The Devil and Tom Walker Study Guide

The Devil and Tom Walker by Washington Irving

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Devil and Tom Walker was first published in 1824 as part of Washington Irving's collection of short stories Tales of a Traveller. The story was included in Part IV of the book, also known as the "Money-Diggers" series of stones. Gentleman Geoffrey Crayon, a fictional character created by the author, narrates the tale. He never refers to himself by name, however, but he states that the story has been a legend of the New England area for roughly a hundred years. Though the story has been widely read and enjoyed since its first appearance, the book Tales of a Traveller was poorly received by critics who complained that its writing was weak and unoriginal. The short story was a relatively new form of fiction at the time, and many of its conventions were still being defined by such writers as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne Some critics have given this as a reason for the artistic failure of many of the collection's stones.

Despite this negative reception, the story about an unpleasant man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for wealth is one of the works for which Irving is best remembered. Commonly referred to as a "comic New England Faust," the story bears many similarities to the German folktale of Faust, a man who trades his soul to the devil for a number of things, including love and money. Irving had travelled widely in Germany by the time he wrote "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," and it can be assumed that he was familiar with German Romantic writer Jo-hann Goethe's version of the tale which was published in Goethe's novel Faust. More so than European versions of the tale, Irving instills the tale with the moral ideals common to New England in the early nineteenth century. In an area settled by Quakers and Puritans, religious piety was of utmost importance to citizens, and the lesson of Tom Walker's ruin illustrated the sorrow that would befall unscrupulous sinners. Some have said that the "Devil and Tom Walker" was a well-known folktale in the New England area at the time, and Irving's retelling of it is a straightforward rendition of how he may have heard it from the region's Dutch inhabitants.

Author Biography

Washington Irving is known as one of the first American authors to gain international recognition for his work. He is also a founder of the short story form. His first book, published in 1808, was Salmagundi; or, The Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq., and Others and was comprised of a variety of satiric pieces. His most famous early success was in 1809 with the publication of A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, which is the fictional history of the Knickerbocker family as told by the character of Diedrich Knickerbocker in the days when New York City was a colony of the Netherlands. Although Irving was renowned in his lifetime for his historical and biographical works, it was through his short stories, the most famous being "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," "Rip Van Winkle" and "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," that he most strongly influenced American writing.

He was born April 13, 1783, to William and Sarah Irving, prosperous New York City merchants. He had a relatively basic education, but he loved to read and write. When he was 19 years old, Irving began writing under the name of Jonathan Oldstyle for a newspaper owned by his brother. The young writer loved to travel, and in 1815 he moved to England to work in his family's export business. When the company failed, he began to write full-time. The result of this decision was a compilation of impressions, thoughts, and descriptions of his travels entitled The Sketch Book, which he published under the pseudonym of Geoffrey Crayon. Of the 32 stories in the collection, twenty are about life in England, and four are about America. From this collection came two of Irving's most popular tales, "Rip Van Winkle" and "A Legend of Sleepy Hollow," both of which became immediate classics.

Irving believed that in order for an American writer to become successful, he or she had to imitate the literature of the British. In The Sketch Book and other stories, Irving successfully mixed logic and sentiment along with elements of the natural and supernatural worlds. The book was a great success in both Great Britain and the United States, and the resulting profits enabled Irving to devote himself whole-heartedly to writing.

Irving remained abroad for more than a decade after this initial publishing success. While in Germany, he became enthralled with the country's rich folklore. Spurred by the copious notes he took after long conversations with the people there, he wrote Tales of a Traveller, a book that attempted to gather together various elements of German folk tales. Today, the work is not known as one of Irving's strongest, but it does contain one of his most famous stories, *The Devil and Tom Walker*.

In 1826, Irving traveled to Spain where he spent several years. He studied Spanish and became flu-entin the language. In 1828, his Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus was published, a work of nonfiction in which Irving discusses with particular interest Columbus's conquest of the island of Granada. The following year, Irving was appointed secretary to the American embassy in London. During this time, Irving was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Oxford University in England, proof that he had attained

an exalted status within the British literary community. In 1832, he returned to the United States and travelled as far as Oklahoma, writing about it for people back East. At that time, the West was still undeveloped and Irving's account of the area in A Tour on the Prairies was the first glimpse of the American wilderness that many people had.

In 1836, Irving settled on a small estate he named "Sunnyside" in Tarrytown, New York, close to the village of Sleepy Hollow he had written about in The Sketch Book. For over twenty years he lived there with his extended family while concentrating on his writing, which included a biography of British writer Oliver Goldsmith and a five-volume set on the life of George Washington. On November 28, 1859, shortly after completing his biography of Washington, Irving died and was buried nearby.

Plot Summary

In "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," set in New England in the early 1700s, a narrator relates a story he has heard about a local man's dealings with the devil. The narrator never claims that the stories are true, only that they are widely believed.

According to local legend, a treasure is buried in a dark grove on an inlet outside of Boston. It is said that Kidd the Pirate left it there under a gigantic tree and that the devil himself "presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship." Since the pirate Kidd was hanged, no one has disturbed the treasure or challenged the devil's right to it.

In the year 1727 a local man, the notorious miser Tom Walker, finds himself in the dark grove alone at dusk while taking a short cut back to his house. Tom is well known among the townspeople for his pitiful horse, his loud wife, and the couple's miserly habits in which they "conspired to cheat each other." Unaware that treasure lay nearby, Tom stops to rest against a tree outside the remains of an Indian fort. Despite local legends of the evil goings-on at the site, Tom "was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind."

After absentmindedly digging up an old skull, Tom is suddenly reprimanded by a gruff voice. The voice belongs to a man who is blackened by soot and grime and who introduces himself as the black woodman. Soon enough, Tom realizes that he is in the company of the devil himself. After a brief conversation, "Old Scratch," as Tom calls him, offers Tom the treasure in exchange for a few conditions. He declines. Back home, he tells his wife what transpired in the woods, and she is outraged that he passed up the opportunity for them to gain great wealth in exchange for his soul, She takes it upon herself to seek out the devil and strike a bargain on her own. After several trips to the fort in the woods, she becomes frustrated by the devil's unwillingness to appearto her. One day, she gathers the couple's few possessions of value in her apron and heads off for the woods. She never returns. Eventually, Tom wanders to the woods to find out what happened to her and discovers her apron hanging from a tree. It contains her heart and liver. Hoof-prints and clumps of hair at the base of the tree hint at a fierce struggle. "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!" he remarks. Nevertheless, the next time the devil appears to Tom, he is eager to strike a deal now that he will not have to share anything with his wife.

Balking at the devil's suggestion of becoming a slave-trader, Tom decides that he will become a usurer, or a moneylender, since gaining the treasure is contingent upon being employed in the devil's service. Tom immediately sets up shop in a "counting house" in Boston and attains great wealth by cheating people out of their money and charging them outrageous interest. He builds a luxurious house but refuses to spend money to furnish it properly. He buys an expensive carriage but fails to maintain it, and his horses he only begrudgingly feeds.

When Tom grows old, he begins to worry about the terms of his deal with the devil and suddenly becomes a "violent church-goer" in an effort to cheat the devil out of receiving his soul. He reads the bible obsessively and prays loudly and long in church each week. Among the townspeople, "Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches." Nevertheless, one morning the devil comes calling and instantly whisks Tom away on a black horse in the midst of a thunderstorm to the Indian fort in the woods, never to be seen again. Town officials charged with settling Tom's estate discover his bonds and money reduced to cinders, and soon enough his house burns to the ground as well.

