The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Study Guide

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow by Washington Irving

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Contents

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Study Guide....1
Contents....2
Introduction....3
Author Biography....4
Plot Summary....5
Summary....7
Analysis....14
Characters....17
Themes....19
Style....21
Historical Context....23
Critical Overview....25
Criticism....27
Critical Essay #1....28
Critical Essay #2....31
Critical Essay #3....38
Adaptations....49
Topics for Further Study....50
Compare and Contrast....51
What Do I Read Next?....52
Further Study....53
Bibliography....54
Copyright Information....56

Introduction

The great American short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" was written while Washington Irving was living in England, and it was published in England in a volume called *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*.The *Sketch Book* was published in installments in the United States beginning in 1819, but the section that included this story was not issued until 1820. Readers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean thus encountered the story at approximately the same time.

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" takes place in Sleepy Hollow, New York, a snug rural valley near Tarrytown in the Catskill Mountains. Constructed from German tales but set in America, it is a classic tale of the conflict between city and country, and between brains and brawn. Ichabod Crane courts Katrina Van Tassel, but is frightened away by his rival, Brom Bones, masquerading as the headless horseman. The story demonstrates the two qualities for which Irving is best known: his humor, and his ability to create vivid descriptive imagery.

Readers immediately took to "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and another tale from the *Sketch Book*, "Rip Van Winkle." Although little formal criticism greeted the arrival of the story specifically, the *Sketch Book* became wildly popular and widely reviewed both in the United States and in England. It was the first book by an American writer to become popular outside the United States, and helped establish American writing as a serious and respectable literature. In 1864, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" was published as a separate illustrated volume for the first time, and there have been dozens of editions since. Today, most of Irving's work has been largely forgotten, but the characters of Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman have lived on as part of American folklore.

Author Biography

Considering that Irving's best-known fiction takes place in the countryside of rural upstate New York, it is perhaps surprising that he spent most of the first thirty-two years of his life in New York City, where he was born on April 3, 1783. He was the eleventh child of immigrant parents, and remained close to his family all his life. Irving's family had money and some influence in New York, and he received a solid education and then studied the law. He was only a mediocre student, and would probably not have made a good lawyer. Instead, he turned to a somewhat leisurely life as a man of letters, attending parties and the theatre, traveling around the state, and writing humorous newspaper pieces under a false name, Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent.

In 1807, Irving was part of a group that collaborated on a humorous periodical called *Salmagundi*, poking fun at the manners and customs of the day, describing the fashions, theatre and arts in wicked detail. The style of the pieces echoed essays written by the English writer Joseph Addison, but with determinedly American subjects. There were no important American literary influences for Irving to follow; the United States was still young enough that its artists had to look to Europe for their models. His first book was *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809), satirizing Dutch customs and manners, and also the pretentious writing style of historians.

He sailed to Europe in 1815, and lived there for the next seventeen years, finding acclaim as a writer and as a diplomat. His most enduring book, *The Sketch Book*, from which "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" are taken, was published in America beginning in 1819, and in England in 1820. It was the first book by an American writer to reach a wide international audience, and proved to the world that America had subjects and themes that were of interest to Europeans. Irving wrote many more books, but never wrote as well again as he had in the *Sketch Book*.

Back in his homeland, he traveled across the plains of the western frontier, and finally bought a large rural property in Sleepy Hollow, a valley near Tarrytown, New York, where he entertained the many people who wanted to meet the famous writer. He died on November 28, 1859, at the age of 76—a long life for the nineteenth century. He is buried in the Sleepy Hollow cemetery. Although in his own lifetime Irving was considered the most important writer America had ever produced, almost none of his books are read today. Only a few of his short stories live on, still loved for their vivid descriptions and humor.

Plot Summary

The story opens with a long descriptive passage offered in the first person by the narrator, who is revealed at the end of the story to be a man in a tavern who told the story to "D. K." Irving's contemporaries, and readers of the entire *Sketch Book*, know that "D. K." is Diedrich Knickerbocker, the fictional author of an earlier book of Irving's. The narrator describes the story's setting, creating images of a quaint, cozy Dutch village, "one of the quietest places in the whole world," in a "remote period of American history" that seemed long-ago even to Irving's original readers. The village is not just far away and long ago; it is a magical place, "under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie."

In this land lives Ichabod Crane, a schoolteacher and singing instructor who comes from Connecticut. His last name suits him. He is tall, lanky and sharp-featured, with clothes too small and ears too big. Crane is a serious and strict teacher, but liked well enough by his students and their families. He has apparently no real friends in the community, but is welcome as he passes from house to house eating whatever he can help himself to in exchange for doing light chores and entertaining the housewives with his stories and gossip. He is much admired for his intelligence, for, unlike the rest of the village, he has "read several books quite through," and he is especially interested in tales of witchcraft and magic. Several local tales feature the ghost of a Hessian trooper, who was killed by a cannonball and who rides through the countryside each night looking for his missing head.

One of Crane's singing students, Katrina Van Tassel, has caught his eye, and he dreams of marrying her. Katrina is eighteen years old, plump and ripe, and "a little of a coquette." Crane desires her not because of her beauty or her personality, but because her father is wealthy and there is always wonderful food at the Van Tassel home. He fills his thoughts with images of roast pigs and pies and sausages, and imagines selling off the Van Tassel land to buy a homestead in the wilderness where he and Katrina "with a whole family of children" could go in a covered wagon. So Crane begins to court Katrina.

Because she is beautiful and wealthy, Katrina has other suitors. Chief among them is Brom Bones, a man who is everything Ichabod Crane is not: strong, rugged, handsome, humorous and clever. Katrina seems content to be courted by two men, and does not discourage either man's attentions. Brom's natural instinct is to fight with Crane, but since Crane will not fight Brom resorts to playing a series of practical jokes on Crane instead.

One evening, Mr. Van Tassel hosts a big party for everyone in the village. Crane dresses up in his finest and makes himself look as handsome as he can. He is so awestruck by the tremendous foodladen tables at the party that he decides to ask Katrina for her hand. After an evening of swapping ghost stories with his neighbors, he approaches his intended bride. Although the discussion is not recorded, a few minutes

later he leaves the house "with an air quite desolate and chop-fallen." Feeling dismal, he begins the long ride home alone. Remembering all the ghost stories he has heard and told that evening, he gets more and more nervous.

Suddenly, he sees a large shadowy figure on the road ahead. It appears to be a headless man riding a horse, and Crane can just make out the shape of a head resting on the pommel of the saddle. Terrified, he races away, chased by the headless horseman. He is unable to escape. The last thing he remembers is the sight of the rider about to throw the head at him; struck by the flying object, he is knocked unconscious to the ground.

The next morning Crane does not come to school, and he is never seen in the village again. A search party finds his hat and a bundle of his possessions, and nearby on the ground a smashed pumpkin. Brom Bones marries Katrina, and for the rest of his life gives a knowing look and a laugh when the mysterious disappearance of his rival is mentioned. Though some in the village may suspect that Brom was responsible for Crane's disappearance, most of the women maintain that Crane was carried away by the headless horseman. Crane himself has become the subject of the kind of ghost story he so loved to tell.

Summary

This short story begins with a statement qualifying the source of the tale. The statement was among the papers left by the deceased Diedrich Knickerbocker. This opening is followed by a poem, describing a place where dreams flourish under the summer sky. The story itself actually begins with a description of a neighboring community. It's a market town nicknamed Tarry Town, so called because husbands like to stay for a while in the tavern on market days. Tarry Town is sheltered from the elements by a cove, and not far from there is Sleepy Hollow, a place along the Hudson River, untouched by time and reason.

The narrator recalls how he was out hunting and one day happened upon this sleepy village. The day was Sunday and nature seemed irritated at the disruption of his gun's discharge. The narrator shares with the reader that he would like to linger in this peaceful escape, but then continues to describe the area. It seems that the inhabitants are descendents of the Dutch. The country lads are referred to as the Sleepy Hollow Boys. The place has such a sleepy, dream-like quality and is laden with superstition and legend. There are even some who believe a German doctor bewitched the area, while some believe an old Indian chief held ceremonies there. Whatever the cause of the strange and varied phenomena, most residents agree to having seen strange sights, suffered trances and visions, and heard unexplained music and voices.

There is, however, one figure that dominates the town's stories and landscape: the Headless Horseman. The Headless Horseman is believed to be a soldier from the Revolutionary War who was beheaded by a canon. His nightly runs are in search of his head, making sure he returns to the buried body in the cemetery by daybreak. This 'superstition' is referred to as the "Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow."

The speaker then returns to his assertion that there is, in fact, something magical and mystical about the area. This area is sure to bewitch travelers with imaginative mind play, dreams, and apparitions. The narrator attributes this state of being to the fact that Sleepy Hollow remains untouched by the surrounding areas. Sleepy Hollow's people and their customs are static; they remain unchanged by the current of activity and time that surrounds them.

The narrator next begins to relay the action of the tale. The action part of the story is set thirty years previous to the time of the telling of this tale, making the time period of the story around 1789. The story seems to revolve around a schoolteacher named Ichabod Crane. Like the gangly bird his surname suggests, Ichabod was long in arms and legs with narrow shoulders. His feet were large, and his head was small. Ichabod's green eyes were wide, and his nose also brought to mind a bird, only this time a beak. Ichabod's clothes were too big and blew around him when he moved, and his gait was awkward.

Ichabod's schoolhouse was a one-room log cabin. The cabin's construction was compared to an eelpot, easy to enter but difficult to exit. The cabin is in a somewhat

lonely setting, with only a birch tree growing near it. That tree supplied the teacher with all necessary disciplinary tools. Apparently, Ichabod knew how to use these birch switches and used them often. Unfortunately, however, the schoolmaster administered justice discriminately, protecting the weak and admonishing the strong.

When not at school, Ichabod would join the somewhat older boys in his class, and on special occasions, he would accompany home the younger ones who had pretty sisters or gifted mothers in the kitchen. To these ends, he stayed on somewhat good terms with his students, especially when a good meal was at stake. Ichabod had a voracious appetite. Ichabod ate huge volumes of food, contradictory to the indications of his bony frame. The residents, of course, would know about the teacher's eating habits since he was boarded at his students' homes a week at a time. While there, he might help farmers with less taxing chores, such as cutting wood, tending cattle, or mending fences. Ichabod knew how to endear himself to mothers by tending to their small children.

Ingratiating himself to his patrons was not the only secondary occupation this teacher possessed. Ichabod was also choirmaster and music instructor to a private few. Ichabod proudly stood in church, leading the others in psalms. As busy as he was, others thought his life easy.

Also of interest regarding the schoolmaster was his hunger for the occult. Left with an overactive imagination from his constant diet of local scary tales, the teacher would walk home, skittish from natural sights and sounds that became ghosts and other phantasms in his mind. To guarantee his safety and quell some of his fears, whether imagined or real, the good teacher would sing his psalms within earshot of the homeowners of Sleepy Hollow.

In addition to keeping the company of his older students and pretty maidens, Ichabod would spend evenings with the old, Dutch wives, who told regional tales of the marvelous and unexplainable. In turn, he would tell stories of signs and visions from his native Connecticut. The way home from these story-laden evenings would, however, prey upon the imagination of this country instructor. Ichabod imagined haunting, shrouded, snowy figures out of nature. Ichabod's greatest fear is to, perhaps, encounter the Galloping Hessian, the Headless Horseman. Every step anticipated this chance meeting. Ichabod was, in fact, prepared for such an engagement, since he had seen spirits before and feared the ever-present Satan. There was, however, one force even greater than the Devil that was to be feared, and that was a woman.

Just such a woman for Ichabod in this tale was named Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a well-to-do farmer. Katrina was just eighteen years old, plump, and a bit of a flirt. The speaker compares her to food, and it is no wonder, because Ichabod's real love was filling his stomach. To the end of one day owning all of Van Tassel's estate, Katrina's father was where Ichabod's real attention lay. Baltus Van Tassel had a big, productive farm. Van Tassel's home was "bursting forth with the treasures of the farm." The narrator shares detailed accounts of the abundance on his farm. According to the storyteller, "The pedagogue's mouth watered as he looked upon this sumptuous

promise of luxurious winter fare." Ichabod wanted the woman due to inherit all this wealth that could be sold and invested into real estate.

The livestock alone could have stolen Ichabod's heart and stomach, but the house made him a man with a "holy" cause. The house was large and filled with expensive furnishings and ornaments. Ichabod had one focus from this point on: to win the fair Katrina's hand in marriage. Ichabod felt like a knight on a holy quest, but he knew this would be difficult, because she was a flirt and many desired her.

Among the contenders for Katrina's hand was the burly Brom Van Brunt. Curly dark hair sat above his broad shoulders. Van Brunt was fit and fun loving; he was not malicious but riotous. Van Brunt settled disputes and "was always ready for either a fight or a frolic." Because of his great strength, he was referred to as Brom Bones, and his comrades loyally followed him. Inconvenienced or disturbed neighbors regularly dismissed their antics.

