Crayon persona as an adherent to standards of literary taste no more current than those of the British Augustan period. The epigraphs to the sketches, drawn from Burton, Cowper, and Lyly, and the allusions throughout the work to Addison and Goldsmith were designed to show that Irving was not to be taken as a new-fangled "Cockney" writer. It was no accident that Irving invoked, through this series of allusions, the specific prose models which *The Sketch Book's* British reviewers used to praise his style.¹²

If allusion in these books was motivated by the travelers' desire to declare their literacy and to dissemble their condition as cultural *arrivistes*, frequent gaffes and incongruities arose as a result. Such was the case in Andrew Carnegie's *An American Four-in-Hand in Britain*, the sentimental account of the Carnegie family's coach trip through rural England in 1881. Early in their excursion the family heard the news of Garfield's assassination. Carnegie, who had been a friend of the President, paused in his narrative to eulogize him:

One might almost be willing to die if, as in Garfield's case, there should flash from his grave, at the touch of a mutual sorrow, to both divisions of the great English speaking race, the knowledge that they are brothers . . . "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it." Garfield's life was not in vain. . . . Let other nations ask themselves where are *our* Lincolns and Garfields.¹³

The reference to *Macbeth* (I. iv. 7.) could not be more inappropriate. Clearly Carnegie did not bother to look into the context of this quotation, or he would have perceived in Malcolm's speech about the traitorous Thane of Cawdor an unfortunate connotation to this eulogy of Garfield. Carnegie blundered in seeking to establish his credentials in British literature.

When Sydney Smith declared in 1820 that no one in the four corners of the world reads an American book, he was accusing American culture, to use Weisbuch's model, of a crude and unpolished earliness. The Emersonian



Andrew Carnegie and his traveling party atop the “Four-in-Hand” (1883). Carnegie is seated on the left in front, holding the whip.

program of American literary nationalism was to seize upon that sense of earliness as the basis for fresh and unimpeded creation. But these narratives of British travel show how many Americans in the age of Emerson perceived themselves as culturally belated, and how many of them sought to counteract that sense of belatedness through displays of assimilated reading.

All of the allusions discussed so far were made in such a way as to foreground the travelers themselves—in these cases, to advertise the speakers’ literacy in British classics. This self-promoting quality also marked the allusions by which travelers ordered their experience of British landscape. A traveler’s reading determined the sites he or she visited, and these sites generated references to the literature that had put them on the itinerary. But it was only a secondary function of such allusions to actually describe a particular site. Mainly, American travelers emphasized their own presence in a landscape by reference to the works associated with it, thus rhetorically locating themselves in British territory.

When Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect, arrived at Liverpool in 1851, a figure familiar from his reading stood before him: “At the head of the gang-plank stood a policeman, easily recognized and familiar, thanks to *Punch*, who politely helped us to land . . .”¹⁴ Here Olmsted not only expressed pleasure in seeing his reading corroborated by the concrete particulars of Liverpool, he also demonstrated the fact of his new location. Olmsted was able to verify *Punch* because he was now participating in the reality from which its caricatures were drawn.

Describing his first day in London in 1852, Henry Tuckerman, a minor luminary of the Duyckincks’ New York literary circle, similarly underscored his

presence on British soil. On his way to look at Nelson's column, Tuckerman's attention was taken by "the names on the glistening panels of each omnibus that dashed by the square." He listed these names in a compound allusion to the works and careers of London writers:

"Hampstead" made me think of poor Keats and his walks when the daisies bloomed along the lanes of that suburban retreat, and of Cunningham, Sydney Smith, and Hood, who lie in its churchyard; "Kensington" raised the image of good Mrs. Inchbald in her retirement there; "Turnham Green" revived Goldsmith's joke; "Highgate" suggested Coleridge, and "Sydenham" Campbell. . . .¹⁵

Clearly, the references served to orient the traveler upon the landscape. But as he took his bearings through allusion, Tuckerman was also putting himself on the map. The passage makes vivid the fact that the traveler had arrived where the books come from.

This process of travelers locating themselves through allusion resembles the "sight/marker" relationship described in Dean MacCannell's study of modern tourism. MacCannell explains that a tourist attraction or "sight" becomes such through its association with a "marker," some piece of information about the place either attached to it or carried in the tourist's mind. Recognition occurs in the instant when the sight and marker are brought together.¹⁶ Those lines from "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," then, served Julian as a marker for Loch Katrine. His recitation of them at the pertinent place announced the moment of recognition.

