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| **LIFE**Washington Irving (1783-1859) has been called the America’s first professional writer. Irving was the favorite and youngest of 11 children of an austere Presbyterian father and a genial Anglican mother. He escaped a college education, which his father required of his older sons, but read intermittently at the law—through by his own admission, he was not a good student, and in 1806 he barely passed the bar. Preferring to indulge his creative impulses, Irving wrote a series of whimsically satirical essays over the signature of Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent.,published in his brother’s newspaper. In 1815 he went to England to look after the interests of his brothers’ firm there. In London he met the famous Scottish author Sir Walter Scott, who encouraged him to continue writing. The result was The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent (1819–20), a collection of stories and essays that mix satire and whimsicality with fact and fiction. *“[A]n American [need not] look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery. But Europe held forth all the charms of storied and poetical association. ...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.”**— W. Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself,”* The SketchbookMost of the book’s 30-odd pieces concern Irving’s impressions of England, but six chapters deal with American subjects. Of these, the tales “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” have been called the first American short stories. They are both Americanized versions of German folktales.Establishing herself as a writer in her hometown, in 1964 she gained recognition for her essay “Notes on Camp.” She published four novels and nine works of non-fiction, and directed four feature-length films. She died in 2004 in New York City. **KEY IDEAS IN ONG’S *ORALITY AND LITERACY***How the psychologies of sight and sound differConsciousness Writing as a technologyLanguage and its influence on self and societyMedia in historyHow knowing the ancient world helps us understand the present and future | WRIT 1506| Stroupe**QUESTIONS**⎯ How does Irving's story toy with the untrustworthiness of representation and narrative? — How is Irving's telling (or "narrative") of this story different from later versions you might be familiar with? — In what ways does Irving's story present an opposition or tension between a modern culture and a traditional one (in some ways parallel to the opposition of literate and oral cultures we studies in Ong)? ***Beneath Irving’s [humor] burned one strong response to life, his sadness or romantic melancholy in the presence of the law of change…. The underlying idea in all of Irving’s best essays is flux…—all declare the brevity of life” (247) ­­− Robert Spiller*****COMMENTARIES ON IRVING**“John Clendenning credits Irving as the "innovator" of a sub-genre he calls "sportive gothic" (92), a form which combines the "mystery and terror common to most gothic tales" with an "ironic sense ... to promote humor and satire" (92). But these pseudo-gothic tales served another purpose too: to debunk the problem of defining the writer's role in an America seemingly bereft of that ostensibly necessary deep past, a history or traditions of its own, from which to draw, or on which to anchor its literary efforts.  — Sheryl Abdoo, “’Before Daybreak’: The Unfinished Quest of Washington Irving’s Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow”Ironically, it was probably not his youthful years among the rural descendants of Dutch settlers in the Hudson River Valley that so shaped his writing, but the romanticism of English writers such as Samuel Coleridge and Walter Scott. Thus, it seems that Irving was not so much influenced by the rich folklore of the Hudson River Valley as the other way around. Inspired by the writings of English and Scottish romantics, Irving infused his native region with ghosts, sprites and spirits…all transplanted, as it were, from the Scottish Highlands by the author. – Patrick Browne |

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Washington Irving