Ironically, however, the raucous Brom Bones shared one thing in common with Ichabod Crane, the desire for the voluptuous Katrina. Ichabod was not driven away by the powerful Brom Bones in securing the hand of Miss Van Tassel. Ichabod pursued Katrina, even under the doting eye of her protective father, who valued her more than his pipe. Brom Bones, however, wanted to settle this issue with brute force, but our gentle schoolteacher knew his adversary and chose less aggressive means to battle for the fair maiden. Accommodating Crane's strategy, Brom and his boys tormented Ichabod with practical jokes, such as smoking out the schoolhouse and disturbing the classroom's furnishings. Brom even taught his dog to whine when Ichabod sang.

It was during this time of rivalry that a message was delivered to Ichabod, inviting him to the Van Tassel household one evening for a party. Sending the students home early, the teacher took great care tending to his appearance for that evening's event. Ichabod even borrowed an old plow horse from a neighboring farmer. The horse, Gunpowder, although old and docile, was so named for his quick discharge in the event of another horse of the opposite sex or whatever moved his fancy. Astride this horse, Ichabod cut a comical appearance, resembling a gawky bird, with his angled limbs protruding awkwardly.

It was fall, and Ichabod made his way through fields reminiscent of rich harvests, while animals scurried in frenzied preparation for the winter. It was evening when he arrived at "the castle" of Van Tassel and met his rival, Brom Bones. Brom arrived on his horse, Daredevil, named for the animal and rider's dispositions. After feasting his eyes on the food, Ichabod feasted his eyes on the tender morsels of womanhood. The host mingled among his guests until, eventually, it was time to dance. Ichabod cut quite a figure on the dance floor when he whirled around the lovely Katrina Van Tassel. This, of course, upset the watching Brom Bones.

After dancing, the men shared stories of battle bravery. These tales were followed by the exchange of ghost stories. The region itself, according to the narrator, "breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies." The story that dominated all the rest, of

course, was that of the Headless Horseman. According to legend, his horse was in the churchyard each night and the bridge near the church was where the horseman would stop any pursuits. The church itself provided a perfect setting to these stories. It was isolated and nearby trees shrouded the area in darkness. Brom Bones added his own experience of racing on Daredevil with the Headless Horseman, and his triumph in that match. Hair-raising tales of sounds and phenomena mesmerized Ichabod, who later shared his own personal experiences with the supernatural.

It was dark when the party broke up, the bewitching time of night. Ichabod did not immediately notice, because he had dejectedly left the party. Ichabod and Katrina had conversed before he left, and Ichabod had walked away from the evening looking forlorn. It was not too long, however, before the teacher realized the potential danger of time and place, and he began to whistle. When he approached the tulip tree, the place of several sightings and abduction of Major Andre, Ichabod was overcome with fear. In this frame of mind, the teacher imagined fantasy out of fact, ghosts out of trees, voices out of wind.

When Ichabod and his horse, Gunpowder, approached a stream's bridge, he tried to steer the horse ahead, but the stubborn animal resisted and went its own way, directing Ichabod into some bushes. Ichabod tried to whip the horse onward, and Gunpowder leapt ahead, only to come to an abrupt stop when Ichabod sighted a large figure. Asking the figure's identity, silence followed, and Ichabod then darted forward with closed eyes. Ichabod tried singing one of his reassuring psalms, but that did not discourage the large rider on the horse. The dark horse and rider entered the road and, with time, Ichabod and his unknown companion were riding in tandem.

When Ichabod came upon a more open area, he was able to view his traveling companion. It appeared to be the Headless Horseman, with a head riding on the saddle. Ichabod tried to spur Gunpowder to flee, but the other rider kept up with them.

When Ichabod and his unwelcome guest reached the road to Sleepy Hollow, Gunpowder again resisted and made another turn. This path led the traveling men toward the church. It was there Ichabod hoped to lead the Headless Horseman so his pursuit would stop by the bridge. Unfortunately, though, in so desperately riding the horse, Gunpowder's saddle fell off, and Ichabod held on for life. This did not deter Ichabod from reaching that bridge, yet when his approach seemed certain, the Headless Horseman rose in his saddle and threw the head at Ichabod. It hit the teacher's head, knocking him to the ground and off road the Headless Horseman and his horse.

The next day, Ichabod Crane was not to be found. Gunpowder was grazing, and his owner, Hans Van Ripper, was concerned for the previous night's rider. Only a trampled saddle, tracks from horses, Ichabod's hat, and a smashed pumpkin could be found. The inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow searched for the body of Ichabod Crane, and satisfied it was not to be found, Van Ripper disposed of Crane's belongings. With time, it came to be believed that the Headless Horseman carried Ichabod away, and since he had neither money nor family, he was quickly forgotten.

Interestingly, though, a farmer visiting New York years later brought home the news that Ichabod Crane was alive and had tried his hand at teaching, law, politics, writing and judging. In Sleepy Hollow, however, life went on. Brom Bones married Katrina Van Tassel. Whenever the tale of Ichabod Crane was told, Brom had a smug expression on his face. It was the telling of the pumpkin, however, that brought laughter to him. Whatever the reason, Ichabod Crane did not return to Sleepy Hollow. Some say it was because of the rampage of the Headless Horseman or the possible anger from Van Ripple over his saddle; others believe he was embarrassed over losing the rich Katrina.

The old country women believe the Headless Horsemen carried Ichabod away. Some even believe he haunts the area, and his melodious psalms are still heard. Ironically, the schoolmaster has become one of the haunting tales he so loved to hear and tell.

Analysis

A short story manifests all the elements of a novel; only the author must consolidate his information and masterfully incorporate them into a more concise form. As with any fiction, this must first establish setting, but in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," by Washington Irving, the author first qualifies his source, lending credibility to his story. It seems this story was found among the papers of a dead man. By introducing the story this way, the author gives credibility to his story with an actual source, and his words seem irrefutable, because this Knickerbocker can no longer disagree. It also sets a tone. By making the dead man 'speak' posthumously, the author gives this story a dark, somber, almost surreal, tone. This is further enhanced by the use of a quatrain, a four lined poem written in iambic pentameter. The poem's formal structure lends to the story's credibility, and the use of words like "drowsy," "dreams," and "half-shut eyes" create an image of the unreal or imagined.

When the author starts his detailed description of the setting, he clearly sets up the possibilities for anything to happen, because as he tells of the bewitched area, yet plays with his readers when he makes reference to "most authentic historians," contradictory to the established reverie of illusions.

Another contradiction appears in the style of writing itself. It is in this tale that the form the antagonist takes is introduced first. It is the Headless Horseman, or some form of that figure, that will create internal and external conflict for our protagonist. The narrator finally establishes a time period for this piece, since physical location has been firmly conveyed. It is "some thirty years since," so that would be around 1789, since the piece itself was published in 1819.

It is now that the speaker introduces our story's protagonist, and that term is used loosely. Today, we might refer to him as an anti-hero. Ichabod is awkward in form and walk, bird-like with lengthy appendages and nose. Ichabod's clothes are hanging off him. He is referred as a "scarecrow." Ichabod is self-serving in his actions toward securing future wealth.

Having established the physical description of our hero, it is now time to investigate his work. The school was a log cabin with a tree nearby that provided birch switches for the teacher to use on recalcitrant children. Corporal punishment was customary prior to 1850, and Ichabod Crane liberally adhered to that practice. Interestingly enough, the school is referred to as an "eelpot." This is a structure meant to keep eels in, making it difficult for them to exit. Such is the way the storyteller sees the schoolchildren; they are squirming and kept confined. Another simile also conveys the school setting. The students' voices are "like the hum of a beehive," signifying a community of busy workers with potential danger if riled too much.

This did not stop the schoolmaster from befriending his students, though. The characterization of Ichabod, in addition to being a strict disciplinarian, was also that of an opportunist. If a pretty female smiled or a good meal was to be had, Ichabod was your friend. In fact, Ichabod knew all the best cooks in Sleepy Hollow, since he spent a week at a time boarding at his students' houses, where he would eat huge quantities of food and still remain gaunt. In a casual, colloquial style, the narrator compares Ichabod's eating habits to that of an anaconda, able to ingest huge quantities without permanently altering its shape.

Ichabod knew how to stay in the good graces of his hosts and hostesses by performing small tasks and tending to wee children. Ichabod would win the favor of mothers by doting over their small children, and the narrator makes the allusion to the lion and the lamb, implying that Ichabod, by nature, does not like children. Ichabod, however, does know how to get what he wants and employs those techniques.

The narrator remarks that Ichabod's host families "are apt to consider the costs of schooling a grievous burden." Information such as this, as well as the boarding of the teacher and disciplinary practices of this time period, make this tale somewhat of a historical document. Readers learn about the varied aspects of a Hudson River community during the turn of the nineteenth century. Information regarding this will be continually shared throughout the story. Not only do readers learn about education but also social practices within that community.

More is learned about Ichabod in describing his musical talents. As well as leading the choir, the teacher gave private vocal lessons. The narrator remarks, "in his own mind, he completely carried away the psalm from the parson." Ichabod was a vain man. Even so, he was still considered quite a catch by the community, the closest to gentlemanly status, second to the parson. Ichabod embraced his status and visited with the available women in between services on Sundays.

Ichabod's worth was further increased by the gossip he shared. In moving from household to household, he was the purveyor of the hottest news. It was in coming home in the evening from his gossiping that he often imagined the unspeakable, the unexplainable, and the undead. Ichabod had seen specters before, and he was ready for whatever might meet him in the dark, especially the Headless Horseman. Humorously, though, the speaker transitions here to introduce Ichabod's object of

conflict, his love, Katrina Van Tassel. The narrator's point is that there might be things far more dangerous in this world than spirits, and that would be women.

The speaker uses a series of food-related similes to describe Katrina, heightening the reader's awareness of her voluptuousness and Ichabod's voracity. This is further developed in the detailed account of the abundant and varied foul and meats on her father's farm. Whoever married Katrina would inherit all these holdings, and this enticed Ichabod beyond belief. Ichabod knew there was competition, and the narrator compares Ichabod's quest to that of the once-great and now romanticized knights of old, conveying another humorous tone with a bit of romanticism.

In keeping with the touch of romance in the informal conversational style of speaking the narrator employs, readers read that Ichabod's knightly mission is to be the quest of the fair maiden, Katrina. Unfortunately for Ichabod, the prankster Brom Bones also wanted the hand of this woman. In the overdramatic use of allusion, keeping with the story's rather comical tone, the speaker compares Ichabod to Achilles, the demi-god who was a 'stormy lover,' and Brom Bones to Hercules, another demi-god known for his great strength.

The narrator now covers the battle over Katrina using knightly metaphors. The type of battles the two combatants would employ is discussed. Brom would rather fight for her and Ichabod would rather plot for her. Ichabod was not a physical match for Brom Bones. The narrator then returns to his knightly diction, or word choice, in describing the teacher's classroom kingdom as "enthroned," "lofty," and "realm." The narrator continues such references when describing Ichabod's preparations, "like a knight-errant in quest of adventures."

When the real battle begins, it is at Katrina's house. It is there Ichabod meets his rival, Brom Bones, on his horse, Daredevil, a name befitting horse and rider. In the telling of that evening at the Van Tassels', the narrator refers to himself as Ichabod's "historian." Using this term sets a more factual tone and gives greater credibility to the narrator. After dinner, Ichabod dances with Katrina, angering Brom Bones. This sets up for the climax in this story, and the telling of ghost stories sets a mood that enhances the upcoming climactic confrontation.

Icabod leaves the party after some form of rejection from Katrina. It is not long, however, before he realizes the time of night and recalls all the stories recently shared. When he does confront the Headless Horseman, he is sufficiently scared to lose all objectivity and common sense. Ichabod sees an object on the horseman's saddle and knows it to be a head. Working with a stubborn horse, Ichabod eventually maneuvers Gunpowder to the church, where he will receive sanctuary like was said in the ghost stories. It is there our protagonist confronts his antagonist in the guise of the Headless Horseman.

What is found after Ichabod's hasty departure conveys the real adversary on the dark horse that night. A smashed pumpkin and a laughing Brom Bones tells the real story of Sleepy Hollow.

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Another contradiction appears in the style of writing itself. It is in this tale that the form the antagonist takes is introduced first. It is the Headless Horseman, or some form of that figure, that will create internal and external conflict for our protagonist. The narrator finally establishes a time period for this piece, since physical location has been firmly conveyed. It is "some thirty years since," so that would be around 1789, since the piece itself was published in 1819.

It is now that the speaker introduces our story's protagonist, and that term is used loosely. Today, we might refer to him as an anti-hero. Ichabod is awkward in form and walk, bird-like with lengthy appendages and nose. Ichabod's clothes are hanging off him. He is referred as a "scarecrow." Ichabod is self-serving in his actions toward securing future wealth.