But while MacCannell's scheme reveals allusion as the signal of sight/marker recognition, it does not account for the way in which these travelers' references acted to foreground the travelers themselves. Why did the allusions made by Olmsted, Tuckerman and so many other American travelers tend as much to emphasize the speaker's location as to announce the simple correspondence of sight and marker, place and text? The reason for this foregrounding lies, to great degree, in the extent of the Americans' "latent preparedness" for Britain. The narrator of James's "Four Meetings," described that moment of recognition that so many travelers to Europe recorded through allusion:

We're like travellers in the desert—deprived of water and subject to the terrible mirage, the torment of illusion, of the thirst-fever. They hear the splash of fountains, they see green gardens and orchards that are hundreds of miles away. So we with *our* thirst—except that with us it's *more* wonderful: we have before us the beautiful old things we've never seen at all, and when we do at last see them—if we're lucky!—we simply

recognise them. What experience does is merely to confirm and consecrate our confident dream.¹⁷

Americans *had* seen the beautiful old absent things of Britain—seen them in the British literature with which they were so eager to display their conversancy, and in the writings of previous travelers. So familiar was the British scene for them that American travelers found in Britain only the slightest disparity between their expectations and the encountered reality of the nation. Encountered Britain could be quaint or grand or picturesque, but it almost always corresponded with its advance publicity. With so small a gap, then, between sight and marker, the habit of allusion became more a device for confirming one's arrival than for taking stock of a landscape not really foreign to the American imagination. By foregrounding themselves through allusion, American travelers showed how generously their confident dream had been fulfilled.

If this foregrounding derived from the Americans' "latent preparedness" for Britain, it also contributed to the historical sleight of hand that characterized American travel in the Old Home. Through allusion, American travelers located themselves in an early Britain distinctly remote from contemporary landmarks. In this sense, the enterprise recorded in these books was not so much travel as escape—escape to a fictive Old England whose landscape had already been navigated through reading. Such an escape occurs in Margaret Fuller's *At Home and Abroad* (1853) as the traveler transferred herself through allusion from a local and contemporary landscape to one imaginary and early. Fuller recounted how while touring the Highlands, she became separated from her guide on the slopes of Ben Lomond and was lost as darkness fell. Eventually she was forced to spend the night alone in a mountain pasture. Fuller's allusive habit of mind turned the pasture into a scene from the indigenous literature, and herself into a leading character:

For about two hours I saw the stars, and very cheery and companionable they looked; but when the mist fell, I saw nothing more except such apparitions as visited Ossian upon the hillside when he went out by night and struck the bosky shield and called to him the spirits of the heroes and the white-armed maids with their blue eyes of grief. To me, too, came these visionary shapes; floating slowly and gracefully, their white robes would unfurl from the great body of mist in which they were engaged, and come upon me with a kiss as pervasively cold as that of death.¹⁸

Lost on Ben Lomond, Fuller was nevertheless able to place herself imaginatively. She could not find the inn or her guide, but she successfully located herself in the Celtic twilight, thereby confirming her location in the early Britain she knew from books.

Through “latent preparedness,” literature informed landscape in these passages. The citation of a familiar text illuminated an only slightly less familiar place, and the correspondence between the two verified the traveler’s presence at the sight. Frequently, the travelers’ allusions worked the other way around, demonstrating how an encountered landscape might lend new meaning to a familiar text. Here again, the emphasis was upon neither place nor text—the familiar confirms the familiar—but upon the location of the traveler in “literary” Britain and upon the privileged reading of British texts that that location enabled. Harriet Beecher Stowe described this experience of heightened literacy early in her *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (1854):

There are many phrases and expressions with which we have been familiar from childhood, and which, we suppose, in a kind of indefinite way, we understand, which, after all, when we come on English ground, start into a new significance. . . .¹⁹

The particular expression Stowe had in mind here was the “hedge-row elms” of Milton’s “L’Allegro,” a dozen lines of which she duly quoted. Having arrived in Lancashire, and with an actual specimen of the British hedgerow before her, Stowe looked back to her Milton with new understanding.