Summary

The story begins near Boston, Massachusetts. The narrator explains that in Charles Bay, near Boston, there is a swampy area that is heavily wooded and wild with several large, old oak trees. A local legend says that the pirate Captain Kidd buried treasure under one of those trees. The narrator explains that this site is elevated from the water and allows a lookout to make sure that no one is approaching the area where the treasure is. Furthermore, the trees are easy to find again and provide good landmarks. The narrator further explains that the devil himself guards the money. The narrator says that the devil always presides over such money, particularly when the money has been gained by stealing or other illegal means. Kidd never returned for this particular stash of money, and he was later sent to England from Boston and hanged as a pirate.

The story takes place in 1727. The narrator explains that there are earthquakes in New England around this time. Tom Walker is a resident of the area and a nasty, miserly person. His wife is also a nasty person. The two even hate one another and try to cheat each other at every opportunity. They hide money from one another, and they fight all the time about money. They live in an ill-kept house. Their land and their trees are all in bad shape, and even their horse is underfed and skinny. The two of them are known to yell at one another and even fight physically from time to time. No one attempts to interfere with them, since they are both so disliked and even feared.

One day, Tom Walker is walking through the swamp near his home on a shortcut from one place to another. The swamp is overgrown and gloomy. Many owls roost there. It is dark even in the middle of the day, and it is treacherous since it is full of pits and marshy land and weeds, often covering pools of mud. There are snakes, frogs and tadpoles all around. Trunks of rotting fallen trees lay all around the swamp. Tom carefully picks his way through this dangerous landscape, stepping carefully from one safe-looking spot to the next, and the birds and other animals make frightening noises around him. Tom comes to a sort of spit of land that runs out into the swamp. Once Indians used this land to hold off the colonists. They put up a rough fort, which has mostly fallen down by now. Most of the remains of the fort are overgrown by weeds and trees.

Tom stops to rest at the old fort. It is becoming darker. Many of the residents consider the place sort of haunted by old Indian spirits. None of this bothers Tom, however. He sits and rests against a tree for a while, absently digging at the black dirt in front of him as he rests. He strikes something hard and digs up a skull that is buried there. It has an Indian tomahawk sticking out of it. As Tom starts to kick the dirt off of it, he hears a gruff voice telling him to leave the skull alone. He looks up and sees a very large, very black man seated right in front of him on a tree stump. Tom is very surprised since he did not hear anyone approach. He is also surprised that the man seems to be neither Black nor Indian. He is dressed sort of like an Indian. He seems to be covered in soot or grime as though he works around fires. He has messy black, unkempt hair and has an axe on his shoulder. He frowns at Tom, and Tom sees that he has huge red eyes. The dark stranger asks Tom what he is doing on his land. Tom retorts that the land is not his, nor does it belong to Deacon Peabody or anyone else.

The stranger informs Tom that he has plans for Deacon Peabody and invites Tom to look over at one of the trees around them. Tom sees Peabody's name on the tree and then notices that most of the trees around have names on them. Peabody has become wealthy by cheating the Indians in various deals. Tom finds that the tree trunk he is seated on has the name of Crowninshield on it. Crowninshield is a man in the area who became wealthy by some other questionable trading activities. The dark man remarks that Crowninshield is just about ready for burning, and that he (the dark man) expects to have a good stock of firewood for winter. Tom questions him as to why he has the right to cut down the Deacon's timber, and the dark man replies that he owned the land long before white men arrived.

Tom asks the man who he is. The man says that he goes by many names. He says he is called the black miner sometimes or the black woodsman. He claims that he is the man to whom the Indians consecrated the spot where they are now. He says the Indians occasionally roasted a white man there in his honor. He also says that since the Indians are now gone, he presides over the persecutions of various religious sects, supports slave-dealers and is the master of the Salem witches. Tom replies that he must then be "Old Scratch," which is another name for the devil. The black man acknowledges that he is Old Scratch.

The narrator then writes that most men, meeting such a character in a wild and lonely place, would be frightened, but Tom is not. The narrator also points out that Tom has lived so long with his nasty wife that he "did not even fear the devil." Tom and the devil spend a long time talking together. The devil tells Tom about the money buried in the swamp by Kidd the pirate. He also tells Tom that all that area, and the money, is under his command and his protection so no one can find the money unless he wants the person to find it. He offers to allow Tom to find the money, but there are conditions on this offer. The narrator explains that Tom has never told what the conditions were, but that most of us can imagine what the devil must have asked for. Tom needs time to think the proposed bargain over, so the narrator concludes that it must have been a difficult decision, since Tom is always so willing to get money any way he can.

At one point, Tom asks the devil for some assurance that what he is offering is real. The devil touches Tom on the forehead, leaving a print, which he refers to as his signature. Then he turns away from Tom and walks off, seeming to be walking down into the ground. He disappears. When Tom gets home, he notices the print on his forehead, and it will not come off no matter what Tom does to try to remove it.

When Tom arrives home, his wife immediately tells him that Crowninshield has died. Tom now feels that what the black man told him must be true. Tom usually does not confide in his wife, but this time he tells her about the black man, since it was such an odd encounter. She immediately wants Tom to go back and do what the black man wants so they can get the gold. Even though Tom has considered selling his soul to the devil, he has resisted doing so to spite his wife. Finally, she decides to make the deal herself and keep all the money herself. She, like her husband, is not afraid of the usual things, so she sets off for the old Indian fort. She is gone a long time and is in a sour mood when she returns. She mentions meeting a black man who would not make a

deal with her. She is to go back again with a kind of offering for the black man, but she will not say what the offering is.

She leaves again the next evening for the swamp. She is carrying many items in her apron. Tom waits for her return, but midnight comes and goes. All the next day, she does not return. Tom becomes uneasy, especially when he finds that she has carried off their silver in her apron as well as every other valuable item they had. Another day and night pass, and she still does not come home. A number of stories begin circulating in the community about what might have happened to her. It is also said that a great black man has been seen in the area with a bundle tied in a checked apron.

Tom starts to look for his wife and his property. He looks for them both at the Indian fort. He calls for her, but only various animals respond with their calls. He finally notices his wife's apron hung in a tree. It seems to have something tied into it. A vulture is near the bundle in the tree. Tom is very pleased and says to himself that he can easily do without his wife if he gets his property back. He climbs the tree. The vulture goes screaming off into the forest. Tom finds only a heart and liver in the apron. The narrator explains that this is all that has been found of Tom's wife. He further surmises that she must have attempted to bully the devil as she did her husband, but it didn't work. Tom notices tufts of what appear to be the black hair of the devil in the area, as well as prints of cloven feet. He surmises that his wife put up quite a fight. Tom actually thinks the devil has done him a favor, and he wants to befriend the devil.

The devil does not show up again for a good while, even though Tom wants to see him. Finally, Tom meets the black man again, walking along with his axe on his shoulder. They begin to haggle about how Tom can get his hands on the pirate treasure. Tom realizes that the devil wants his soul, so they do not discuss that. There are other conditions about which the devil is also somewhat obstinate. He says that the money Tom receives through this means should be used in the devil's service and suggests that Tom should become a slaver. Tom refuses, however. The devil suggests that Tom become a moneylender, because the devil considers moneylenders to be his kind of people. This particular line of work appeals to Tom, so he does not object.

The black man tells Tom he will be opening a "broker's shop" in Boston next month, and Tom volunteers to do it the next day. The devil says that Tom should lend money at 2% interest, and Tom volunteers to lend it at 4% if the devil desires. The devil further says that Tom should "extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchants to bankruptcy." Tom interrupts him, saying he will drive all these unfortunate debtors to the devil as well. The devil is very pleased, and they strike a deal. In a few days, Tom is set up in business in Boston.