Having established the physical description of our hero, it is now time to investigate his work. The school was a log cabin with a tree nearby that provided birch switches for the teacher to use on recalcitrant children. Corporal punishment was customary prior to 1850, and Ichabod Crane liberally adhered to that practice. Interestingly enough, the school is referred to as an "eelpot." This is a structure meant to keep eels in, making it difficult for them to exit. Such is the way the storyteller sees the schoolchildren; they are squirming and kept confined. Another simile also conveys the school setting. The students' voices are "like the hum of a beehive," signifying a community of busy workers with potential danger if riled too much.

This did not stop the schoolmaster from befriending his students, though. The characterization of Ichabod, in addition to being a strict disciplinarian, was also that of an opportunist. If a pretty female smiled or a good meal was to be had, Ichabod was

your friend. In fact, Ichabod knew all the best cooks in Sleepy Hollow, since he spent a week at a time boarding at his students' houses, where he would eat huge quantities of food and still remain gaunt. In a casual, colloquial style, the narrator compares Ichabod's eating habits to that of an anaconda, able to ingest huge quantities without permanently altering its shape.

Ichabod knew how to stay in the good graces of his hosts and hostesses by performing small tasks and tending to wee children. Ichabod would win the favor of mothers by doting over their small children, and the narrator makes the allusion to the lion and the lamb, implying that Ichabod, by nature, does not like children. Ichabod, however, does know how to get what he wants and employs those techniques.

The narrator remarks that Ichabod's host families "are apt to consider the costs of schooling a grievous burden." Information such as this, as well as the boarding of the teacher and disciplinary practices of this time period, make this tale somewhat of a historical document. Readers learn about the varied aspects of a Hudson River community during the turn of the nineteenth century. Information regarding this will be continually shared throughout the story. Not only do readers learn about education but also social practices within that community.

More is learned about Ichabod in describing his musical talents. As well as leading the choir, the teacher gave private vocal lessons. The narrator remarks, "in his own mind, he completely carried away the psalm from the parson." Ichabod was a vain man. Even so, he was still considered quite a catch by the community, the closest to gentlemanly status, second to the parson. Ichabod embraced his status and visited with the available women in between services on Sundays.

Ichabod's worth was further increased by the gossip he shared. In moving from household to household, he was the purveyor of the hottest news. It was in coming home in the evening from his gossiping that he often imagined the unspeakable, the unexplainable, and the undead. Ichabod had seen specters before, and he was ready for whatever might meet him in the dark, especially the Headless Horseman. Humorously, though, the speaker transitions here to introduce Ichabod's object of conflict, his love, Katrina Van Tassel. The narrator's point is that there might be things far more dangerous in this world than spirits, and that would be women.

The speaker uses a series of food-related similes to describe Katrina, heightening the reader's awareness of her voluptuousness and Ichabod's voracity. This is further developed in the detailed account of the abundant and varied foul and meats on her father's farm. Whoever married Katrina would inherit all these holdings, and this enticed Ichabod beyond belief. Ichabod knew there was competition, and the narrator compares Ichabod's quest to that of the once-great and now romanticized knights of old, conveying another humorous tone with a bit of romanticism.

In keeping with the touch of romance in the informal conversational style of speaking the narrator employs, readers read that Ichabod's knightly mission is to be the quest of the fair maiden, Katrina. Unfortunately for Ichabod, the prankster Brom Bones also

wanted the hand of this woman. In the overdramatic use of allusion, keeping with the story's rather comical tone, the speaker compares Ichabod to Achilles, the demi-god who was a 'stormy lover,' and Brom Bones to Hercules, another demi-god known for his great strength.

The narrator now covers the battle over Katrina using knightly metaphors. The type of battles the two combatants would employ is discussed. Brom would rather fight for her and Ichabod would rather plot for her. Ichabod was not a physical match for Brom Bones. The narrator then returns to his knightly diction, or word choice, in describing the teacher's classroom kingdom as "enthroned," "lofty," and "realm." The narrator continues such references when describing Ichabod's preparations, "like a knight-errant in quest of adventures."

When the real battle begins, it is at Katrina's house. It is there Ichabod meets his rival, Brom Bones, on his horse, Daredevil, a name befitting horse and rider. In the telling of that evening at the Van Tassels', the narrator refers to himself as Ichabod's "historian." Using this term sets a more factual tone and gives greater credibility to the narrator. After dinner, Ichabod dances with Katrina, angering Brom Bones. This sets up for the climax in this story, and the telling of ghost stories sets a mood that enhances the upcoming climactic confrontation.

Icabod leaves the party after some form of rejection from Katrina. It is not long, however, before he realizes the time of night and recalls all the stories recently shared. When he does confront the Headless Horseman, he is sufficiently scared to lose all objectivity and common sense. Ichabod sees an object on the horseman's saddle and knows it to be a head. Working with a stubborn horse, Ichabod eventually maneuvers Gunpowder to the church, where he will receive sanctuary like was said in the ghost stories. It is there our protagonist confronts his antagonist in the guise of the Headless Horseman.

What is found after Ichabod's hasty departure conveys the real adversary on the dark horse that night. A smashed pumpkin and a laughing Brom Bones tells the real story of Sleepy Hollow.

Characters

Brom Bones

See Abraham Van Brunt

Ichabod Crane

Ichabod Crane, the protagonist, is a stern schoolteacher and singing instructor who has come to Sleepy Hollow, New York, from Connecticut. He is lanky and sharp-featured, awkward and somewhat clumsy, but more educated and sophisticated than the native villagers. He is quite fond of food, and is well fed by the neighboring housewives, who share his delight in telling and re-telling ghost stories. When he sets his sights on marrying Katrina Van Tassel, it is not because of any feeling he has for her, but because her father is wealthy and Crane admires the food that is always displayed in the Van Tassel home. Katrina refuses him, however, preferring the manly and strong Brom Bones. In his disappointment Crane allows his imagination to run away with him. He is tricked by Brom into believing that he is being chased through the night by a headless horseman. In the morning he is gone, having left town without saying good-bye.

Abraham Van Brunt

Brom Bones is Crane's chief rival for Katrina's affections, and is in every way Crane's opposite. He is large, strong, rough, humorous, and good-natured, as well-known for his skill as a horseman as Crane is for his education. When he sees that Crane is paying attention to Katrina, Brom begins a series of practical jokes to humiliate him. Finally, he disguises himself as the headless horseman and chases the impressionable Crane through the darkness. When Crane leaves town, Bones marries Katrina.

Baltus Van Tassel

Old Baltus Van Tassel is a veteran of the American Revolution, and the patriarch of a wealthy Dutch farming family. He owns a large, well-kept home and barn, with livestock and fertile fields. Van Tassel is a warm and generous neighbor and an indulgent father. He does not interfere in his daughter's dalliances with the local young men.

Katrina Van Tassel

Katrina is the eighteen-year-old daughter of Baltus Van Tassel and his wife. She is beautifully plump and rosy-cheeked, and always dresses to enhance and emphasize her attractiveness. She is flattered by the attentions of the young men, and does nothing to encourage or discourage Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones from flirting with her. But

when Crane presses for a commitment, she sends him away, and soon after marries Brom.

Themes

City versus Country

One of the great themes of American literature and American folklore is the clash between the city and the country, between civilization and the wil derness. As the theme is played out in literature around the world, it carries one of two interpretations: either the city is seen as beautiful, civilized, rich, clean and safe, and the country is ugly, dirty and dangerous, or else the city is dirty and dangerous, populated by swindlers who love nothing better than tricking the kind, gentle people from the beautiful country. American folklore from the nineteenth century tends to favor the second view. Settlers were proud of their wilderness, and excited by it, and their stories celebrated the skills and qualities one needed to survive on the frontier. The heroes from this period—Daniel Boone, Mike Fink, Paul Bunyan, John Henry, the Swamp Angel—are rugged, strong and clever. When supposedly educated city slickers venture into the countryside, they are outsmarted by these heroes every time.

Ichabod Crane, a native of Connecticut, is a typical scholar who wishes he were an outdoorsman. Irving points out that there are two types of men who come out of Connecticut, "pioneers for the mind as well as for the forest," who become "frontier woodmen and country schoolmasters." Crane is not completely out of place in the forest —he is able to help with the "lighter labors" on the farm— but thinks of himself and is considered by others "a kind of idle gentleman-like personage, of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains." On Sunday afternoons, while he strolls about with the young ladies of the village, "the more bashful country bumpkins h[a]ng sheepishly back, envying his superior elegance and address."

Brom Bones, Crane's most formidable competitor for the hand of Katrina, is as unlike Crane as he could be, "burly, roaring, roistering." Where Crane is "esteemed by the women as a man of great erudition," Brom is "the hero of the country round, which rang with his feats of strength and hardihood." Crane is "tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders," while Brom is "broad-shouldered" and has a "Herculean frame." Crane courts Katrina "in a quiet and gently insinuating manner," while Brom's "amorous toyings" are "something like the gentle caresses and endearments of a bear."

Irving sets up a confrontation between these two opposites, and any reader of American folklore knows how it will turn out. Crane's education is no match for Brom's native wit, his scrawny body and awkward riding are no match for Brom's strength and skill, and the woman chooses the rough and strong man over the refined and delicate one. Nei ther man is particularly unlikable, but in America, a young country with frontier to be tamed, the values of the country win out over those of the city.

Creativity and Imagination

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is a story about stories and story-tellers, and a lesson in keeping the line clear between fiction and reality. The title is significant. Irving identifies this as a legend, a type of story that may be loosely based on truth but is clearly fiction, that may feature the supernatural, that is handed down by a people and that reflects the national character of that people.

This quality is captured in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as the narrator reminds the reader again and again of the special nature of the valley where the story takes place. The name of the valley is no accident, for "a drowsy dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere." The place "holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie." Ichabod Crane is not immune to the influence, for even outsiders, "however wide awake they may have been before they entered that sleepy region," are sure to "inhale the witching atmosphere of the air, and begin to grow imaginative."

One function of imagination and story-telling is to bind a community together, as seen in the party scene. Most of the stories told are unverifiable and untrue: "Just sufficient time had elapsed to enable each story-teller to dress up his tale with a little becoming fiction, and, in the indistinctness of his recollection, to make himself the hero of every exploit." The exaggeration is just part of the fun, and so long as everyone understands this there is no harm.

Crane, however, does not understand the limits of imagination. His dreams are too grand; he tries to make them reality but he can never live up to them. When he sees the bounty at the Van Tassel home, he dreams "in his devouring mind's eye" of "every roasting-pig running about with a pudding in his belly" and every turkey and duck and pigeon becoming a meal for him. When he looks over the Van Tassel land, "his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash." And when he looks into the mirror as he prepares for the party, he sees a cavalier, where the narrator sees only a "grasshopper." No wonder Crane is bold enough to ask for Katrina's hand, and no wonder he is surprised when she refuses him.

This lack of discernment is Crane's downfall. Because he imagines himself to be a "knight-errant in quest of adventures," he humiliates himself in front of Katrina. Because he does not understand that the story of the headless horseman is just a story, he is easy prey for Brom. If only he were as wise as the story-teller in Knickerbocker's postscript, who says of his own story, "Faith sir . . . I don't believe one half of it myself."

Style

Narration/Narrative/Narrator

There is an almost dizzying number of levels of narration and narrators in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow": a) Washington Irving is the author of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. ; b) Geoffrey Crayon is the fictional author of the volume, the one responsible for collection or creating the stories and sketches; c) Diedrich Knickerbocker is the character who supposedly wrote down "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and in whose hand the postscript was "found," presumably by Crayon; d) the legend was told to Knickerbocker by a "pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old fellow"; e) within the legend, the characters tell stories that they have heard or read, many of them concerning "a figure on horseback without a head." Ichabod Crane, then, is a man who is frightened by a story within a story within a story within a story.

The narrators are not only numerous, but also unreliable. Knickerbocker claims that he has repeated the legend "almost in the precise words in which I heard it related"—a ridiculous claim considering the length of the story, the amount of description, and the fact that he heard it only once. The "gentlemanly old fellow" makes a great pretense in the beginning of his narration of telling the truth, pointing out that he has heard an explanation for the name "Tarry Town," but he will not "vouch for the fact, but merely advert to it, for the sake of being precise and accurate." By the end, however, he admits that the legend might be a bit extravagant, and says, "I don't believe one half of it myself."

The inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow are subject to fits of imagination, "they are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs," and they enjoy gatherings at which each story-teller is encouraged "to dress up his tale with a little becoming fiction, and, in the indistinction of his recollection, to make himself the hero of every exploit." When the men are not telling stories of how they won the war singlehandedly, they are telling "tales of ghosts and apparitions," and finding the stories delightfully frightening. As narrators, they are as unreliable as Knickerbocker and his acquaintance.