Even so sober a commentator on the English landscape as Hawthorne took pleasure in showing how his presence in that landscape enhanced his reading. He wrote in his *English Notebooks* for 1853:

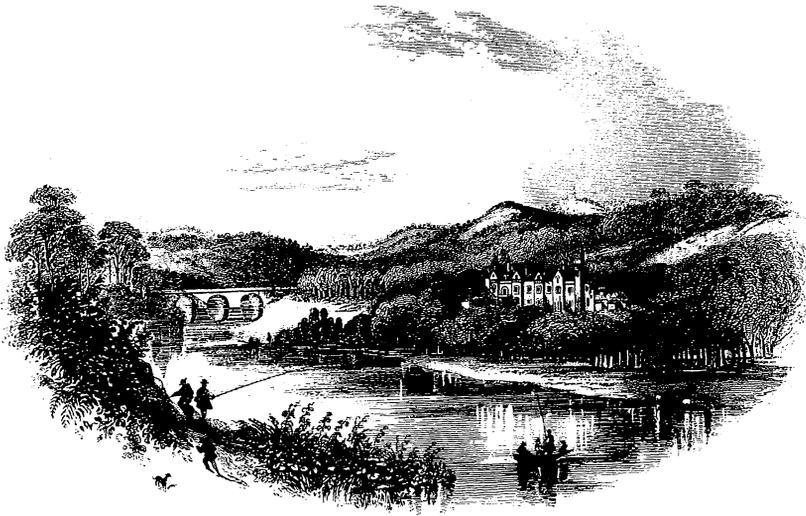
An American would never understand the passage in Bunyan about Christian and Hopeful going astray by a by-path into the grounds of Giant Despair—from there being no styles [sic] and footpaths in our country.²⁰

By demonstrating the privileged literacy that British travel granted them, these travelers advertised their progress into a region of which their American audience will have only read. And in confirming their location this way these travelers were, of course, falsifying their moment in history. As Stowe revealed herself in Milton’s, and Hawthorne in Bunyan’s landscape, both travelers belied their condition as belated Americans.

The anachronistic quality of American travel books on Britain accounts in great part for the homogeneity of the content of these books, and for the near-uniformity of American tourist itineraries in Britain. Significantly, those Americans who came to Britain in the 1850s appear to have traveled without guidebooks. English-language guidebooks on Britain were largely unavailable to American travelers at midcentury, and references to them are correspondingly scarce in American accounts of British travel before the 1870s.²¹ Without guidebooks to direct their steps, most travelers in the 1850s allowed British

literature itself to give shape to their journeys, and went mainly to those sites sufficiently inscribed in the classics to provide scope for an orienting allusion.

The standard itinerary of these travelers can be seen as little more than a round of literary checkpoints productive of opportunities for allusion. From Liverpool, most travelers went to Chester and London, then to Oxford and Stratford, perhaps then to the Lake District, and on to what Hawthorne called “Scott-Land.” They confined themselves, in other words, to the Old England encrusted with literary association. Industrial Britain—Manchester and Newcastle and Birmingham—was either avoided completely or impatiently dismissed. Even Andrew Carnegie, who would have had more reason than most to linger there, passed over Birmingham in a mere page and a half, saying: “. . . do not let us forget that it is just Pittsburgh done over again.”²²



ABBOTSFORD.

Frontispiece to the 1859 edition of Irving’s *Crayon Miscellany*. Walter Scott’s Abbotsford was prominent on the itineraries of American travelers.

Such reminders of the nineteenth century that interrupted the American idyll of travel were strongly resisted. Tuckerman’s *Month in England* is remarkable for the tenacity with which it looked away from the contemporary scene, even despite the fact that Tuckerman arrived in London in 1852, just as the British vogue of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was in full swing. Despite his sympathies for abolition, Tuckerman was only annoyed by the British popularity of *Uncle Tom*, describing the book as a sort of novelistic parvenu trespassing upon the better

judgment of British readers.²³ He spent much of his time in London dodging reminders of the novel's popularity.

Still, all of London was alluding to a text which Tuckerman would rather have ignored. In the lobby of his hotel an Uncle Tom savings bank had been set up for subscriptions to the abolitionist effort. On the washstand in his room he discovered a cake of Uncle Tom soap. Afoot in the city, he had to flee from the melody of "Massa, I can tell you Nothing." And taking refuge in a barber shop, he found the walls of the place adorned with "innumerable tableax" of Uncle Tom and Little Eva.²⁴ Tuckerman resented the novel's appearance in London because *Uncle Tom* necessarily modernized the British scene. Tuckerman wanted nothing more than to be left alone in the Britain of his reading. He was happiest at Stratford and Windsor where he could invoke the shades of Shakespeare and Gray. Uncle Tom brought the nineteenth century with him and disturbed the traveler's nostalgic vision, his conjuring of cultural earliness.