In these times, much business and financial speculation is going on, and Tom lends a great deal of money for a variety of shaky schemes. Once the investments collapse, Tom has many customers who are not able to repay their debts. Tom's terms are hard, however, and he accumulates a lot of wealth and property by calling his loans due and taking possession of the assets of his customers. Tom becomes a rich and mighty man. He builds a large house. His miserly ways surface once again, and he does not properly

furnish the house or even completely finish it. He has a large carriage, but he nearly starves the horses he keeps to pull it. He doesn't even oil the wheels of the carriage, and they squeal loudly.

As Tom ages, he begins to worry about his bargain with the devil. He tries to think of a way to get out of the bargain. He becomes a loud and ostentatious churchgoer. He prays long and loud and criticizes his neighbors for not being as "holy" as he is. He seems to think that all their sins make him all the more righteous. Even with all these efforts, Tom feels that the devil will still win out. Tom always carries a Bible with him. He also has a large Bible in his office, and he is often found reading it when customers come to see him. He marks his place in the Bible and proceeds to drive a hard and unfair bargain with his customers.

Some say that Tom is becoming odd in his old age. He even has his horse newly saddled and has new shoes put on him. Then, he has the horse buried with his feet up. Tom supposes that on the last day of the world, the world will be turned upside down, and he wants his horse ready for him. He plans to run from the devil. The narrator comments that this story is probably an old wives' tale. Still, the narrator says that a particular event involving Tom really did happen. This is on a very hot summer afternoon. Tom is sitting in his counting house (money office) in his nightgown. He is about to foreclose on some poor family's mortgage, even though the family has begged for an extension of time. They have words, and Tom refuses, saying, "The devil take me if I have made a farthing!" Just then, there is a loud knock on the door. When Tom opens the door, the black man stands there with a black horse that is stomping and seems quite impatient to be off.

The devil announces that he is there to take Tom. Tom tries to move away, but he has left his Bibles elsewhere. The black man puts him in the saddle, and they gallop away in the middle of a thunderstorm. People stare at him from their windows. They see his white nightgown and cap and his horse seems to produce fire when its hooves hit the pavement. The black man disappears. Tom never returns. A man who lives at the edge of the swamp says he heard the horse's hooves and a great howling. Then there was a bold of lightening in the swamp, which seems to have set the trees on fire.

Tom's neighbors in Boston are accustomed to witches and goblins and other supernatural sights, so they are not particularly disturbed by this event. Trustees are appointed to handle Tom's affairs and property. They search his rooms and office, but all his deeds and money are burned up. Only ashes are left. Tom's gold and silver has turned to wood chips in his chests. Even his horses have turned to skeletons in his stable. The very next day, his house burns to the ground.

The narrator explains that this was the end of Tom Walker and all the wealth he accumulated by cheating and abusing others. The narrator says that all such money brokers should take notice of what happened to Tom. The very hole under the tree in the swamp can still be seen today, and the old Indian fort is haunted by a figure in a white nightgown and cap on a fast horse. The narrator explains that this story has actually

become a proverb and is the origin of the saying, "The Devil and Tom Walker," which is common in New England.

The narrator further explains that this is the end of the story. The narrator and a companion, who tells him the story, are out fishing during the telling of this tale. It is hot, and they decide to come ashore and rest under the trees until the heat subsides. They land in an area familiar to the narrator. It is a place where he played as a child and is near the vault of an old Dutch family. This vault is built into the side of a bank and was fascinating to the children in the area when the narrator was growing up. The narrator says that he and his childhood friends once saw a coffin and bones in the vault. They associated these relics with the pirate wreck that is rotting away in another coastal area called Hell's Gate. There are also local tales and legends that this area was once the property of a very wealthy man who was reputed to have had shady dealings with people outside their area. The narrator explains that all these childhood legends sort of melded together in the minds and imaginations of he and his boyhood friends.

While the narrator is thinking about all this, his companions are enjoying a meal, and all of them lay on the rich grass in the area. The narrator tells his companions of his childhood memories about the surrounding area. When he is finished, one of his companions, John Josse Vandermoere, says he remembers a story about the same area. He says the stories he heard about treasure hunting might account for some of the stories that the narrator heard in his boyhood. The narrator and his friends then listen to the story Vandermoere has to tell, and this tale becomes the next of Washington Irving's tales, called "Wolfert Webber, Or Golden Dreams."

Analysis

The location of the story is New England, an area with a history of tales of witches and evil spirits. The location where Tom Walker meets the devil is particularly grim, dark, dank and overgrown. It also has large trees, and those trees are supposedly landmarks used by Captain Kidd, a pirate who hid treasure there. Captain Kidd, another nasty person, is also associated with this ugly and uninviting location. The narrator explains that stolen money is hidden in this location, and such locations are known to be presided over by the devil himself. Indians are rumored to have lived there and murdered white settlers. Again, the location is painted as ugly, treacherous and even evil.

Tom Walker, a greedy and miserly person, is the main character in the story. Tom is offered riches by the devil, but at first he balks and says he needs to think the offer over. Tom is known to be unwilling to share anything at all with his wife, an equally awful person. He is greedy himself, but it seems that he is unwilling to gain the riches the devil promises if he has to share it with his wife. Tom and his wife are described as not only miserly, but wicked. Their home is not kept well, and even their animals are ill-fed and abused. Others generally dislike and even fear Tom and his wife. They are painted as evil people in this story.

Tom is so used to his awful wife and his mean existence that meeting devil himself does not alarm Tom. The devil shows Tom various fallen trees in the swamp. They are marked with names of people who are doomed and are in league with the devil. These men have cheated others and have engaged in other dishonest dealings. Tom, who trusts no one, asks the devil for assurance that what he has offered (great wealth) is real. The devil puts a fingerprint on Tom's head to prove whom he is and that the deal is real. Tom goes home to think about the offer.

When Tom tells his wife about the devil's offer to give him riches in exchange for his soul, she insists he take the deal. She and Tom have never agreed upon anything, and they argue about this, too. She sets off to confront the devil herself, and she takes something with her concealed in her apron. Tom realizes she has taken every possession of value in their home hidden in her apron to attempt to bargain with the devil. She does not return. After several days, Tom looks for her and finds her apron hanging in a tree with her liver and heart inside. He actually had gone looking for the possessions she took from the house in her apron more than for her, his own wife. In other words, he is not concerned about her. He is only concerned about his possessions.

Tom finds evidence that the devil fought with his wife in the swamp. Rather than mourn his wife's apparent murder, he is pleased to find her liver and heart hanging in her apron in a tree. Now that she is dead, he is willing to talk to the devil, who Tom considers has done him a favor. Tom's greediness is so powerful that he is now willing to bargain with the devil, since he will not have to share any resulting riches with his wife. His reaction seems to be just the opposite of what good people would do! He does not mourn his wife, but he is pleased by her murder. He does not avoid her killer, but he seeks him out instead.

The devil is somewhat difficult for Tom to locate. When they do meet again, they discuss how Tom will work for the devil and how he will become wealthy in the devil's service. Strangely, Tom refuses the first offer the devil makes, which is to become a slaver. Tom is willing to do all kinds of awful things, so it seems hypocritical that he should balk at being a slaver. The devil has another idea, and je offers Tom the opportunity to be a moneylender. Tom gladly and enthusiastically embraces this new career. Soon, he is cheating his customers and routinely foreclosing on properties. He is dishonest and as greedy as ever. Although he becomes wealthy in this role, he still does not take proper care of his animals or even of his house and wagon. Tom embodies all that is evil, and the story is indicting moneylenders as evil.