The effect of all these unreliable narrators is to distance the reader from the action and from the characters. If nothing can be believed, empathy cannot develop, and the reader forms no strong feelings about Crane, either positive or negative. As a psychological study, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" falls short, because the reader never gets close enough to the characters to look inside their minds. Cardboard characters move through a humorous situation, and although there is some trickery afoot, no one really gets hurt. This emotional distance, created by the multiple levels of narration, focuses readers' attention on the humor, and it is the humor that has made "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" an American favorite for almost two hundred years.

Imagery

One of the most striking features of the story is the long passages of rich descriptive detail. The narrator opens with a long reverie on the dreaminess of the landscape, but when the story shifts its focus to Crane and his thoughts, the description becomes more vivid. When Crane walks home in the evening, for example, the narrator lists every creature that frightens him: the whip-poor-will, the treetoad, the screech-owl, the fire-flies, the beetle. When he looks over the Van Tassel barn, "bursting forth with the treasures of the farm," Crane's gaze— and the reader's— lingers over every swallow, martin, pigeon, pig, goose, duck, turkey, guineafowl and rooster.

When he sees a farm animal, Crane imagines it as food, and the list of farm creatures is followed immediately by a longer list of the dishes they might yield. "In his devouring mind's eye" Crane sees the pigs roasted, the pigeons "snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie," the ducks "pairing cozily in dishes, like snug married couples, with a decent competency of onion sauce." Inside the Van Tassel home, Crane cannot keep his eyes still as he admires the tools, the furniture, and most importantly the fruits of the earth: "In one corner stood a huge bag of wool ready to be spun; in another, a quantity of linsey-woolsey just from the loom; ears of Indian corn, and strings of dried apples and peaches, hung in gay festoons along the wall, mingled with the gaud of red peppers." Where other men are attracted to Katrina because of her beauty, Crane sees her only as a stepping stone to "the treasures of jolly autumn."

William Hedges observes that "the method of this story is to heap up images of abundance and contrast Sleepy Hollow's amplitude with the meagreness of Ichabod Crane's body and spirit." Mary Weatherspoon Bowden refers to the same images of "glorious autumn days and autumn harvests, to food, food, and more food, to buxom lasses and merriment and pranks" when she concludes that the legend is "a celebration of the bounty of the United States."

For Americans at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the United States was still the land of plenty, a country of endless resources. This was a source of pride for Irving and his American readers, and a subject of fascination and wonder for his British readers, whose national wilderness had been tamed centuries before. Irving uses lush imagery precisely for its lushness, to demonstrate and celebrate the endless resources of a new, unproven nation.

Historical Context

The Dutch in New York

In its earliest days as an outpost for Europeans, New York was settled by the Dutch, or people from the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Henry Hudson, referred to in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as "Master Hendrick Hudson," sailed in 1609 from present-day New York City to Albany up what the Dutch called the Tappan Zee, and what is now called the Hudson River; the Tappan Zee Bridge in New York City commemorates this today. Hudson was British by birth, but was working for the Dutch East India Company, and after his explorations the Netherlands claimed what is now New York as its own territory. The first Dutch settlers arrived at present-day New York City in 1624. Although the territory eventually came under British and then American control, the Dutch people were still numerous and influential throughout New York in Irving's day.

As with any ethnic group, stereotypes of the Dutch were abundant. They were said to be jolly, prosperous, well-fed, and foolish. Irving had poked fun at Dutchmen in *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, whose fictional author was Diedrich Knickerbocker. Knickerbocker is supposedly the source of this story as well, and the stereotypes are used to comic effect in the characters of Baltus Van Tassel, his daughter Katrina, and their superstitious and somewhat pompous neighbors. It should be said that there were also widespread stereotypical notions about Yankees, or people of Anglo-Saxon descent, who were considered—like Ichabod Crane— to be vain, overeducated, sophisticated and lacking in common sense.

Irving made use of the folklore about Dutch people, and in a minor way contributed to it. When he created the character of Diedrich Knickerbocker, he made up the name "Knickerbocker" to sound funny and at the same time come close enough to a genuine Dutch name to be believable. With Irving's growing popularity, people began to associate the last name with the people. Dutch people were referred to as "knickerbockers," and later the baggy pants gathered below the knee that the men wore came to be known as "knickerbockers" and then "knickers." Knickers fell out of fashion after the 1930s, but the name is still used by the professional basketball team the Knickerbockers, or the New York Knicks.

The New American Fiction

Irving was alive and writing at the moment in American literary history when a true national literature was being called for and created. Previously, the writing coming out of the colonies and then out of the new nation was primarily religious or historical, and was scarcely different from the same kinds of writing coming out of Europe. Ichabod Crane's own favorite writer, Cotton Mather (1663-1728), was a preacher and a political writer of rational, stern treatises on subjects of the day. His books about witchcraft grew out of

the Salem witchcraft trials, and they were neither imaginative, nor intended to entertain or to express the writer's experiences or emotions. Instead, in *The History of New England Witchcraft*, which Daniel Hoffman has identified as *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Mather presented case histories of what he believed to be actual and Satanic events, for the purpose of informing his readers and arguing against the witch trials.

By the end of the eighteenth century, there was a demand for American characters and American themes, and plays filling this need had already begun to appear. The popularity of novels imported from England led to the beginnings of the American novel, and to serious discussions about what kinds of literature would best reflect the values of a democratic society. Irving was among the first American writers who had both the talent and the will to write American fiction, but he had no American models.

The Sketch Book, written in England, contains more than thirty sketches or stories, and nearly all of them have to do with English life and English characters. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" was unusual, though not unique, in being set in the United States. To create the story, Irving borrowed heavily from the German legends of Ruebezahl from the *Volksmaerchen der Deutschen*, transporting the basic action and characters to Upstate New York. It was a beginning. The *Sketch Book* became the first book by an American to sell well in England, proving that it could be done.

Historians and critics have debated for over a century whether Irving invented the short story when he wrote "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." Some have argued that the two are not actually stories at all, but merely tales. Whether he was a creator or an adapter, a writer of stories or of tales, Irving expanded the possibilities of American writing, and helped make possible the explosion of new forms and idioms that would come along at the middle of the nineteenth century.

Critical Overview

Most early readers of *The Sketch Book* praised the volume for its humor and its graceful descriptive writing, but did not single out "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" for special attention. Francis Jeffrey, in an 1820 review in *Edinburgh Review*, did note that the legend, along with "Rip Van Winkle," was among only five or six pieces in the collection of thirty-five that relates "to subjects at all connected with America. . . . The rest relate entirely to England." But other than pointing out its existence, he had nothing to say about the story. Jeffrey was clearly delighted with the collection, and astonished that Irving was able to produce it: "It is the work of an American, entirely bred and trained in that country. . . . Now, the most remarkable thing in a work so circumstanced certainly is, that it should be written throughout with the greatest care and accuracy, and worked up to great purity and beauty of diction."

More recently, critics have attempted to delineate just what is American about Irving's fiction. Terence Martin, writing for *American Literature* in 1959, focuses his attention on the newness of the United States as a nation during Irving's career, and the American tendency at the time to equate "the imaginative and the childish." Irving's struggling to control his appetite and to use imagination properly can be seen as mirroring the struggles of the new society to behave maturely. He concludes, "for Irving there is no place, or a very limited place, for the hero of the imagination in the culture of early America." In *The Comic Imagination in American Literature* (1973), Lewis Leary traces the influence Irving's work had on American humor, and claims that in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and other early tales, Irving "opened doors which gave access to native varieties of the comic spirit."

Around the middle of the twentieth century, attention was turned toward finding the sources Irving used in crafting his tales. The most important work was done by Henry A. Pochmann in 1930. In articles in *Studies in Philology* and *PMLA [Publications of the Modern Language Association]*, Pochmann demonstrated that Irving had translated and adapted German stories to create "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and other tales. In a 1953 article in *PMLA*, Daniel G. Hoffman explored Irving's use of American folkloric sources, finding that Irving used great "originality in interpreting American themes," and he developed his ideas further in his 1961 book, *Form and Fable in American Fiction*.

In the last quarter century, some critics have examined the story from a feminist perspective, to examine what the story reveals about Irving's ideas about the role of women. In her 1975 book *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny describes Sleepy Hollow as a feminine pastoral setting. She sees Ichabod Crane as a male aggressor who threatens this community and therefore must be driven away. In 1993, Laura Plummer and Michael Nelson again find that Crane is "an intrusive male who threatens the stability of a decidedly feminine place," as they explain in an article in *Studies in Short Fiction*. They describe the story as a conflict between male and female forms of storytelling, and point out its "misogynistic bent."

Other critics have seen Crane as threatening, but in different ways. Writing for *American Imago* in 1981, Edward F. Pajak explains how the legend is a variation of the myth of Narcissus, and describes Crane's "poorly integrated identity." Crane's attraction to Katrina and her father masks his unconscious attraction to Brom Bones, and he can find resolution only by "a rejection of the world." For Albert J. von Frank, Crane is more than paranoid and regressed. He finds in a 1987 article in *Studies in American Fiction* that "Irving's genial reputation largely obscures the evil that Ichabod represents." Crane's envy, avarice, sloth and gluttony, among other sins, threaten the community with "moral taint and eventual destruction," making it necessary to drive him from the village.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Bily teaches English at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan. In this essay she discusses Irving's conception of Sleepy Hollow as an earthly paradise.

Irving's narrator opens "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with a brief description of Sleepy Hollow itself, "one of the quietest places in the whole world," a place of "uniform tranquillity." Before moving on to introduce his characters he concludes, "If ever I should wish for a retreat, whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley." In this opening, Irving establishes Sleepy Hollow as both of-this-world and not-of-this-world, an "enchanted region" of unparalleled beauty and fertility. Tapping a literary tradition that stretches back literally thousands of years, he sets his story in a comic American version of what is often called an Earthly Paradise.

A. Bartlett Giamatti explains in his book *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* that "the desire for a state of perfect repose and life eternal has always haunted mankind, and poets have forever been the spokesmen for the dream." Poets— and, more recently, prose writers—have created "idylls, eclogues, odes, epithalamia, epics, satires, romances, and occasional verses all [abounding] with descriptions of such an ideal life in an ideal landscape." These works of literature have tended to depict their landscapes using a traditional set of images and ideas, and Irving uses and adapts many of them in creating his own "enchanted region."

Stories set in an earthly paradise often take place in a Golden Age, a distant time and way of existence without strife and care. In the eighth century BC the Greek poet Hesiod outlined the five ages of man in his *Works and Days*; the five were the golden age, the silver age, the bronze age, the age of heroes, and the iron age in which we live now. The golden age was the first, the most simple and noble, and the yearning to return to the golden age has figured in ancient and more recent literature. As Giamatti writes, the image "never failed, or fails yet, to evoke that time when the world was fresh with dew and man was happy." Even today, Americans look to the past ("those were the days") as a happier time, and tell themselves that "things were simpler then." In creating his earthly paradise, Irving comically sets his story in a new nation's version of ancient history, "in a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since."

The attractive thing about the golden age landscape is that it does not change. The narrator pines, "Though many years have elapsed since I trod the drowsy shades of Sleepy Hollow, yet I question whether I should not find the same trees and the same families vegetating in its sheltered bosom." Sleepy Hollow is the kind of place where "the population, manners, and customs remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved."

But it is the landscape, not the society, that makes an earthly paradise. One of the most common ways of depicting paradise is as a garden, for example, the Bible's Garden of

Eden. Giamatti finds that "in a garden, meadow or field poets have always felt Nature most nearly approximates the ideals of harmony, beauty and peace which men constantly seek in some form or other." Another common depiction is the beautiful but somewhat wilder landscape used in pastoral poetry as a setting for love to bloom. Albert J. von Frank sees elements of both the garden and the pastoral in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." In a 1987 article in *Studies in American Fiction*, he writes, "Like other ideal settings, the larger Dutch community, Sleepy Hollow, and the Van Tassel farm are enclosed gardens, here concentrically frames, inviting, seductive, and as dangerous to itinerants as the island of the Sirens or the land of the Lotos-Eaters. The societies sheltered by these nested gardens are themselves closed and static . . . yet magically productive. Following pastoral convention, Irving describes the land."

One example will demonstrate the images that Irving is working with. Theocritus, the third century BC Greek poet who is credited with inventing the pastoral, wrote a series of "idylls," or brief poems about contentment in country life. In his seventh idyll is found this passage: Many an aspen, many an elm bowed and rustled overhead, and hard by, the hallowed water welled purling forth of a cave of the Nymphs, while the brown cricket chirped busily amid the shady leafage, and the tree frog murmured aloof in the dense thornbrake. Lark and goldfinch sang and turtle moaned, and about the spring the bees hummed and hovered to and fro. All nature smelt of the opulent summertime, smelt of the season of fruit. Pears lay at our feet, apples on either side, rolling abundantly. And the young branches lay splayed upon the ground because of the weight of their damsons.