This shirking of the contemporary is visible even in allusions to the one American writer most frequently cited by his travelling countrymen—Washington Irving. The Britain of Irving's *Sketch Book* was dated even by 1820. His was the Britain of Bracebridge Hall and the Country Church, of quaint rural manners and London antiquities. But Irving's anachronistic vision of Britain was so attractive to subsequent travelers that his *Sketch Book* became one of the texts that shaped the landscape they encountered. Following in Irving's footsteps, many Americans were able to imagine themselves in the placid pre-industrial nation that had been the scene of Geoffrey Crayon's gentle enthusiasms.

For example, Frederick Law Olmsted described how he was overtaken by a rainstorm on the road from Bath to Warminster, and fled to a roadside inn. He passed the night there and woke up the next morning to find that ". . . the rain still continued—I drew the window curtain, and there was Geoffrey Crayon's picture almost to the life: a sleepy old mare 'letting it rain;' a draggle-tailed cock on a smoking dunghill . . . half-a-dozen doves huddled moping together on the thatch of the stable. . . "²⁵ The landscape in which Olmsted traveled was that much more genuinely Old England because Irving had identified it as such.

For Margaret Fuller the memory of Irving was as much alive as that of Shakespeare at Stratford on Avon. Here is Fuller at the Red Horse Inn, an establishment whose fortune was made by *The Sketch Book*:

At Stratford, I handled, too, the poker used to such good purpose by Geoffrey Crayon. The muse had fled, the fire was out, and the poker rusty, yet a pleasant influence lingered even in that cold little room, and seemed to lend a transient glow to the poker under the influence of sympathy.²⁶

Fuller was remembering the opening of the Stratford sketch where Crayon mused before the inn's hearth upon the comfortable lot of the traveler: "The armchair is

his throne, the poker his sceptre, . . . ‘Shall I not take mine ease in mine inn?’ thought I, as I gave the fire a stir, and lolled back in my elbow chair . . . “ 27

There is a quality of infinite regress about this. Fuller was alluding to a passage in Irving where Irving was quoting Shakespeare. She may not have been aware of how many echoes were started by her reference, but Fuller’s passage shows the derivative and atavistic quality of the American’s vision of England. In 1820 Washington Irving was dreaming of an England already generations gone—in this case the England of Falstaff and Prince Hal—and in 1846 Fuller was dreaming of Irving’s England.

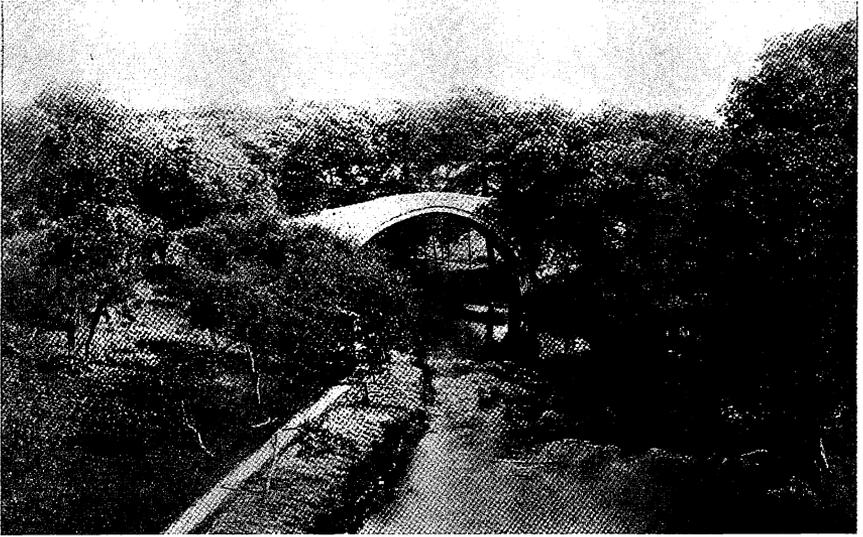
This backward-looking cast to the Americans’ vision of England is an example of the tourist behavior that MacCannell calls “marker involvement.” Marker involvement occurs when some piece of information about a sight—a plaque, a brochure, in this case a pertinent literary tag—actually eclipses the sight itself in the tourist’s mind.²⁸ Indeed, American travelers found contemporary Britain obscured behind the classic literature they invoked to orient themselves there. Obviously, there was more to Britain than *The Sketch Book* had indicated, but so eager were they to find themselves in Irving’s footsteps that American travelers tended to overlook the contemporary scene.