Tom, as he gets older and nearer to the end of his life, begins to worry about his deal with the devil. He starts to go to church and to loudly decry anyone else he regards as a sinner. He keeps a Bible with him at all times, too. Tom, of course, continues to be a moneylender, even though he loudly proclaims his "goodness." He is just as miserly and evil as ever, but he professes to be otherwise. Religion does nothing to help Tom. He is not really sorry or contrite. He only wants to save himself, and he lacks any human kindness or goodness. His continuing hypocrisy turns out to be his downfall. He is talking to a customer who he is just about to foreclose on. He is pretending that he does

not make money on such deals, and he says, "The devil take me if I have made a farthing!" The devil immediately comes to take Tom away. Tom tries to avoid his fate, but the devil takes him. The neighbors hear screaming and horses' hooves moving off into the night. Tom is gone.

When others step in to take care of Tom's affairs and handle his property, a strange thing happens. Anything that Tom has gained in his evil life is destroyed. His house burns down. His poor horses drop dead and instantly become skeletons. When the trustees look in his chests of money, the money has turned to ashes, and his gold and silver coins have turned to wood chips. The narrator of the story cautions that others who live evil lives like Tom's will surely come to the same kind of fate. That is, others who are as evil and corrupt as Tom will be taken by the devil regardless of their pretence at reform. This story is a horrific story and also a cautionary tale against greed and hypocrisy.

Both Tom and his wife are miserly, evil and unkind people. They both are willing to bargain with the devil, and apparently they have no qualms about doing so. Their miserly behavior even extends to taking care of their own home, property and the animals they need to work the land and for transportation. They are at odds not only with others around them, but also even with one another. The devil apparently kills Tom's awful wife and then later kills Tom, too, once his usefulness to the devil has passed. This story emphasizes the folly of Tom's evil ways and the idea that the devil will lay claim to those who bargain with him. The devil takes the people represented by the fallen trees, Tom's wife and with Tom himself, even though Tom tries to cheat the devil out of his bargain in the end.

Analysis

The location of the story is New England, an area with a history of tales of witches and evil spirits. The location where Tom Walker meets the devil is particularly grim, dark, dank and overgrown. It also has large trees, and those trees are supposedly landmarks used by Captain Kidd, a pirate who hid treasure there. Captain Kidd, another nasty person, is also associated with this ugly and uninviting location. The narrator explains that stolen money is hidden in this location, and such locations are known to be presided over by the devil himself. Indians are rumored to have lived there and murdered white settlers. Again, the location is painted as ugly, treacherous and even evil.

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wife, but he is pleased by her murder. He does not avoid her killer, but he seeks him out instead.

The devil is somewhat difficult for Tom to locate. When they do meet again, they discuss how Tom will work for the devil and how he will become wealthy in the devil's service. Strangely, Tom refuses the first offer the devil makes, which is to become a slaver. Tom is willing to do all kinds of awful things, so it seems hypocritical that he should balk at being a slaver. The devil has another idea, and je offers Tom the opportunity to be a moneylender. Tom gladly and enthusiastically embraces this new career. Soon, he is cheating his customers and routinely foreclosing on properties. He is dishonest and as greedy as ever. Although he becomes wealthy in this role, he still does not take proper care of his animals or even of his house and wagon. Tom embodies all that is evil, and the story is indicting moneylenders as evil.

Tom, as he gets older and nearer to the end of his life, begins to worry about his deal with the devil. He starts to go to church and to loudly decry anyone else he regards as a sinner. He keeps a Bible with him at all times, too. Tom, of course, continues to be a moneylender, even though he loudly proclaims his "goodness." He is just as miserly and evil as ever, but he professes to be otherwise. Religion does nothing to help Tom. He is not really sorry or contrite. He only wants to save himself, and he lacks any human kindness or goodness. His continuing hypocrisy turns out to be his downfall. He is talking to a customer who he is just about to foreclose on. He is pretending that he does not make money on such deals, and he says, "The devil take me if I have made a farthing!" The devil immediately comes to take Tom away. Tom tries to avoid his fate, but the devil takes him. The neighbors hear screaming and horses' hooves moving off into the night. Tom is gone.

When others step in to take care of Tom's affairs and handle his property, a strange thing happens. Anything that Tom has gained in his evil life is destroyed. His house burns down. His poor horses drop dead and instantly become skeletons. When the trustees look in his chests of money, the money has turned to ashes, and his gold and silver coins have turned to wood chips. The narrator of the story cautions that others who live evil lives like Tom's will surely come to the same kind of fate. That is, others who are as evil and corrupt as Tom will be taken by the devil regardless of their pretence at reform. This story is a horrific story and also a cautionary tale against greed and hypocrisy.

Both Tom and his wife are miserly, evil and unkind people. They both are willing to bargain with the devil, and apparently they have no qualms about doing so. Their miserly behavior even extends to taking care of their own home, property and the animals they need to work the land and for transportation. They are at odds not only with others around them, but also even with one another. The devil apparently kills Tom's awful wife and then later kills Tom, too, once his usefulness to the devil has passed. This story emphasizes the folly of Tom's evil ways and the idea that the devil will lay claim to those who bargain with him. The devil takes the people represented by the fallen trees, Tom's wife and with Tom himself, even though Tom tries to cheat the devil out of his bargain in the end.

Characters

The Devil

See Old Scratch

Old Scratch

Old Scratch is the guise for the Devil, who appears in "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" as a dark-skinned man. Readers are told, however, that he is neither Indian (Native American) nor white. He has deep red eyes, wears a red sash, and carries his axe on his shoulder. He is the one who tempts Tom Walker with the proposition of wealth and who ultimately condemns him to ride a horse through the swamp where they made their bargain. The Devil's actions are similar to those he exhibits in other stories in which he is a featured character. In the Faust legend, as retold by Johann Goethe from German folklore, the Devil also strikes a deal with a man who desires wealth. It is the Devil's usual place in literature to tempt other characters, often by providing some hapless character a deal "too good to refuse " In "The Devil and Daniel Webster," written by Stephen Vincent Benet almost a century after Irving's story, a farmer who is down on his luck sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for seven years' prosperity. In Benet's tale, the Devil is also known as Scratch. In "Tom Walker," Old Scratch personifies temptation, which has existed ostensibly since the Garden of Eden, providing a colorful and dramatic way to present a character's conflict between choosing good and evil.

Tom Walker

Tom Walker is considered one of Washington Irving's least likeable characters. As described by Geoffrey Crayon, he is eccentric and miserly. The only thing that initially prevents him from striking a deal with Old Scratch (also known as the Devil) is his loathing for his wife. Walker states that he might have felt compelled to sell his soul to the Devil if it would not have pleased his wife so much. After confiding to his wife that Old Scratch would help him become rich beyond his wildest dreams, he decides against this partnership because Old Scratch wanted Tom to become a slave-trader. After his wife disappears and he finds her liver and heart wrapped up in her apron, Tom gives in to Old Scratch and accepts a job not as a slave-trader, but as a usurer, someone who lends money at outrageous interest rates. He becomes quite successful. He is still blunt, brusque, and unforgiving. His newfound wealth has not changed his basic attitudes, he still treats everyone with disrespect.

When Old Scratch approaches Walker to collect on his own promise, Walker realizes that he must pay up and be responsible for his own promissory note. Only then does Walker become pious and churchgoing to prove to the Devil that he has seen the light. Unfortunately, his religious conversion has not helped him one bit because he is critical of everyone in the church, quick to judge them, and refuses to see the error of his ways.

But Walker has achieved his wealth through greed, and as a result he becomes a prisoner of his own doing.

Tom Walker is considered the "New England Faust" by some critics, a reference to the tale of soul-selling Faust by the German writer Johann Goethe. The primary difference between the two tales, however, was that Walker craved only money, whereas Faust craved a number of things, including love. At the time Irving wrote the story he was living in Germany and had become enthralled with folktales of the region, particularly with the Faust legend. Some critics have suggested that if "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is interpreted as an allegory, then the character of Tom Walker represents the evolving business ethic of the young, industrial United States.