Although Irving's story takes place in the fertile harvest time of autumn instead of summer, he builds his descriptive passages out of nearly the same images, adding a comic twist here and there. The approach to the Van Tassel farm resembles the opening lines of the Theocritus passage, if a barrel can be asked to stand for the cave of the Nymphs: "A giant elm-tree spread its broad branches over it, at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the softest and sweetest water, in a little well formed of a barrel." Where the Greeks had lark and goldfinch, here in America Irving boasts of a long catalog of birds, "taking their farewell banquets. In the fulness of their revelry, they fluttered, chirping and frolicking, from bush to bush and tree to tree, capricious from the very profusion and variety around them." Even the tree-frog appears, not murmuring but giving a "boding cry."

And the food! The fruits of the American paradise are so much more than pears and apples and damsons (plums). There are apples, of course. Ichabod beholds "vast stores of apples; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press." But there are also "great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts" and "yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun" and the "fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odor of the beehive." Nearly every feature of Theocritus's poem is present in Irving's description.

One detail that is missing is the cricket, but Irving handles that in another way. In one of the most vivid images in the story, he shows Ichabod Crane riding off to meet his lady

with "his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers." Theocritus's cricket is brown, but Crane wears "rusty black."

This is not to say that Irving had read Theocritus (though he may have), but rather that Irving and Theocritus had read the same things, and had drawn from the same well of images. The earthly paradise often has other features, some of which Irving adopts or adapts: the landscape is situated on a high mountain (here it is "a little valley, or rather lap of land, among high hills"), there is a fountain (here the brook which seems to flow past every building in the valley), the west wind blows. In poems of the fourteenth century and later, the earthly paradise may be dangerous, the mountain may be in shadow, as Sleepy Hollow is. Giamatti describes a "beautiful- seeming earthly paradise where man's will is softened, his moral fiber unraveled, and his soul ensnared. It is the garden where insidious luxury and sensuous love overcome duty and true devotion."

The danger appears in a familiar form. Giamatti traces the idea of the danger to the fourteenthcentury Italian poet Petrarch, in whose *Triondo d'Amore* "a man is tempted to let down his guard, to succumb to the desire for security and female domination which the garden promises. Man is weakened in such a place . . . in the arms of the woman who animates the place." Ichabod lets down his guard—loses his head—in the same way. The narrator claims that "he would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman."

Irving's use of classical images and themes was not an accident of native talent and inspiration. He was adequately literate in several languages, and had read the important literature of Europe and the classical world. He was well acquainted with Sir Walter Scott, whose own novels and poems were based on legends and myths. As Daniel Hoffman argues in *Fame and Fable in American Fiction* (1973), Washington Irving was . . . something of an antiquary. His early *Knickerbocker's History of New York* reveals him to be enchanted with the very past he satirized. . . . Wherever Irving went he collected popular sayings and beliefs; he was prepossessed by a sense of the past, and recognized the power—and the usefulness to a creative artist— of popular antiquities."

Irving knew the value of calling up old images. By echoing the ancients he borrowed some of their power, and claimed for his story—even if in a mocking way—a place among them. By adapting European imagery to use American details, he showed in a form of shorthand that America had as much to offer as the Europeans, and more. In this, he was not alone. But he was one of the first, one of the reasons Giamatti can state that "American literature is constantly read as a record of the quest for happiness and innocence in the great unspoiled garden."

Source: Cynthia Bily, for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Plummer and Nelson maintain that the women in Sleepy Hollow maintain their power through the tales that they tell. The tales of the women retain their strength as men measure their strength by defeating the evils in the women's tales and the women's tale of the Headless Horseman is a means of removing the aggressive Ichabod Crane from the maternally controlled Sleepy Hollow.

Discussions of Washington Irving often concern gender and the artistic imagination, but these topics are usually mutually exclusive when associated with the two most enduring stories from the *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. (1819-20): "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Many readings of the former focus on gender, while discussions of the latter most often explore its conception of the artist's role in American society. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" does indeed address this second theme, but also complicates it by making art an issue of gender. Ichabod Crane is not only a representative of bustling, practical New England who threatens imaginatively fertile rural America with his prosaic acquisitiveness; he is also an intrusive male who threatens the stability of a decidedly female place. For Irving, the issue of art is sexually charged; in Sleepy Hollow, this tension finally becomes a conflict between male and female storytelling. A close look at the stories that circulate through the Dutch community shows that Ichabod's expulsion follows directly from women's cultivation of local folklore. Female-centered Sleepy Hollow, by means of tales revolving around the emasculated, headless "dominant spirit" of the region, figuratively neuters threatening masculine interlopers like Ichabod to ensure the continuance of the old Dutch domesticity, the Dutch wives' hearths, and their old wives' tales.

Although Irving often places the feminine in a pejorative light—the "feminine" in Ichabod is his unmanly, superstitious, trembling, and gullible side— he himself seems, in this tale, begrudgingly to acquiesce to the female sphere of Sleepy Hollow. And this sphere has none of the abrasiveness so blatant in "Rip Van Winkle." We have no shrewish wife, whose death in a "fit of passion" allows for Rip's carefree dotage upon his return to the village. Rather, we are left with a sense of relief at Ichabod's removal, at this snake's relegation to the mythology of the Hollow. Thus the tale presents a stark contrast to "Rip Van Winkle." In that story, women attempt and fail to confront men openly; in Sleepy Hollow, female behavior is much more subversive, and effective.

In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving's conservatism subverts itself, since conservation of the existing power structure means the continuance of a female (though certainly not feminist) hierarchy. Irving's tale is one of preservation, then, of maintenance of the feminine, and the landscape is the predominant female. Sleepy Hollow lies "in the bosom" of a cove lining the Hudson, the valley is "embosomed in the great state of New York," and the vegetating families of Sleepy Hollow are rooted in its "sheltered bosom." Clearly the repose and security of the place rest in the maternal landscape— an assumption so pervasive that even our male narrator attests to it. For as he observes, in this tale of a Dutch Eden even the adamic act of naming falls to women. "The good house-wives of the adjacent country, from the inveterate propensity

of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days," have named the nearby "rural port" "Tarry Town"; the name and the power of naming thus operate as a gently sardonic means of reproaching unruly husbands and of preserving female dominance over the valley.

The narrator is not simply an idle observer, however. He comes to the Hollow to hunt:

I recollect that when a stripling, my first exploit in squirrel shooting was in a grove of tall walnut trees that shades one side of the valley. I had wandered into it at noon time, when all nature is peculiarly quiet, and was startled by the roar of my own gun, as it broke the sabbath stillness around, and was prolonged and reverberated by the angry echoes. If ever I should wish for a retreat, whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know none more promising than this little valley.

The tale thus begins with a paradigm of masculine experience in the maternal bosom of Sleepy Hollow: an acquisitive, intrusive male both perpetuates female influence over the region and also acquiesces to constraints on male behavior. As the narrator remarks, the Hollow is his choice for "retreat" and security. But although the return to Sleepy Hollow is therefore a return to the womb, unfortunately, he is no longer welcome there.

For as he praises the soporific atmosphere of the Dutch valley, the narrator also admits it has repulsed him. It is clear that Mother Nature here produces a bower not to be disturbed by the masculine aggression of hunting, regardless of its tameness in the case of this "stripling." Hunting is not permitted, and trespassers will be startled into submission. Our gun-toting narrator is surprised not only by the roar of his own gun, his own masculine explosion into the place, but also by the sense that his behavior is inappropriate. This womb-like grove is for nurturing dream, not bloodsport; to be treated with respect due the sabbath, not rent asunder by blunderbuss ejaculations. Indeed, the "angry echoes" from the landscape suggest a rebellious reaction to such flagrant poaching. Indolent as the epigraph may make the place seem, Sleepy Hollow does not take kindly to intruders; hence the narrator is properly awed into acquiescence.

The youthful exploit of this opening scene is echoed by the actions of Ichabod and the Headless Horseman. For like the narrator, both Ichabod and "the dominant spirit" of Sleepy Hollow—"the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head"— are masculine, mercenary interlopers in this feminine place. The bony schoolmaster's desire to liquidate heiress Katrina Van Tassel's wealth, invest it "in immense tracts of wild land," and take Katrina from the Hollow mirrors both the narrator's childhood intrusion and the former Hessian trooper's attempt to win Sleepy Hollow for Royalist forces "in some nameless battle during the revolutionary war." They embody the essence of masculine imperialism: war, fortune hunting, and even squirrel hunting are all expressions of the same will to conquer. Gun, Hessian sword, or birch in hand, the narrator, the Horseman, and Ichabod all bear authority; and all three seek the spoils—political, material or sexual—of invading Sleepy Hollow.

Irving's bawdy imagery strongly suggests that all male intrusions in this female place are ultimately sexual. Ichabod, for example, is described in insistently phallic terms:

He had, however, a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance in his nature; he was in form and spirit like a supple jack—yielding, but tough; though he bent, he never broke; and though he bowed beneath the slightest pressure, yet, the moment it was away—jerk!—he was as erect, and carried his head as high as ever.

The pedagogue's "pliability and perseverance"— Ichabod is elsewhere accredited with possessing "the dilating powers of an Anaconda"— suggest that he will not be as easily scared or awed as the narrator. It will take more than just the roar of his gun to frighten this persistent "jack."

Storytelling is also a part of male imperialism. Of the numerous tales that circulate through Sleepy Hollow, those told by men concern their own fictionalized exploits. "The sager folks" at Van Tassel's farm sit "gossiping over former times, and drawling out long stories about the war"; "just sufficient time had elapsed to enable each storyteller to dress up his tale with a little becoming fiction, and in the indistinctness of his recollection, to make himself the hero of every exploit." These stories are designed to increase the teller's status in the minds of his listeners by linking him to the heroic, historic, and masculine past.

True to this male practice of self-aggrandizing storytelling, Ichabod regales his female companions with scientific "speculations upon comets and shooting stars, and with the alarming fact that the world did absolutely turn round, and that they were half the time topsy-turvy!" Though fantastic in themselves, these stories are to Ichabod the height of learning and scholarly achievement. Even his tales of the supernatural show him as "a perfect master of Cotton Mather's History of New England Witchcraft." Ichabod's familiarity with the subject attests to his book learning and his reliance on the great masters of American thought, not to his understanding of folklore. Boastfully displaying his knowledge of worldly matters, this "travelling gazette" brings word of the "restless country" of "incessant change" outside Sleepy Hollow. Part of the pioneer's repertoire, carried from town to town, his stories are meant to recommend him to each new audience by proving his erudition.

While male storytelling is a part of the will to compete and conquer, storytelling for the women of Sleepy Hollow moves beyond self-image to counter that male will. The "witching power" the narrator fails to define fully is a female influence that gently molds the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow through the folklore that emanates from that exclusively female, domestic province, the hearth:

Another of [Ichabod's] sources of fearful pleasure was, to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning by the fire, with a row of apples roasting and sputtering along the hearth, and listen to their marvellous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted fields and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges and haunted houses, and particularly of the headless horseman, or galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him.

Spinning, cooking, and spinning tales are simultaneous acts; the convergence of folklore and the domestic imbues everyday events with the supernatural.

The effectiveness of this domestication of the supernatural is clear from the extent to which folklore affects local inhabitants' behavior. At the tale's close, the bridge where the Horseman confronted Ichabod is no longer used, the schoolhouse is abandoned, and Ichabod's "magic books" have been burned in Hans Van Ripper's censorial flames; the community has accepted that the spirit world is larger than themselves, that despite their boasts and challenges, the lore of the place is still supreme and affects nearly every facet of their lives.

Perhaps the most convincing proof of the pervasiveness of female influence in Sleepy Hollow is that all the men have set themselves to challenging it. Accordingly, the narrator not only concedes the connection between women and spirits, but he also establishes women as the greatest source of fear for men:

[Ichabod] would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the Devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man, than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman.

Although this passage is supposed to be humorous, it nonetheless reveals Irving's characteristic misogyny and the male fear of disempowerment played out again and again throughout the tale. In contrast to Rip Van Winkle, however, the Hollow men displace this fear from women to characters of folklore. It is a misunderstanding that, as in the case of Ichabod, ensures men's continued thraldom.

Given the misogynistic bent of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," it is not surprising that despite the tale's narrative complexity, Irving suppresses actual female speech; in fact, the only narratives directly or indirectly related are spoken by men. This conspicuous absence of female narration underscores the way in which males both fear and resist the feminine. Thus, the narrator is at a loss to relate what Katrina says to Ichabod in their tete-a-tete after the frolic: "What passed at this interview I will not pretend to say, for in fact I do not know." The war stories told at the Van Tassel frolic, like the narrative as a whole, are told by men. And it is Sleepy Hollow *men* who tell ghost stories at the frolic. Tales from the female sphere must be validated by male retelling. That is, the story of the Headless Horseman originates in a tradition kept by women; storytelling sessions with women make Ichabod susceptible to local superstition; but men first reinforce, and then—as we shall see in the confrontation between Ichabod and Brom Bones— capitalize on the fears and superstitions engendered by women.