The list of those developments in British social and political history elided by American travelers at midcentury testifies to the reductive nostalgia with which those travelers viewed the nation. Margaret Fuller and Harriet Beecher Stowe visited ragged schools and urban relief organizations during their visits to London, but most travelers simply ignored the movements of educational reform and relief of the urban poor that were in progress during the 1850s. Neither did the travelers consider any of the important acts of Parliament made in the decade. The travelers mentioned neither the Factory Acts of 1850 and 1853 nor the Jewish Relief Acts of 1851 and 1858, and the Rothschild case of 1847 was similarly elided. More startling still was the general silence among American travel writers about the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Crimean war.

Ignoring contemporary Britain, these travelers concerned themselves instead with the static landmarks of Old England—Poet’s Corner, Anne Hathaway’s Cottage at Shottery, Burns’s bridge over the Doon—landmarks at which they confirmed their presence through allusion. One reason for this elision of the contemporary had to do, as we have seen, with these travelers belying their condition as culturally belated Americans. Another reason derived from a strong generic element of the nineteenth-century American travel book—an element that came, again, from Irving.

In the preface to *The Sketch Book*, “The Author’s Account of Himself,” Irving set forth a kind of apology for the desultory quality of his British observations. He explained the absence of systematic inquiry in *The Sketch Book*:

I have wandered through different countries, and witnessed many of the shifting scenes of life. I cannot say that I have

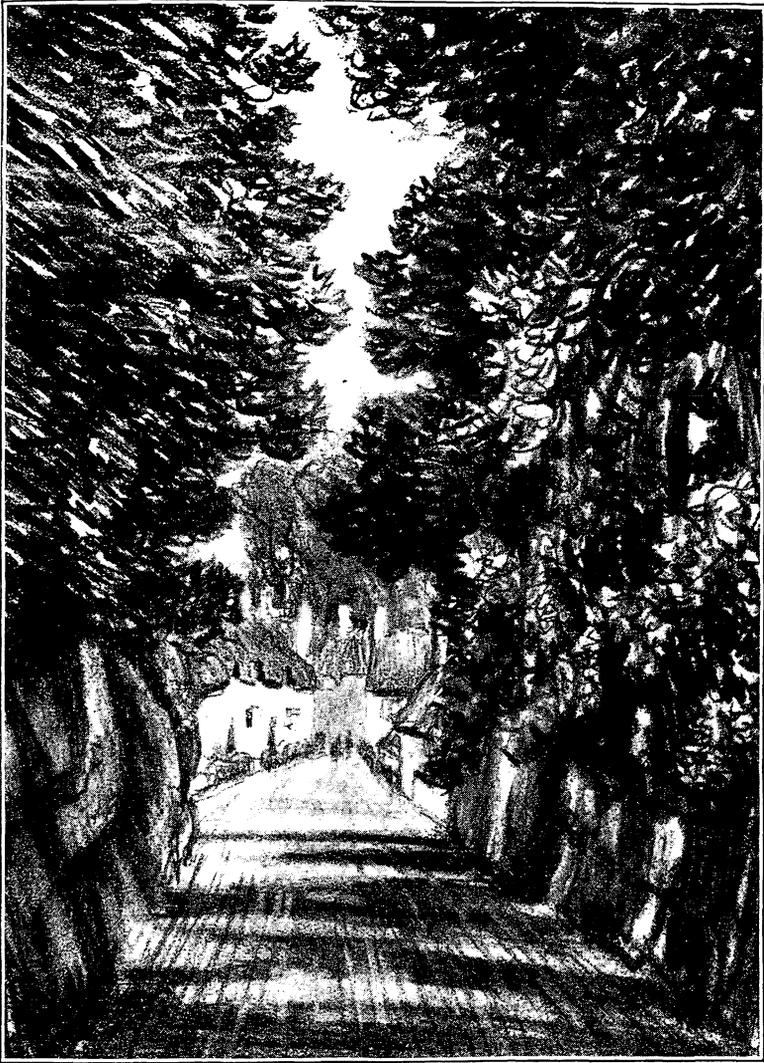


Burns's bridge over the Doon: from a 1900 edition of Hawthorne's *Our Old Home*.