Tom's Wife

Tom's wife is a tall "termagant" woman, one who is fierce of temper, loud of tongue and strong of arm. She is as equally miserly as her husband, and they both plan ways to cheat each other. She has a minor role in the story, but her death sets the action in motion. When she finds out that her husband has declined the offer from Old Scratch, she takes it upon herself to go into the forest and bargain on her own behalf. The only time Tom ever confides in his wife is when he tells her of the deal set forth by Old Scratch and how he turned it down. Her greedy side overcomes her and they quarrel constantly about it. But, "the more she talked, the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her." She ventures out to the swamp to bargain with Old Scratch and when she doesn't return, Tom goes in search of her. When he finds her heart and liver wrapped up in her apron, he suddenly feels liberated and immediately goes off to bargain with the Devil. Her greedy ways helped aid Tom in his decision to go back and visit Old Scratch; however, this time he is going of his own free will. In a way, Mrs. Walker helped him to keep his distance from the Devil because of her constant nagging and his need to go against her wishes.

Themes

Greed

Greed is one of the most important themes of " "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" Tom is approached by Old Scratch and offered wealth beyond his wildest dreams. Initially, Tom is so greedy that he declines because he would have to share the fortune with his wife. Eventually, however, Tom is duped by the false kindness of Old Scratch and blinded by his own greed. As Irving writes, Tom "was not a man to stick at trifles when money was in view." Once established as a moneylender in Boston, Tom is described ironically as a "universal friend of the needy," even though "In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms." Though he becomes wealthy, Tom still remains parsimonious: he refuses to furnish his mansion or feed his horses properly. Still, he denies his greed. When accused by a customer of taking advantage of his misfortune, Tom answers "The devil take me if I have made a farthing!" Of course, immediately Old Scratch appears at the door. Irving's moral is clear: "Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill-gotten wealth, Let all griping money-brokers lay this story to heart."

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is evident throughout "*The Devil and Tom Walker*." When agreeing to the terms of the deal, Tom refuses to become a slave-trade because he claims to have a conscience. Yet has no problem becoming a moneylender who will profit by impoverishing others through unscrupulous business practices. In a further example of hypocrisy, Tom insists on keeping his deals with customers, which drive them to ruin, but then he conspires to cheat the devil on the terms of their own deal. Thus, his public display of religious fervor has nothing to do with his belief in God but is rather an attempt to save himself from hell. In his final moment of hypocrisy, Tom denies that he has made a penny from an "unlucky land-speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship." When the devil comes knocking, Irving makes it clear that Tom's hypocrisy has caught up with him.

Moral Corruption

Though Tom Walker is presented as an individual who has always been morally corrupt, the action of "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" presents how moral corruption breeds more moral corruption, escalating to the greatest corruption of all, a pact with the devil. Described at the beginning of the story as a "meagre, miserly fellow," Tom's "house and its inmates had altogether a bad name." For one with few morals, becoming a corrupt moneylender presents no crises of character. In acquiring great wealth, Tom feels that the ends justify the means. Selling his soul to the devil presents a crisis to Tom only when he pauses to consider the afterlife. His conversion to religion, made specifically

for the sake of his own personal interest rather than his faith in God, is a further act of moral corruption. Nevertheless, Tom cannot escape his fate, and Irving makes it clear the consequences of such "ill-gotten wealth." Though the narrator refers to the tale as a "story," he also states that "the truth of it is not to be doubted."

Style

Point of View

This story is narrated by Geoffrey Crayon, a fictional character created by Irving who appears in a number of the author's works. The story's status of "legend" or"tall tale" is enhanced by Crayon's comments and the fact that he places the year it takes place, 1727, nearly a hundred years before the date he is writing Tales of a Traveller. Crayon refers to the rumors of treasure near Boston as "old stories" and states that the fate of Tom's wife "is one of those facts which have become confounded by a variety of historians." Through this secondhand narration, Irving shows that the tale has a long, local history, a primary characteristic of a folktale. Furthermore, the narrator states that "the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is the origin of that popular saying, so prevalent in New England, of '*The Devil and Tom Walker*.'" Such first-person narration adds to the feeling the reader has of being told a story in the oral tradition, the way most folktales are handed down from generation to generation.

Allegory

Many folktales are allegories. In an allegory, characters and actions are symbolic of larger conditions of human nature. In "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," the character of Old Scratch personifies evil or temptation. The murky woods full of quagmires in which Tom meets the devil are symbolic of his conscience, which, clouded by his greed, falls easily to the devil's temptation. Tom Walker, an unscrupulous moneylender, makes a pact with the devil and only later professes religious beliefs. Through these actions, Tom represents religious hypocrisy, which Irving shows will be punished.

Setting

Irving sought to spearhead the establishment of literature that was uniquely American, To that end, he set "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" in the New England area near Boston. In the early eighteenth century, this was one of the largest and most-established metropolitan areas in the growing United States. Irving describes the landscape of bluffs and swamps that were familiar to the area's inhabitants and made the site of Tom's meeting with the devil an old Indian fort that had been a stronghold during a war with the Europeans, providing a further uniquely American context. Furthermore, the New England setting highlights Irving's interest in Tom's morality. The region was populated by Puritans, Quakers, and Anabaptists, all strict Christian orders that were highly concerned with church members' moral consciousness. The murky morass in which Tom meets Old Scratch is also symbolic of Tom's character. Through this setting, Irving suggests that if one's heart is full of mud and quicksand, one is likely to encounter and succumb to temptation.

Historical Context

At the time Irving wrote "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" in 1824, the United States was a new and growing country. As the land was populated by various groups of European immigrants, a uniquely American culture slowly formed as the traditions of many different groups merged and new traditions, brought on by circumstances, emerged. In literature, writers such as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, and Ralph Waldo Emerson published works that embodied the concepts of freedom, religious piety, and independence that characterized the country. By 1800, New York City was the largest city in the United States, but most of the West remained wild and unexplored. In 1826 the American Temperance Society was founded, giving a voice to those who were intolerant of alcohol consumption of any sort. In 1828, Andrew Jackson, a man known for his efforts to displace many Native American tribes, causing their widespread starvation and death, was elected president. New arrivals to the country, however, were uplifted by America's perceived spirit of Romanticism and humanitarianism. Irving embraced this feeling of Romanticism in his fiction, writing long descriptive passages about landscapes and relating the stories of hardworking immigrants who carved out a good living for their families. In the North, these ideas came to include the belief that slavery was immoral, and tension between the North and South over this and other issues began to rise. Much of the literature of this period, like the novels by James Fenimore Cooper, were romantic tales of the adventures of common men, often concluding with strong morals outlining Puritan ideals of good and evil. "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," in which Tom Walker, a corrupt individual who gets his comeuppance at the hands of the devil, typifies literature of this era.

Critical Overview

Though the "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" has become one of Irving's most famous stories, it received a lackluster response when it was published in Tales of a Traveller in 1824. Darrel Abel remarks in American Literature: Colonial and Early National Writing that this collection of Irving's stories was "one of his poorest.... a batch of hackwork pieced together" in an attempt to use "the German materials he had been accumulating." One of the onginal reviews, quotes Abel, attacked Irving personally, calling him "indisputably feeble, unoriginal and timorous." Irving was hurt by these accusations, particularly because they came from British writers, for whom he had great esteem and whose style he had tried to emulate. In retrospect, Eugene Current-Garcia says in Studies in Short Fiction that the story "foreshadows the best of Hawthorne's fictional exposure of Yankee shrewdness and Puritan hypocrisy." Current-Garcia also credits Irving for helping to develop the genre of the short story: "If he did not actually invent the short story, he had indeed set the pattern for the artistic recreation of common experience in short fictional form." By the mid-twentieth century, with the critics' adverse reaction to Tales of a Travellerlong faded, opinion had solidly changed in Irving's favor. William Hedges wrote in Washington Irving: An American Study 1802-1832 that "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is one of Irving's best works.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton is an educator and the coordinator of the undergraduate writing center at the University of Texas at Austin. In the following essay, she discusses the conventions of the narrative sketch as practiced by Washington Irving in "The Devil and Tom Walker."