The ultimate irony concerning gender and storytelling, then, is that the very female stories males debunk influence their lives, often through their own telling of them. The men who continually joust fictionally with the Headless Horseman not only inflate their prowess, but also repeatedly confront in narrative the threatening world formed, unbeknownst to them, by the alliance of female and spirit. Fighting mock battles in which they defeat what they mistakenly consider their greatest adversary, men actually

strengthen the female hold on the community by reinforcing and perpetuating the narratives through which women maintain order.

Indeed, Brom Bones and Ichabod provide an example of males literally enacting these stories. In his role as the Headless Horseman, by means of which he intends to humiliate his rival, Brom unwittingly serves as the means to achieve the goal of the female community: the removal of Ichabod and himself as threats to Sleepy Hollow's quietude. Posing as the Headless Horseman of legend, Brom plays upon Ichabod's superstition and credulity to eliminate his opponent. And it is Ichabod's association of legend and place, engendered in his mind by the female-controlled mythology, that proves his undoing. Riding home alone from the Van Tassel farm at "the very witching time of night," "all the stories of ghosts and goblins that he had heard in the afternoon, now came crowding upon his recollection"; "he was, moreover, approaching the very place where many of the scenes of the ghost stories had been laid." Thus Brom Bones has at his disposal a carefully scripted and blocked drama with which to exploit Ichabod's credulity and superstitious fear.

The phallic language of this passage reiterates Ichabod's sexual threat and clearly indicates that the gullible pedagogue is essentially neutralized or neutered by figurative castration. Bones, masquerading as the Headless Horseman, appears as "something huge, misshapen, black and towering" "like some gigantic monster," while Ichabod flees in terror from the apparition "stretch[ing] his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight." Indeed, in this drama of competing masculinity, Ichabod's fear is of dismemberment. Ichabod, "unskilful rider that he was!" has trouble staying on his mount, slipping and bouncing from one side to the other "with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder." Ichabod's fear is nearly realized when Brom hurls his pumpkin/ head at the schoolmaster, "tumbl[ing him] headlong into the dust."

Brom Bones triumphs in this phallic contest of horsemanship and sexual potency—Ichabod is never seen in Sleepy Hollow again—but ironically this ejaculatory coup de grace effects his own emasculation. His impersonation of the Horseman prefigures his domestication: donning the garb of the dismembered spirit, and ultimately throwing away his head, Brom insures that his days as a "roaring, roystering blade" are numbered. The ultimate beneficiary of Brom's midnight prank is the Dutch community itself, the maintenance of whose dreamy repose and domestic harmony is the province of women.

The altercation between Brom and Ichabod and its inevitable outcome meet with tacit approval from the female sphere. Brom Bones, the "hero of the country round" with "more mischief than ill will in his composition," appears not to share the schoolmaster's desire to take Katrina and her wealth out of the Dutch community. Since marriage is a most soporific state for the men of Sleepy Hollow, it is more than likely that Brom, who "had for some time singled out the blooming Katrina for the object of his uncouth gallantries," will soon become as content and domesticated, and as plump and vegetable- like, as Katrina's father. Accordingly, there are no "angry echoes" to greet Brom's adventures; indeed, "the old dames" of the country, content with merely remarking "aye, there goes Brom Bones and his gang," indulge him in his revels and

pranks. For Brom Bones would be a threat to Sleepy Hollow only if Ichabod should succeed in his suit, thus extending Brom's bachelorhood indefinitely (and enabling Ichabod to make off with the Van Tassel fortune).

Ichabod's expulsion from Sleepy Hollow, then, results from subtle manipulation of local folklore by women. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" thus provides a foil to the open male-female confrontation of "Rip Van Winkle"; the story is a darker, more paranoid vision of female power. Indeed, the narrative frame shows the lengths to which men go to find plausible alternatives to the female version of Ichabod's disappearance, which relegates him to the cosmos:

The old country wives, however, who are the best judges of these matters, maintain to this day, that Ichabod was spirited away by supernatural means; and it is a favourite story often told about the neighborhood round the evening fire.

The male account asserts that Ichabod

had changed his quarters to a distant part of the country; had kept school and studied law at the same time; had been admitted to the bar, turned politician, electioneered, written for the newspapers, and finally had been made a Justice of the Ten Pound Court.

This version translates the jerky young man into the self-reliant American jack-of-all-trades and self-made success. Yet this story is also an import; it arrives via "an old farmer, who had been down to New York on a visit several years after." The ending is brought into Sleepy Hollow from New York, and by a man; it dismisses the supernatural perspective with a very plausible account of Ichabod's fear and mortification as impetus for his speedy removal, and places Ichabod in a respected occupation.

In similar fashion, Diedrich Knickerbocker attempts in the tale's postscript to lend credibility—a factual backbone—to his story, by placing it within a masculine sphere:

The preceding Tale is given, almost in the precise words in which I heard it related at a corporation meeting of the ancient city of Manhattoes, at which were present many of its sagest and most illustrious burghers.

These wise old men are intended to lend credence and authority to a story that operates on a plane beyond that of burghers and business meetings. And, as Knickerbocker relies upon the authority of "precise words," we are reminded of the narrator's having told us early in the narrative that his aim is to be "precise and authentic." Something there is in these male storytellers that doesn't love a ghost.

The narrator's sardonic comment that "the old country wives . . . are the best judges of these matters" is clue enough to a rather disparaging attitude; resenting the authority of women is nothing new to Irving's fiction. Yet this remark does not alter the fact that the community listens to the women's stories. And this particular one is a favorite in Sleepy Hollow because it both warns and neutralizes threatening males. Ichabod becomes the

community's most recent lesson by example, the shivering victim of his own acquisitive fantasies and proof positive of the truth of legend.

The postscript to the tale reiterates the gender conflict present in the story proper and the narrative frame. Diedrich Knickerbocker focuses on the confrontation between the narrator and a cynical listener that ends in the narrator's parodic syllogism and his ambiguous admission concerning his story that "I don't believe one half of it myself." Their verbal jousting is reminiscent of Brom's and Ichabod's own rivalry. And Diedrich Knickerbocker's description of the narrator is most telling: he is "one whom I strongly suspected of being poor, he made such efforts to be entertaining." This, too, allies the narrator with Ichabod and the men of the Dutch community; his performance stands as a final example of male self-aggrandizing storytelling. Indeed, the tale proper becomes the object of male desire and competition; it is the game our youthful narrator has waited the length of a "troubled life" to carry off. In turn, Diedrich Knickerbocker the antiquarian, and Geoffrey Crayon the sketch writer, extend this instance of storytelling as appropriation to fill the entire frame of the tale: its inclusion in *The Sketch Book*. The presence of gender as a central conflict is further buried under layers and layers of male acquisitiveness and competition.

But in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," stories, like wealth and game, are not exportable. It is the association of lore and place, of supernatural and practical, that gives the legend of the Headless Horseman its power and efficacy in controlling males within the Dutch community; the very title of the sketch reinforces the primacy of place in storytelling. Like the Horseman himself, the tale is powerless outside a circumscribed area. The ability to tell it in New York, where its supernatural elements are so easily debunked, attests not to the power of the male storyteller who does the debunking— as the postscript would have us believe—but to the element of female storytelling in Sleepy Hollow that insures the success of the female order: its subtle, self-effacing nature. Diffused throughout the folklore and the practical, everyday world of a particular place, the source of power in the Hollow— women—is disguised, making belief in the supernatural a matter of course, not compulsion. When the tale is told outside this female-controlled landscape of the naturalized supernatural, the effectiveness of the story dissolves, leaving only a Hollow husk.

Source: Laura Plummer and Michael Nelson, "'Girls can take care of themselves': Gender and Storytelling in Washington Irving's 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,'" in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 30, 1993, pp. 175-84.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, von Frank explores the various aspects of the evil in Ichabod Crane's personality and actions that necessitates Ichabod's eventual expulsion from the community.

Washington Irving's reputation as a genial writer— as, indeed, America's *most* genial writer—has been firmly established for a century and a half, despite general agreement that his most enduring works are satires. *Knickerbocker's History* maintains its good humor largely by making its narrator appear foolish, but it is harder to say what keeps "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" from seemingly overtly caustic, since in the portrait of Ichabod Crane Irving comes rather closer than in the *History* to adopting the controlling assumption of Augustan satire that the ridiculous and the evil are one. If Irving's genial reputation largely obscures the evil that Ichabod represents, it must also obscure the mythical structure of the story and, consequently, its formal relationship to such later works as "Young Goodman Brown," "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," and a score of others. That Ichabod is evil needs all the more to be said since several modern readings of the story have made impressive moral claims on his behalf, or, alternatively, have transformed him into a pathetic hero, a figure more sinned against than sinning. One urges that he be taken "seriously as a symbol of man's higher aspirations," while another proclaims that "what he wants is simply a home, like anyone else." Even those who regard Ichabod as a threat to the Dutch community differ signifi- cantly in assessing the nature and seriousness of the problem he presents.

As Donald Ringe pointed out in 1967, the story is a work of regional satire, pitting Dutch New York against the restless spirit of New England; it is a story that "pleads in effect for the values of the settler and conserver over those of the speculator and improver." Irving's satire, however, works most significantly not at the sociological or political level, but—as all permanently valuable satire does— at the level of the underlying moral issues. The success of the satirical method in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" lies in Irving's ability to see the familiar Yankee character as only superficially comic while at the same time discretely ventilating the deeper moral disease of which that comedy is the not quite independently conceived mask. The complexity of tone arising from such a polarized treatment may be traced more specifically to the two uses that Irving makes of the setting. The world of the New York Dutch is something more and other than an ethnic region realistically sketched; it is, indeed, a mythically conceived community, unfallen and changeless, a place of perfect ripeness. Irving establishes the setting in precisely this light and locates Ichabod's mock-heroic chivalry in the most incongruous of all possible contexts, while at the same time raising that portentous central issue of American literature, the moral spoliation of the New World garden. Inasmuch as both the serious and the comic themes converge on the setting, Irving has made the recovery of *its* meaning a precondition for any interpretation.

The setting is not a frontier. Although Daniel Hoffman has persuasively argued that the portrait of Brom Bones owes a great deal to the type of the "ring-tailed roarer," it is not a point with which one can do much more than Hoffman himself has done. Irving indicates

that Sleepy Hollow is in most ways the precise reverse of a frontier. Not only has it long been a settled region (a rural one, to be sure), but it is also emphatically a European community with European values. Those forces which on the frontier operate to break down imported cultures—like the rest of the "incessant changes" that Irving abhors—are outside, beyond the "high hills," and simply do not function in "such little retired Dutch valleys, found here and there embosomed in the great state of New York," where "population, manners, and customs, remain fixed." The true American frontier figures but once in the story and then only by way of the sharpest contrast with the Hudson Valley setting: knowing no more than Milton's Satan "to value right / The good before him," Ichabod proposes to exchange the "middle landscape" of the Van Tassel patrimony for a tract of wild land in "Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where."

If the setting is not part of the frontier, it is a version of the American pastoral as Leo Marx has defined it, though ironically the distinction of Irving's version is that his innocent shepherds are all Europeans. They figure in this magic landscape as the stewards of their own abundant fruitfulness, which fertility takes on a sacramental character in the description of Baltus Van Tassel's farm, where architecture and institutions melt imperceptibly into the activity of farming, and that into a humanized version of the natural order, all under the benediction of an approving sun:

Hard by the farm house was a vast barn, that might have served for a church; every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm; the flail was busily resounding within it from morning to night; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves, and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof.

This sequestered community is more than home to a company of Dutch farmers; in its sheltered resistance to change, its ungrudging fruitfulness, its feminine character, and, ultimately, its vulnerability, it is the fully elaborated symbol of home as a romantic moral concept.

Like other ideal settings, the larger Dutch community, Sleepy Hollow, and the Van Tassel farm are enclosed gardens, here concentrically framed, inviting, seductive, and as dangerous to itinerants as the island of the Sirens or the land of the Lotos-Eaters. The societies sheltered by these nested gardens are themselves closed and static (again, unlike the frontier), yet magically productive. Following pastoral convention, Irving describes the land in eminently hospitable feminine imagery, indicating in the first sentence that "in the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson" lies the community named Tarry Town by the women of the region. Two miles away is the smaller village of Sleepy Hollow, likened to a "mimic harbour, undisturbed by the passing current," where one might find even yet "the same families vegetating in its sheltered bosom" In the description of the Van Tassel farm these genderspecific topological features recur: it "was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling." Each specific location is a repetition of the others; each involves the feminine

principle, repose, and water, so the "small brook" that glides through Sleepy Hollow "with just murmur enough to lull one to repose" is made to well up on Van Tassel's quiet Xanadu as "a spring of the softest water" that bubbled along "among alders and dwarf willows."