studied them with the eye of a philosopher, but rather with the sauntering gaze with which humble lovers of the picturesque stroll from the window of one print shop to another, caught sometimes by the delineations of beauty, sometimes by the distortions of caricature, and sometimes by the loveliness of landscape. As it is the fashion for modern tourists to travel pencil in hand and bring home their portfolios filled with sketches, I am disposed to get up a few for the entertainment of my friends.²⁹

The genre of the sketch, as Irving defined it here and as the contents of *The Sketch Book* make plain, was necessarily limited in scope. The sketch was to be partial in its range, impressionistic in its method, and highly selective of its objects. Those objects, outlined here and elsewhere in the "Author's Account," were to become traditional in American travel writing on Britain: landscape, the picturesque, monuments, and literary landmarks. Notably absent, of course, were objects of contemporary human and social interest. Irving modestly described himself as a follower of touristic "fashion" in presenting his travels as sketches, but it would be more accurate to say that Irving himself created that fashion, making the sketch an informing element in the genre of American travel writing.³⁰

In the "Author's Account" Irving further defined the sketch as a vehicle for giving expression to the traveler's "idle humor" and "vagrant inclination" for the "nooks and corners and byplaces" he encountered along his way.³¹ And it was to



One of Joseph Pennell's illustrations to the 1905 edition of James's *English Hours*.

these nooks and corners that subsequent writers of travel sketches confined themselves, leaving out of the picture whatever harsh contemporary facts failed to correspond with their preconceptions. Thus the genre of the sketch abetted the "latent preparedness" of American travelers for Britain, enabling them to dwell almost exclusively upon the Old England that they had known from books.

Certainly there were exceptions to the atavistic tone of American travel

writing on Britain at midcentury. Emerson's *English Traits* (1856) confronted contemporary Britain quite squarely; it was also a work, significantly, that contained very few allusions. Hawthorne, in *English Notebooks* (1853-57) and *Our Old Home* (1863) tended to vacillate between nostalgia for Old England and affirmations of the promise of Young America. This vacillation pervaded Hawthorne's British writings and was particularly visible in the allusions that run through these books.

In this passage from from *Our Old Home*, for example, he described his reactions to a visit to the British health resort of Leamington Spa. Hawthorne was attracted by the peacefulness of the sleepy little town, but realized, characteristically, that the attraction ran counter to the American temper with which he associated himself:

Better than this is the lot of our restless countrymen, whose modern instinct bids them tend always towards "fresh fields and pastures new." Rather than such monotony of sluggish ages, loitering on a village green, toiling in hereditary fields, listening to the parson's drone lengthened through centuries in the grey Norman church, let us welcome whatever change may come³²

The irony of the passage is plain. Hawthorne set out here to pay tribute to American earliness, to the freedom from history and tradition supposedly enjoyed west of the Atlantic. But he was unable to express the restless and progressive character of his countrymen without using an inherited British trope to make his point. The passage from *Our Old Home* reflects how strong the seductions of British earliness to Americans traveling at midcentury were, and how fully a habit of allusion characterized travelers' attempts to claim that earliness for themselves.

Literary allusion, finally, became a way in which these travelers closed the gap between the Britain they had prepared themselves for and the Britain they actually encountered. That their allusions tended to conjure Old England and to dissemble their status as belated Americans reveals the travelers' rejection of what Weisbuch has called the plural cultural times available to them as Americans. Indeed, this dissembling suggests that a sense of cultural lateness was central to these travelers' experience of themselves as Americans. British travel confronted them both with a haunting reminder of that sense of lateness and with an opportunity to falsify or conceal it.