Irving's career and work is best understood in the context of the enormous cultural and ideological changes transforming the new nation at the time. By the 1820s, the United States had concluded its second war with Britain, Lewis and Clark had already explored the West, and the population grew from a little over five million to nine-and-a-half million in the years 1800-1820. Still, 97 percent of Americans lived in rural communities. The country was poised for great change: By 1850 the population reached 21 million and the proportion of urban dwellers increased sharply. During these turbulent years, inventions that spurred industrial growth, like the steamboat, the cotton gin, the telegraph, and eventually the railroad, dramatically shaped Americans' sense of themselves.

Irving was not an unqualified believer in the popular notions of progress and expansion. He consciously chose British literary models and spent most of his life living outside of the United States because he believed that the only hope for American culture was to attach itself to the traditions of Britain. Tales of a Traveller was written and published in England, where Irving enjoyed a large audience and had cultivated a reputation for charm and civility. His literary depictions of the New World tend to find value in times past when American culture was more closely tied to the values of the Old World. One of the reasons that Irving had such a large readership was that his writing harkened back to an older time, before materialism and commercialism became leading forces in the newly emerging American society. Nevertheless, as many readers of "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" are well aware, Irving's fictional America is hardly a new Eden, unspoiled and uncorrupt. Rather, the fictional landscape of the "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" seems haunted by events of the past and infused by Irving's occasionally biting satire.

"*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is written in the genre that Irving practically invented—the fictional sketch. One of his innovations was the fictional narrator, in this case Geoffrey Crayon, who views events and reports local legends with good-natured skepticism. The device of the narrator serves several purposes for Irving. First, it allows him to distance himself from his readers. Many critics suggest that he started to rely on this mechanism when he sensed that his reading public was dwindling. Second, the intervention of Crayon permits Irving to tell fantastic stories without having to attest to their truth. According to Donald Rmge in his essay "Irving's Use of the Gothic Mode," this device allowed Irving, a man who subscribed to the dominant realistic philosophies of the day, to present "ghosts and goblins as actual beings" without having to explain them as natural phenomena. As readers, by extension, we do not have to believe that Tom Walker actually consorted with the devil, only that the legend says he did.

Irving's use of these gothic themes within the framework of the fictional sketch raises another issue, however. Irving's satirical purposes makes less important the question

whether the devil, the pirate Kidd, or the treasure are real. In an allegory like "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" the fantastic elements are "real" in the sense that they represent something else. The comedy of satire works because of the different ways readers can interpret the story. For example, Irving and his ideal readers— those in on the joke—get to poke fun at the fictional audience for this story, those who actually believe that Tom Walker met the devil in the woods, made a deal with him, and later was carried off to his fate in a carriage driven by black horses. The narrator is a kind of intermediary between audiences, sometimes gullible ("Such, according to this most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife") and sometimes judgmental ("Like most short cuts, it was an ill-chosen route").

By setting the story in New England, Irving is invoking the young country's colonial past. The description of the dark forest with its dark history of an Indian massacre hardly portrays a people proudly connected to their own noble heritage. Instead, Irving seems to suggest that this is a community content to bury and forget old atrocities, and, more broadly, that the nation eager to bury its own history is doomed to be haunted by it. The woods in this tale also invoke the Puritan's sense that the wilderness is the habitat of all sorts of evil. Readers will recognize the similarity to the dark wood of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," for example. Tom's short cut is, of course, a quicker route through the woods, but it also represents what Irving sees as the American tendency toward quick fixes and quick profits.

Irving's allegory in "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is very broadly drawn. In fact, many readers agree with Mary Weatherspoon Bowden in her book Washington Irving when she says that "occasionally [his] allegory gets in the way of the story." The example that Bowden points out is that neither the pirate Kidd nor the treasure, not having any allegorical work to do, ever reappear after the first paragraph. After the pirate and the treasure are dispensed with, however, what remains is a stinging indictment of what Irving believes to be the state of economics and politics in the United States.

Source: Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton, for Short Stories for Students, Gale Research, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Zug talks about the aspects of common folklore that Irving incorporated into "The Devil and Tom Walker," particularly those he gathered in his travels to Germany.

Although it is unquestionably one of Washington Irving's finest tales, "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" has never attracted much critical attention. First published in 1824 in Part IV of Tales of a Traveller, the tale recounts the fate of an avaricious New Englander, who sells his soul to the Devil in return for Captain Kidd's treasure, and is finally carted off to Hell after a long and profitable career as a usurer in colonial Boston. For the most part, critics have been content to note that the tale is "a sort of comic New England Faust," or that it "is redolent of the American soil." In other words, the consensus is that the tale has certain Germanic overtones but is indigenous to the young American republic in which Irving grew up. No one, however, has really attempted to examine the possible sources for this work or note the complex manner in which Irving has interwoven numerous motifs from American and German folklore....

At the outset, it is significant that no source has ever been discovered for "*The Devil and Tom Walker*." Most commonly, critics cite the Faust theme as the basis for the tale, but this is rather inaccurate, for Tom Walker is in no sense a scholar who desires to extend the limits of human knowledge. In actuality, it is not the Faust theme but the well-known motif M211, Man sells soul to devil, that lies at the heart of the tale. This, however, is only one of numerous folk motifs used, and taken by itself, it provides little insight into the source or structure of the tale. The problem here is that unlike "Rip Van Winkle," which is largely patterned on a complete tale, "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is based on a series of folk motifs gathered by Irving from a wide variety of sources. It is important at this point to understand the exact distinction between a tale and a motif. The former is a complete and independent narrative which consists of one or more motifs traditionally associated with each other, while the latter is "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition." Generally, motifs fall into one of three categories: "the actors in a tale," "items in the background of the action," and most commonly, "single incidents." AUhough based on folklore like "*Rip Van Winkle*," "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is thus a much more complex and original work, for instead of starting with a fully developed plot, Irving began with a series of plot elements and fused them into a new and harmonious whole. That he was highly skilled in assembling these traditional motifs is evidenced by the number of critics who have accepted "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" as a rewritten version of a folktale that he had heard or read.