Whatever significance may finally attach to the dandy-and-squatter form of Ichabod's conflict with Brom Bones, the moral satire surely depends on seeing Sleepy Hollow less as the frontier setting of a memorable joke than as Irving's romantic notion of any man's true home. The tone of the story is at all points favorable to the settled and home-loving Dutch; it supports their sense of tradition, their security, their relation to the land, their repose and plenitude, and, most of all, their imagination, while the interloper, Ichabod, is point for point the destructive antithesis of all these traits.

Since the issue of the imagination has appeared to some to support a sympathetic view of Ichabod Crane, and since Irving himself indicates that Sleepy Hollow is an active abettor of the imagination, it is important to see how Irving discriminates between Ichabod and the Dutch on this point. "It is remarkable," writes Irving, "that the visionary propensity I have mentioned is not confined to the native inhabitants of the valley, but is unconsciously imbibed by every one who resides there for a time. However wide awake they may have been before they entered that sleepy region, they are sure, in a little time, to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to grow imaginative—to dream dreams, and see apparition." As an Arcadian environment, Sleepy Hollow is necessarily a source of inspiration, and yet those who dream under its influence do so according to their personalities and capacities. The genuinely inspired acts of imagination all belong to the Dutch: to Brom Bones most conspicuously, the Pan by whom Ichabod is panicked, and a poet not of words, certainly, but of virtuous action; to Yost Van Houten, the inspired architect of the schoolhouse locking system, modelled on "the mystery of the eelpot," whereby, "though a thief might get in with perfect ease, he would find some embarrassment in getting out"; or to Baltus Van Tassel, who monitors Ichabod's quixotic courtship of his daughter by recognizing and observing its appropriate symbol, that is, by "watching the achievements of a little wooden warrior, who, armed with a sword in each hand, was most valiantly fighting the wind on the pinnacle of the barn." Ichabod's imagination is a truly sorry thing in contrast, compounded, at worst, of Cotton Mather and simple credulity, and never, at its best, escaping the small shrewdness of his New England heritage. In his vision of the Van Tassel farm all its teeming life lies dead, served up as food for him alone, so that Irving's early description of Ichabod as "the genius of famine" comes finally to have a profounder point of reference than his gaunt and awkward appearance. He can easily imagine sacrificing all life to his own; the business of the story, however, is to force him to imagine his own death and ultimately to make that imagination feed and sustain the life of the community.

Nowhere is the difference between the Dutch imagination and Ichabod's more evident than in their respective superstitions. As the allusions to Cotton Mather suggest, Ichabod's superstitiousness is the vestige of a decadent Puritanism from which God and glory have departed equally. The schoolmaster is thus left with a system of infernal providences in which all of nature is supposed to have the power—even the purpose—of doing harm to Ichabod Crane. Never wholly secure, he is especially skittish after dark

when "every sound of nature . . . fluttered his excited imagination: the moan of the whip-poor-will from the hill side; the boding cry of the tree toad, that harbinger of storm; . . . or the sudden rustling in the thicket, of birds frightened from their roost." Ichabod is so radically disjoined from his environment that he and the natural world are fated enemies: nature frightens him, but, by the same token, he can and does frighten it. Put another way, the presence of death that he senses in nature, nature senses in him.

This development of the protagonist's character reveals an important aspect of Irving's method, because the frightening of the birds recalls the introduction of Ichabod as in appearance like a "scarecrow eloped from a cornfield" in a way that decisively alters its original comic application, just as the imagined devastation of the farm's teeming life recalled and deepened the earlier reference to Ichabod as the "genius of famine." The thematic aptness of Irving's humor becomes increasingly apparent as this kind of transformation is several times repeated: the comic details are simply funny when first seen undeveloped or apart from a larger social or moral context (which is to say, from Ichabod's perspective); but when Irving then replants them in a more coherent universe (when he provides them, in effect, some of the morally settled quality of the Dutch perspective), the regional comedy darkens into moral satire.

It is, of course, the basic coherence of the Dutch imagination that prevents their very pronounced superstitiousness from having anything monstrous about it. They are on the best of terms with their ghosts, who are, like themselves and unlike Ichabod, intimately attached to life and the local scene. The Dutch women tell of "haunted fields and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges and haunted houses"; the men tell of "funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major Andre was taken" or "of the woman in white, that haunted the dark glen at Raven Rock." These manifestations are, in the way of folk mythology, so localized, so much a part of familiar nature, that to apply the term "supernatural" to them seems almost inappropriate. They tell of unexpected life in the landscape, not of death or threats of death. The Dutch, moreover, tell these tales artistically, neither as first-hand accounts nor as "extracts" from books, as Ichabod does, but as still living legends. The sole exception is Brom Bones' account of his match with the Headless Horseman, a tale combining a youthful irreverence for the mythology of his elders with a point that not even the supernatural is to be dreaded. Generically, the Dutch tales are poles apart from Ichabod's monstrous and unfriendly indication to his female hosts of the "fact that the world did absolutely turn round, and that they were half the time topsyturvy!"

These unsettled and unsettling traits in Ichabod are manifestly related to, and yet go deeper than, the New England character that on one level is the object of Irving's regional satire. Not content merely to display and ridicule the social behavior of the type, Irving probes the character of his Yankee to give the most basic kinds of moral explanations for the comic inappropriateness of his outward actions. The nature of these explanations is determined by the structure of the story, which involves the penetration of an outsider into the very heart of an earthly paradise. Seen in this light, Ichabod's unsettling traits seem less significantly those of an awkwardly displaced regional character or even of a sinful individual than, at last, those of sin itself. Indeed,

the characterizing details of the story seem clustered around the seven deadly sins, even though it is not certain that Irving consciously meant it to appear so.

Ichabod's envy is indicated in one way by his "large green glassy eyes" which are mentioned first as a part of a ludicrous physical description and then again with the moral implications more fully in evidence. His envy is indicated in another way, of course, in his whole attitude toward the domain of Van Tassel:

As the enraptured Ichabod . . . rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchard burthened with ruddy fruit, which surrounded the warm tenement of Van Tassel, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness."

This is not envy in the simple sense of wanting to own what others own but accords rather with the classic conception of the sin of envy in which, perversely, one seeks the annihilation of the object. The type of this sin is Satan's envy of the kingdom of God: he cannot hope to share in it, and so commits himself to its destruction. While it might be argued that merely *selling* the land would not destroy it, surely the point about these Dutch farms is that they never *have* been sold, never have had a "market value" or been held by strangers, and that what they represent would be forever lost if any of these conditions were to come to pass. Insidious as this threat is, however, it does not involve a passion that the Dutch, as the owners of the land, can directly be tainted with. In this sense, it is rather more disturbing that Ichabod has introduced envy in an altogether different way to people who seem never to have felt it before. While the schoolmaster escorts the village damsels about the churchyard on Sundays, "the more bashful country bumpkins hung sheepishly back, envying his superior elegance and address."

Ichabod's avarice is the concomitant of his envy and has already been suggested in the way his imagination is so casually dominated by the cash nexus. His plans for the Van Tassel-Crane estate show that he is interested not in the good life but in the immoderately wealthy life, which, for Ichabod, is the fiscal equivalent of never settling down. His "immense tracts" of frontier are for speculation, not for living on or farming, and reflect a characteristic desire that his wealth should come without labor.

Sloth ought to be a sin difficult to attain in this paradise, and yet Ichabod aspires even here. Aside from being a "flogger of urchins," he earns his bread not so much by the sweat of his brow as by assisting the Dutch "occasionally in the lighter labours of their farms." These labors comprise the sort of tasks then commonly assigned to women and children and include taking the horses to water and making hay. Even these he manages largely to avoid by becoming "wonderfully gentle and ingratiating" with the women: "He found favour in the eyes of the mothers, by petting the children, particularly the youngest, and like the lion bold, which whilome so magnanimously the lamb did hold, he would sit with a child on one knee, and rock a cradle with his foot, for whole hours together." Ichabod's almost systematic avoidance of productive labor is depicted

mainly through his alliance with female society and through his adoption of the least consequential of the activities traditionally associated with women. Thus, for example, he is a major source of gossip in the community and would also "pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning by the fire, . . . and listen to their marvellous tales." However, his masculinity is most directly challenged by his being a "man of letters" in a community of farmers, where to work is perforce to have something to show for one's work. The women can appreciate his erudition, "for he had read several books quite through," though he was "thought, by all who understood nothing of the labour of headwork, to have a wonderfully easy life of it." It is a moral comment on Ichabod that a variety of his traits, including his problematic relationship to the world of work, divides a fundamentally coherent Dutch community along gender lines.

The subject of sloth appears to have been a complex and perhaps even a sensitive one for Irving, who, in the persona of Geoffrey Crayon, maintained a vested interest in the innocence of repose. The epigraph from Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, a poem that successively celebrates the pleasures and indicts the decadence of indolence, contributes to the complexity of the issue by seeming to oblige the author to discriminate carefully in moral terms between the sloth he is condemning and the repose to which he is temperamentally and artistically committed. The distinction turns out, once again, to favor the Dutch, who never, throughout the course of the story, are shown at work. In the Van Tassel barn, "the flail was busily resounding . . . from morning to night," but workers neither work nor appear. The repose of the Dutch is simply prelapsarian, which means that they have, as the schoolteacher does not, something vital on which they can repose. Ichabod, who is shown working, who puts in his time at the schoolroom and performs his odd job, is nevertheless constantly preoccupied with schemes for rescinding the penalty of original sin in his own personal case, which is a large part of what Yankee ingenuity comes to in Irving's satire.

This fundamental difference parallels and at the same time further explains the qualitative distinction between the Dutch imagination and Ichabod's, the one effortless, natural, and supremely located, the other artificial, self-indulgent, and frenetic. From another point of view, Irving clearly had professional reasons for raising this issue, for if he was less personally concerned than Nathaniel Hawthorne with the public's perception of the value of the writer's vocation, he nevertheless knew that literature and scholarship in America were not always held in high esteem, that, indeed, they were often associated with idleness and self-indulgence. By creating in Ichabod a slothful character at whom such charges might be levelled with perfect justice, he shows that they are most appropriately brought against the poseur, the man of self-deluding pretensions to literature, and not against the true writer (or artist) at all. And by creating in his Dutch characters an imagination rooted in innocent, even blessed repose, he affirms the value and explains the virtue of his own art.

If, in Eden, sloth is difficult, gluttony is simply ungrateful. It suggests a certain doubt as to the extent and continuance of divine providence, and, as Irving shows, leads to envy:

[Ichabod] was a kind and thankful creature, whose heart dilated in proportion as his skin was filled with good cheer, and whose spirits rose with eating, as some men's do with

drink. He could not help, too, rolling his large eyes round him as he ate, and chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable splendour.

Despite the narrator's gentlemanly imputation of thankfulness, the apparent fact is that Ichabod, having found heaven, aspires to be, not thank, its "lord." The appetite that prompts him is the sinister elaboration of the early, comic observation that "he was a huge feeder . . . though lank," while the transition from the physical fact to its spiritual implication has been prepared by Irving's intermediate use of the imagery of gluttony to describe Ichabod's mental processes. He is an intellectual gourmand: "His appetite for the marvellous, and his powers of digesting it, were equally extraordinary. . . . No tale was too gross or monstrous for his capacious swallow." After he is introduced to Katrina, it is, as the narrator says, "not to be wondered at, that so tempting a morsel soon found favour in his eyes," or that "his devouring mind's eye" could transform at a glance all the farm's life to food. If Ichabod's imagination is thwarted and traversed by his sloth, it operates ineluctably in service to his belly. Even as he goes for his last interview with Katrina, he is "feeding his mind with many sweet thoughts and sugared suppositions."

There are three moments in the story that shed light on Ichabod's tendency to the sin of anger, and they appear to form, as in the case of his gluttony, a pattern of deepening seriousness. His willingness to flog his students, and particularly the stronger, more threatening children, is consistent with his personal insecurity and impatience with "inferiors." Beneath the artfully dispassionate surface of his behavior ("this he called 'doing his duty by their parents,'" the anger is, though visible, well submerged and controlled, so much so that Irving is content merely to hint at it and at the same time to warn his readers against concluding too quickly that Ichabod is "one of those cruel potentates of the school, who joy in the smart of their subjects." That Ichabod takes no "joy" in it is sufficiently easy to believe. The second moment occurs at the Van Tassel farm where Ichabod, flush with food, contemplates the possibility of being "lord of all this scene." Here the surface parts to reveal how he contends emotionally with the prospect of success: "Then, he thought, how soon he'd turn his back upon the old school house, snap his fingers in the face of Hans Van Ripper, and every other niggardly patron, and kick any itinerant pedagogue out of doors that should dare to call him comrade!" With perfect ironic aptness, his idea of success involves becoming the niggardly patron he despises, but the more important point is that his greatest wrath is reserved for his own alter ego. This mounting sense of anger when he ought to be most satisfied and placid is concisely indicated in the succession of verbs, which points ultimately to the self-hatred at the heart of the sin of anger. In the third and final moment, Ichabod's social controls, along with his great expectations, collapse at the end of the party in his private interview with Katrina. Here the surface parts in a different way: "Without looking to the right or left to notice the scene of rural wealth, on which he had so often gloated, he went straight to the stable, and with several hearty cuffs and kicks, roused his steed most uncourteously from the comfortable quarters in which he was soundly sleeping, dreaming of mountains of corn and oats, and whole valleys of timothy and clover." The horse, sharing Ichabod's physical traits and innermost dreams, is another alter ego, though now the kicking has become actual.