Notes

1. Sophia Hawthorne, *Notes in England and Italy* (New York, 1869), 188.
2. Henry James, *The Complete Tales*, ed., Leon Edel, (Philadelphia, 1962), vol. 2, 227.
3. Richard Harding Davis, *Our English Cousins* (New York, 1894) 156f.
4. Allison Lockwood, *Passionate Pilgrims* (East Brunswick, New Jersey, 1981), 145-153.
5. Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago, 1986), 109.
6. *Ibid.*, 125ff.
7. The chapter on "Stonehenge" in Emerson's travel book *English Traits* (1856) plays deftly with these metaphors of cultural time. There, in conversation with Carlyle, Emerson contrasts the "great sloven continent" of America with the "over-cultivated garden of England." Britain consistently appears, in Emerson's work, as "an old and exhausted island." *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed., Edward W. Emerson, (Boston, 1903), vol. 5, 275, 288. See also the preface to *The Marble Faun* (1860) where Hawthorne thus justifies the Italian setting of his romance: "It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow." *The Marble Faun*, ed., William Charvat et al., (Columbus, 1968), 3. Both Emerson and Hawthorne here articulate the conventional view of Europe as belated and America as early—a view, as we shall see, that is largely modified by American travelers to Britain at midcentury.
8. Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double Cross*, 132.
9. *Ibid.*, 212.
10. Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans., W. F. Rae, (New York, 1872), 256.
11. William W. Brown, *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad*, (Cleveland, 1855), 115.
12. "Despising the qualifications of a cockney, he has joined in the throng of English essayists. He has looked to the genius of Addison, the sensibility of Mackenzie, and the arch simplicity of Goldsmith for his models; and in this instance the labourer is well worthy of his hire." Review of *The Sketch Book* by Washington Irving, *Gold's London Magazine*, 2 (1820), 281. The term "Cockney School," apparently coined by *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817, became a catch-all epithet used by reviewers to condemn Hazlitt, Hunt and especially Keats for their "low birth" and for the disregard of Augustan models in their work.
13. Andrew Carnegie, *An American Four-in-Hand in Britain* (New York, 1883), 33.
14. Frederick L. Olmsted, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (New York, 1852), vol. 1, 50.
15. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Month in England* (New York, 1853), 29.
16. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1976), 110ff.
17. Henry James, *The Novels and Tales* (New York, 1909), vol. 16, 275. Later in his career James would speak of Britain as "the abyss of the familiar." See *English Hours* (rpt. New York, 1981), 180.
18. Margaret Fuller, *At Home and Abroad* (rpt. Port Washington, New York, 1975), 136.
19. Harriet B. Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (London, 1854), 32.
20. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, ed., Randell Stewart, (London 1962), 88.
21. Baedeker's guidebooks were not produced in English until 1861; the first Baedeker guide to Great Britain was published in 1887. While Murray's exhaustive *Handbook for Travellers* series began in 1836 with a guide to the Continent, *Handbooks for Britain* were slow in coming. *Murray's Handbook for Modern London* and the *Handbook for Travellers in Devon and Cornwall* appeared in 1851, but it wasn't until the 1860s and 1870s that Murray began to cover the rest of British terrain, county by county. Guidebooks published in America were also scarce at midcentury. George P. Putnam's *The Tourist in Europe* (1838) appears to have enjoyed little success, and the popular *Harper's Handbook* series was not brought out until the 1860s.
22. Carnegie, *An American Four-in-Hand*, 150.
23. Tuckerman accounts thus for *Uncle Tom's* success among British readers: "The appeal it made to the pity and moral indignation of the public, by high-wrought and exceptional scenes of cruelty and degradation, found an immediate response; the intelligent minority alone compared its revelations with facts, or applied to them the test of reason and charity." *Month in England*, 120.
24. *Ibid.*, 120ff.
25. Olmsted, *Walks and Talks*, vol. 2, 119.
26. Fuller, *At Home and Abroad*, 136.
27. Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book*, ed., Perry Miller, (New York, 1961), 253.
28. MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 113ff.
29. Irving, *The Sketch Book*, 15.
30. Even the titles of American travel books published after Irving's reveal how durable the sketch genre was in nineteenth-century American travel writing. See for example: William Wells

Brown, *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad* (1855), Arthur Cleveland Coxe, *Impressions of England; or Sketches of English Scenery and Society* (1863), Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches* (1863), Charles Stewart, *Sketches of Society in Great Britain and Ireland* (1835), Bayard Taylor, *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery and Men* (1886), and Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Pencillings by the Way* (1835).

31. Irving, *The Sketch Book*, 15.

32. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home*, ed., William Charvat *et al.*, (Columbus, 1974), 60.