To fully understand Irving's increasingly sophisticated use of folklore, it is necessary to briefly consider some of Irving's activities between the publication of The Sketchbook in 1819 and the writing of "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" in 1824. The key event here appears to have been the yearlong tour through Germany in 1822 and 1823. Prior to this journey, Irving had shown an increasing interest in German lore and literature, and had been encouraged by Sir Walter Scott "to study the fascinating history of folklore." However, Irving's contact with German folklore at this time was limited to the few works

over which he struggled to learn the German language and a number of English publications which were "Translated or adapted from the popular literature of Germany." The trip to Germany in 1822 gave Irving a new opportunity: a chance to investigate and gather up German folklore at first-hand. As he wrote to Thomas Storrow at the beginning of the tour, "I mean to get into the confidence of every old woman I meet with in Germany and get from her, her wonderful budget of stories." In other words, Irving was out to collect folklore in its purest state, directly from oral transmission. Stanley Williams notes this shift in Irving's attitude, commenting that "he now formed a resolution that folklore should not merely entertain the knight-errant but should earn his lordship's bread and butter. He would really follow that impulse felt at Abbotsford in 1817 and create his volume of German legends. The tour now became a hunt for gnomes, pixies, and phantom armies; and he extended the journal into a saving bank for diis species of coin." That the hunt was clearly successful is revealed by the numerous legends and scraps of lore that may be found in the letters and journals written during the German tour. At Salzburg, for example, Irving noted that "the mountain regions are full of fable and elfin story, and I had some wonderful tales told me." In his journal, he even wrote out seven local legends from this region, all of them concerned with the imposing figure of Untersberg Mountain. Walter Reichart points out that none of these legends appears to have a literary source, "so that it seems likely that Irving actually heard them from some of the inhabitants." Since Irving had little time or ability for reading German during his travels, this conclusion is almost inescapable. In addition, the letters and journals abound with fragments of and brief references to well-known tales and motifs, such as "the Emperor and his army shut up in the enchanted mountain" and "the Black Huntsman and the enchanted Bullets." Altogether, it appears that Irving rapidly enlarged his working knowledge of German folklore, and there are numerous entries indicating that he also enjoyed retelling die tales to his friends. The German experience thus served not only to increase his "savings bank" of potential source materials, but more important, to teach him the technique of combining and recombimng diese materials so as to form new tales. It is exactly this shift in emphasis, from written to oral sources, from the tale to the motif, and from the mere materials to the actual mechanics of folklore, that is reflected in "*The Devil and Tom Walker*." As such, this tale suggests that a re-evaluation of Irving's later use of folklore is very much needed. As the following analysis reveals, Irving's use of folklore after his German tour was somewhat less "slavish" than most critics have been willing to admit....

In conjunction with the prevalence of German motifs, it is important to note that practically the entire plot is made up of elements from folklore. In fact the only nontraditional portions of the plot are the two sections which I have labeled the domestic and financial subplots. The tale opens with three American motifs built around the legend of Captain Kidd. Immediately following is the domestic subplot, which is reminiscent of the marital situation in "Rip Van Winkle" and serves to develop the mutual enmity between Tom and his wife. Merely to infuriate her, Tom obstinately refuses to close his pact with the Devil. She, therefore, runs off with the family silverware to make her own bargain, and is apparently carried off by the Devil after an heroic struggle. After this humorous interlude, Irving immediately returns to the main plot of folk motifs, and it is not until after the pact is actually completed that he inserts the financial subplot. This section describes the state of affairs in colonial Boston, neatly delineating the avarice

and religious hypocrisy of the inhabitants. With the uttering of the oath, Irving again returns to the main plot, and the tale moves swiftly to a close. Taken as a whole, the plot thus consists of a central chain of folk motifs into which two realistic subplots have been inserted....

Irving' s choice of the Kidd legends as a framework for "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" was a good one, for it placed the tale in a distinctly American setting. Willard Hallam Bonner, who has made an extensive study of Kidd, notes that "the composite legend surrounding him is Saxon North America's first full-bodied legend." However, this legend is a limited one, in that it generally contains only a few, often recurring motifs. There is first a widespread belief that Kidd did bury his treasure, either along the southern New England coast or up the Hudson River. In addition, there is the belief diat the treasure is guarded either by a slain sailor or worse, by "the Earl of Hell himself, at whose command Kidd 'buried his Bible in the sand,'" As noted in die earlier plot outline, Irving used these American motifs at the beginning of the tale, although he shifted the place of burial to the Boston region. With the introduction of the domestic subplot, which follows immediately, Irving moved away from the Kidd legends and began using German motifs which concerned the Devil. Apparently it was the Kidd stories heard from Colonel Aspinwall that gave Irving the initial inspiration and got the tale underway. Once started, Irving inserted the two realistic subplots and used the figure of the Devil, first mentioned in the American legend, as the means of transition to the numerous German materials....

Irving certainly never intended "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" to be taken as a folktale. His purpose was to produce an entertaining, fast-moving story based largely on German folk motifs and firmly rooted in an American locale. In this he was eminently successful, and "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" deserves to be ranked with "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as one of his best tales. Stanley Williams has pointed out that the major flaw in Tales of a Traveller was Irving's failure "to draw bravely from that wonderful stock of German legend in his notebooks and in his mind." While this analysis is true for most of these tales, it is clearly not applicable to "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," where the carefully assembled chain of German motifs provides the backbone for a unique and vigorous plot structure. Still a second valid criticism of the Tales of a Traveller is that Irving did not succeed "in transplanting German legends into American settings where the native landscape could reflect the spirit of the tale." Once again, "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" proves the exception, for Irving skillfully introduced the German materials through the use of the native Kidd legends, using the figure of the Devil as the unifying force for all of the motifs. By adding the two realistic subplots, a few brief character sketches, and some local history and legend, Irving succeeded in developing a truly American atmosphere. As William L. Hedge has observed, Irving was able "to bring certain aspects of Puritanism into dramatic focus by connecting Yankee shrewdness and Puritan respectability." As previously noted, this satire on the avarice and hypocrisy of colonial Boston is skillfully integrated with the folklore Irving used, and the final motif, Devil's money becomes ashes, is so well chosen that it serves as a fitting epilogue to the tale.

Once the construction of "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" is laid bare, it becomes evident that Irving, at least after his German tour, was no "slavish" imitator but rather a highly skilled manipulator of both American and German folklore. In avoiding the stock Gothic machinery and a distant, foreign setting for an American locale, and in assembling a chain of folk motifs that was distinctly his own invention, he created a vigorous tale that is still very much alive and meaningful today. This is not to assert that Irving possessed a first-rank imagination, as his successors Poe and Hawthorne did. Instead, as his contemporary Coleridge might have observed, Irving was endowed with a mechanical rather than an organic imagination. In this sense, he is not unlike the medieval French author Chretien de Troyes, who drew so heavily on traditional materials yet left his own stamp on them. Like Chretien, Irving knew and understood the traditional storyteller's skill in relating folk motifs and so, in tales such as "*The Devil and Tom Walker*," he was able to recombine and reshape such motifs into new and significant forms.

Source: Charles G. Zug IH", "The Construction of '*The Devil and Tom Walker'1 A Study of Irvmg's Later Use of Folk-lore*," in New York Folklore Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, No 4, December, 1968, pp 243-60

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt of a longer article, Lynch talks about the devil as a character in literature, including his appearance in "The Devil and Tom Walker," one the devil's first appearances in American literature.

In the spring of 1951, when the emotionalism of the MacArthur controversy was at its highest, a mob of people in one of our western towns hanged Secretary of State Acheson in effigy. If this act had taken place about one hundred seventy years ago, there probably would have been one difference—the figure of the devil would also have had a part in the ceremony. We learn from contemporary accounts of the Revolution that when Benedict Arnold's treason became known his effigy was burned and hanged throughout the towns of America, invariably with an image of the devil thrusting him into hell with a pitchfork. Even as late as 1828, the school board of Lancaster, Ohio, declared the railroad a device of the devil. And when Irving's "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" appeared, a contemporary critic of 1825 wrote: "If Mr. Irving believes in the existence of Tom Walker's master we can scarcely conceive how he can so earnestly jest about him, at all events, we would counsel him to beware lest his own spells should prove fatal to him." Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe, therefore, being fairly close to the times when the devil had some status, could be expected as romantic writers to use the devil as one of their characters.

The devil as a character is, of course, a manifestation of romantic writing concerning the supernatural. It is obvious, however, that he is not to be associated only with the so-called romantic period, for he has appeared throughout our literature from the writings of Cotton Mather to Whittaker Chambers' article on the history of the devil in Life magazine of February 2,1948___

A biographer of Irving stated that "*The Devil and Tom Walker*" may possibly be called "a sort of comic New England Faust, for during 1822 and 1823 Irving had read and reread Goethe." Calling him a New England Faust might be a clever way of referring to Irving's devil, but another critic analyzes more accurately when he states that the story "owes very little to foreign influences. Though he is interested in popular legend, and shows sympathy with the Romantic movement of Europe, Irving's story is redolent of American soil."

Irving's devil is of the pure New England variety—and he could hardly have been thinking of Goethe's regal Mephistopheles when he wrote his story. Irving places his humorous tale in Massachusetts history during the office of Governor Belcher (1730-1741). Tom Walker, at no point a serious figure, finds himself following an "ill chosen route through a swamp thickly grown with the great gloomy pines and hemlocks which made it dark at noonday." After setting the atmosphere in much the same way that Hawthorne did later, Irving recounts the legend of the "Old Indian Fort" of which the common people had a bad opinion "since the Indian wars when it was asserted that the savages held incantations here and made sacrifices to the evil spirit." After this reference to the superstition of the early New England folk, the devil suddenly appears

unannounced—a technique used by most devil-writers. Tom had just uncovered a skull when a gruff voice says, "Let that skull alone!" Irving describes the devil in accordance with his common title in New England, "The Black Man.1'

"You are commonly called Old Scratch," Tom remarks calmly enough to the devil. "The same at your service," the devil replies. Irving explains that Tom "had lived so long with a termagant wife, that he did not even fear the devil." The outcome of this meeting is that the devil promises Captain Kidd's buried treasure if Tom will sell his soul. Returning to his wife, Tom tells her of the devil's offer. But when she urges him to enter into the contract, he refuses in order to irritate her with his perversity. The wife then sets out to make a deal with "Old Scratch," and Irving comments, "Though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it." This remark is reminiscent of the imported English ballad "The Farmer's Curst Wife," wherein the wife is taken off to hell by the devil and then brought back to the farmer because she is too unpleasant even for the devil. But Tom's wife is never seen again, and when Tom goes to the swamp, he sees signs of a fierce struggle. "Egad," he says to himself, "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!"

Feeling gratitude to the devil for carrying off his wife, Tom then decides to do business with him. But the devil is crafty, and after some delay Tom again meets "the black woodsman," who now affects indifference while casually humming a tune. If one were to imagine an actor taking this devil's part, Charles Laughton might well be an appropriate choice.

The contract is eventually made between them. The devil tries to make the condition that Tom enter the slave trade, but Tom refuses, agreeing, however, to open a usury business in Boston. There are two explanations as to why Irving mentioned the slave trade here: that he was repelled by a barbarous practice that the devil fosters with primary interest, and/or that he wanted to achieve suspense by putting into the reader's mind the idea that Tom might escape that fulfillment of the contract because of a momentary humane feeling.

Using Kidd's treasure to build up a fortune in making loans and then foreclosing, Tom, as he grows older and more conscious of the terms of the contract, becomes a religious zealot, carrying the Bible at all times in order to ward off the devil. Irving refers to the legend that Tom buried his horse upside down because when the world would be turned upside down on the last day he would be able to give the devil a run for it. But according to Irving, if he did this, it was of no help to him, "at least so says the authentic old legend."

Tom is caught off guard without his Bible while he is foreclosing a mortgage, and is seized during a storm and carried off in the direction of the swamp and the Old Indian Fort, never to be seen again. Irving concludes the legendary story:

Let all griping money-brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak trees, whence he dug Kidd's money, is to be seen to this day; and the neighboring swamp and old Indian fort are often haunted nights by a figure

on horseback, in morning-gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact, the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is the origin of the popular saying, so prevalent throughout New England, of "*The Devil and Tom Walker*."

Irving would be interested to know that the popular saying to which he refers continued to be used until the twentieth century....

Source: James J. Lynch, "*The Devil in the Writings of Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe*," in the *New York Folklore Quarterly*, Volume VDI, No. 1, Spring, 1952, pp. 111-31.

Hedges, *William L. Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press*, 1965,231-233.

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Topics for Further Study

Discuss the relationship between Tom Walker and his wife. Do you feel that they deserve each other? Do you feel that they both get what they deserve?

It has been said that Tom Walker is a New England version of Faust legend. Research the different versions of Faust and see whether or not the character of Tom Walker resembles Faust.

Explore Puritanism in New England in the 1700s and 1800s. How does Irving incorporate its tenets into his fiction?

Compare and Contrast

1727: Religion is central to the lives of New England citizens. At the Salem Witch Trials, less than forty years before, twenty people accused of consorting with the devil are executed. In the Puritan tradition, the concepts of sin and penance guide many behaviors. These beliefs regarding good and evil form the basis of many communities' laws.

1824: Religion continues to dominate daily life, though the Puritan tradition has lost much influence as less strict forms of Christianity, like Unitarianism, gain membership. Popularized by poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarianism espouses a blend of philosophy, spirituality, and practicality. The church is based in the town of Concord, Massachusetts.

Today: A majority of people living in the United States belong to a house of worship. Though Christianity claims the largest number of followers, millions of Americans are Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist.

1780s: Wolfgang Mozart writes Don Giovanni, an opera about a promiscuous man who is confronted by the devil.

1832: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe publishes his tale of temptation and the devil, *Faust*.

Today: The devil continues to be a popular character in literature, appearing recently in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses and John Updike's The Witches ofEastwick.

What Do I Read Next?

A History of New York, Irving's 1809 novel in which Dutchman Diedrich Knickerbocker recounts the settling of New York by the Dutch, in a comic and highly inaccurate manner.

The *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Gent, is comprised of 32 short stories, many of which deal with England. The collection includes two of Irving's most celebrated works: "*Rip Van Winkle*" and "*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*."

Moby Dick, Herman Melville's 1851 epic of the seafaring Captain Ahab's quest to conquer the great white whale, Moby Dick. So single-minded is Ahab's goal that he fails to realize that he is being ruined by greed and deceit.

The Pardoner's Tale, Geoffrey Chaucer's tale that explores "the curse of avarice and cupidity." Three bandits attempt to become wealthy through deceitful means, but each of them attempts to usurp the others' gold. In the final analysis, all three are destroyed by their own greed. This story is the basis for the movie, Treasure of the Sierra Madre.

"*Young Goodman Brown*" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, first published in 1835. An allegorical tale of a pious Puritan New England man who encounters his fellow townspeople engaged in the black mass. Hawthorne was a contemporary of Irving's, and both writers were concerned with creating an American literature that featured the tenets of New England Puritanism.

"*The Devil and Daniel Webster*" a short story by Steven Vincent Benet first published in 1937. A New England folktale that won an O. Henry Memorial Award, the story concerns a poor farmer strikes a deal with the devil, who appears as a lawyer. In an attempt to back out of the deal after obtaining prosperity, the farmer hires Daniel Webster to defend him in a court trial presided over by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

"*The Devil and Tom Walker*" was published in 1824 in Washington Irving's Tales of a Traveller. It is widely recognized as the best story in the book and the third best of all his tales (after "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.") Having established an international literary reputation, Irving had committed himself to a career as a professional man of letters, and the mixed critical reception that Tales of a Traveller received stung him badly. Modern readers of stories in this volume are often struck by the folk or fairy-tale quality of the narratives and by Irving's evocation of an older American landscape rich in symbolic texture.

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Demonstrates Irving's pioneenng work in developing the sketch genre of literary writing.

Woodress, James. "*Washington Irving*," in *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, edited by Noelle Watson, St. James Press, 1994, pp. 262-65.

A biographical and bibliographical sketch on Washington Irving.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Data Capture
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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535