In the sentence describing this outburst of passion, much of the humor centers on the word "uncourteously," which signals the whole issue of the ill-starred lover's chivalric self-image. The narrator's sarcastic allusion is to the ruins of what had been, from the start, the preposterous vehicle of Ichabod's conscious pride: his assumption that he was a bit too good for a community of bumpkins. In point of pride, he is the opposite of Baltus Van Tassel, who is "satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it." Unlike the man he seeks to supplant, he is eager to misapply the social leverage of his prospective good fortune by—class-consciously— kicking itinerant pedagogues out of doors. But in perhaps the most telling revelation of all, Ichabod's pride appears at odds not with individuals but with sacred and communal values: "It was a matter of no little vanity to him to take his station in front of the church gallery, with a band of chosen singers; where, in his own mind, he completely carried away the palm from the parson." Appropriately, the profane Ichabod, the supercilious critic of the churchyard epitaphs, is avowedly the parson's self-anointed antagonist.

The treatment of lechery in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is understandably circumspect, and yet it is very close to the effective center of the satire. The fact that Ichabod is a portrait of perverse and misdirected sexuality is arguably the author's final comment on his representative Yankee. Here Irving supplies two general contexts for Ichabod's behavior: one is the fertile feminine land that the schoolmaster threateningly lusts after, and the other is the prevailing sexuality of the Dutch, which is, for the most part, no sexuality at all. These are "general contexts" mainly in the sense that while they are rather inertly present all the while, they take on a heightened significance in conjunction with more particular details. For example, the first of these contexts is quickened when, on several occasions, Irving intimates that nothing is easier for Ichabod than to divert his sexual appetite into an appetite for food. After school he would sometimes follow students home "who happened to have pretty sisters, or good housewives for mothers, noted for the comforts of the cupboard." The change in the direction of this sentence, as the rest of the story goes to show, suggests a transformation rather than a competition of motives. By constantly pairing women and food in this metonymic way as objects of Ichabod's attention, Irving seems to imply that the gluttony is merely displaced lechery, and not, because food seems always to take precedence, that he is without lust.

Irving's favorite phallic symbols—on which so much of his early bawdy humor centers— are guns, swords, and noses. In "Rip Van Winkle" there is the "clean well oiled fowling piece" that in twenty years of disuse became rusty and dysfunctional; there is, too, among the men of Hendrick Hudson's crew playing at the masculine game of nine-pins, one whose face "seemed to consist entirely of nose, . . . surmounted by a white sugarloaf hat, set off with a little red cock's tail." This individual is singled out by the narrator from a group who carried "long knives in their belts" and of whom "most . . . had enormous breeches." The commander of this crew is further distinguished by having a "broad belt and hanger." In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" the "long snipe nose . . . that . . . looked like a weathercock" belongs to Ichabod, and Irving is even prepared to suggest, more directly than he ordinarily does, that this nose is a kind of reproductive organ: "There are peculiar quavers still to be heard in that church, and which may even be heard half a mile off, quite to the opposite side of the mill pond, of a still Sunday

morning, which are said to be legitimately descended from the nose of Ichabod Crane." The final image in the story —that of a loitering ploughboy hearing these notes "among the tranquil solitudes of Sleepy Hollow"—seems in turn to allude to one of the very first images, that of the narrator breaking "the sabbath stillness around" by the startling "roar of [his] own gun," so that the story is framed by mutually defining instances of intrusion in which the virgin stillness of this enchanted feminine ground is symbolically violated by a foreign sexuality.

Another set of three images seems to work in much the same way, though it sheds a rather different light on the theme of Ichabod's lubricity. The transformation of the schoolhouse by the Dutch into an elaborate eelpot implicitly but quite directly casts Ichabod in the role of the eel. As though to underscore this impression, Irving shortly thereafter asserts, in one of the more surprising metaphors of the story, that Ichabod "had the dilating powers of an Anaconda." The effect of Irving's likening his protagonist to an eel becomes fully apparent only later, at the Van Tassels' harvest festival, where "the sons [appeared] in short square coats with rows of stupendous brass buttons, and their hair generally queued in the fashion of the times, especially if they could procure an eel skin for the purpose, it being esteemed throughout the country as a potent nourisher and strengthener of the hair." The schoolhouse, then, is explicitly an eel-trap constructed by a community that values eels as a source of male sexual potency. Apart from this connection, it is difficult to see why either detail should be in the story. Read, thus connected, in the general context of the prevailing Dutch sexuality— that is, in the division of the Dutch characters into menopausal and pre-pubescent groups—it becomes necessary to look upon Ichabod as, in a manner of speaking, the serpentine source of sex in paradise or as the necessarily extrinsic agent, procured by Yost Van Houten in the name of Dutch folk wisdom, to help Brom Bones over the portal of maturity. In this event, Katrina's coquettishness takes its place as a single element in a much larger ritual, one that manages to include the whole community.

The husband-to-be is near to the point of escaping the socially useless boy-culture of "Brom Bones and his gang," but so long as his "amorous toyings" continue to be "like the caresses and endearments of a bear" he will clearly never pass muster with the blooming Katrina. His rite of passage, as it turns out, involves more than the simple conquest of a rival. It involves him in the first socially useful act of his life, his first act as a member of the whole community. The expulsion of Ichabod simply is the defense of that whole community from moral taint and eventual destruction, while, considered in relation to the marriage that ensues—the marriage that, indeed, it makes possible—it is the rejection or expulsion of "Yankee sexuality," of the perverse and aggressive lust of one who "in form and spirit [was] like a supple jack—yielding, but tough: though he bent, he never broke; and though he bowed beneath the slightest pressure, yet, the moment it was away—jerk! he was as erect, and carried his head as high as ever." It is to break *this*, once and for all, that the "Headless Hessian" at long last carries *his* head high, and, in the event, so frightens the hard-riding Ichabod as nearly to bring off the latter's castration "on the high ridge of his horse's back bone." Irving, though, is mercifully content with the symbolic castration of a blow to the "cranium," which is, appropriately yet problematically, the real seat of Crane's lechery.

To read "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in this way is to see its formal relation to an important sub-genre of American fiction that Roy Male, in defining it, called "the Mysterious Stranger story."

This form is

an inside narrative with an enclosed structure; its plot and characterization consist of the effect of a semisupernatural and usually ambiguous stranger upon a crowd, a family, or an individual; its theme tends to center around faith and the contagiousness of good, or distrust and the contagiousness of evil and violence. . . . The trickster-god appears unexpectedly, usually in disguise, tests or transforms a mortal, and disappears.

In Irving's Mysterious Stranger story all the elements are present, and yet, perhaps because he was more interested in the conflict than in its resolution and sequel, perhaps because he lacked the deeper ironic intelligence—certainly, in any event, because he made his devil too much the fool—Irving evades some central implications of the form, or, more particularly, has no use for the issue of "the contagiousness of evil and violence" that the structure of such a story raises. So far as the community is concerned, Ichabod is simply absorbed into the local mythology as the morally neutralized spectre that haunts the decaying schoolhouse. Death is absorbed into life. In a realm of such enchantment, there is no clear sign that Ichabod will have a lasting subversive effect on Sleepy Hollow or that anything serious will follow from the necessity that he himself created of expelling him by devious and forceful means. And if in the end there is no lurking worm of guilt, no paradise quite lost, yet it is to be remembered that Irving is attacking, not defending, the Puritan possibilities. Were he to insist that the expulsion of Ichabod is reflexively corrupting, it would be tantamount to giving the demonic mythology of New England precedence over the benign mythology of the Dutch. By refusing to give the devil his due, Irving in effect chooses to stress the preserving innocence which the recollection of home, safe from betrayal or violation, inveterately has in the memory.

Still, fictional forms have a force and a meaning of their own, built up of the uses to which they have previously been put by other writers. For this reason at least, Irving cannot quite escape the implication that Ichabod has forever changed Sleepy Hollow. Of the sorts of falls that such an agent as he might induce, consistent with Irving's fondness for his Dutch characters, there is the sort of pillow-soft, post-Miltonic fall of Brom, who, encountering evil without accepting it, passes from innocence to a knowledge of virtuous action and in the process gains his manhood. All that is shown of his life after marriage is that he would "look exceedingly knowingly whenever the story of Ichabod was related," and that some were led to "suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell," a sort of deviousness which, harmless enough in appearance, is certainly no longer an Arcadian simplicity.

Another kind of fall is suggested by the whole retrospective, memorial tone of the narration, augmented, perhaps, by a knowledge of the historic fate of these Dutch communities. The story is set in the past, but the wistfully receding perspective in which it is presented is a function mainly of the layered narration, a device which, as Irving

handles it, tells its own story of declining prosperity and increasing sophistication. The first narrator is "a pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old fellow . . . with a sadly humourous face; and one whom I [Dietrich Knickerbocker, the second narrator] strongly suspected of being poor. He tells his story—orally—in the same spirit in which the supernatural tales are given at the Van Tassel party, neither as "literature" nor as veritable history, claiming in the end not to "believe one half of it myself." Knickerbocker, who writes it all down, has literary aspirations and a sense of wider audiences, though as the *History* indicates, he is ultimately defeated by poverty. He figures at last as a deadbeat fleeing from a hotel, a wandering solitary man survived only by his papers. With the emergence of Geoffrey Crayon as the executor of this literary estate, the tradition has passed from the Dutch altogether, and the fall seems complete.

Source: Albert J. von Frank, "The Man That Corrupted Sleepy Hollow," in *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1987, pp. 129-43.

Adaptations

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" has been recorded by Donada Peters as part of a five-hour set of audiotapes titled *Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories*. The set is distributed by Books on Tape, Inc. The story is also available on audiocassette as a musical dramatization that has received excellent reviews. Produced by Reed Publishing USA in 1993, it is part of the Carousel Classics collection.

The story is also available on videocassette. *Tales of Washington Irving* (1987) is a videocassette release of animated films made in 1970. Distributed by MGM/UA Home Video, the 48- minute tape contains "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle", and features the voice talents of Mel Blanc and other familiar stars. Another videotape, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow by Washington Irving*, uses human actors and sets the story in a recreated early American- Dutch settlement. Published by Guidance Associates, it is designed to motivate students to read the story.

Topics for Further Study

Find a few of the many illustrated versions of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in the children's section of the library, or some of the video or filmstrip versions. Compare the pictures of Ichabod Crane in these versions with Irving's descriptions in the text. How precisely does Irving describe Crane? How closely do the pictures match your own vision of Crane's appearance?

Find a copy of "The Castle of Indolence," a poem from 1748 written by the Scottish poet James Thomson. Why might Irving attached four lines of this poem to his own story? What do the two pieces have in common?

Research the status of African Americans in New York during the end of the eighteenth century. Analyze Irving's casual disrespect for the "Negro" characters in his story in terms of how his contemporary readers would have responded to it, and in terms of how modern readers might respond.

Closely examine the passages in which Irving describes food in lingering detail. Based on the modern food pyramid, how healthy was the diet of wealthy Dutch farmers in the late 1800s?

Compare and Contrast

1810: Irving's home town, New York City, is a major metropolitan center with a population of 80,000. The population of the United States is 7,239,881.

1990: The population of New York City is 7,322,564.

1810s: Women's bodies are thought to be attractive if they are, like, Katrina Van Tassel's, "plump as a partridge." Many women think it is vulgar to be thin enough that the shape of their bones is revealed.

1990s: Women are expected to be thin. Defined cheekbones are a mark of beauty.

1810s: Few people in a rural village are educated enough to teach school. Most people are not able to read and write. Therefore, teachers come from outside, often from the cities.

1990s: Adults who cannot read or write have great difficulties managing daily life.

1810s: Veterans of the American Revolution are still alive, and enjoy telling true and exaggerated war stories at social occasions.

1990s: Veterans of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts tend to keep quiet about their experiences.

What Do I Read Next?

"Rip Van Winkle" (1819) is the second of the two stories for which Irving is famous today. Rip Van Winkle wanders off into the Catskill mountains to escape his wife's nagging, plays ninepins with a group of dwarfs, and sleeps for twenty years.

"The Spectre Bridegroom, A Traveller's Tale" (1819) is another story from Irving's *Sketch Book*. A young girl is loved by two men, one from her own rural area and one from a far-away city. Although it is set in Germany, this story of competition, pranks and the supernatural is instructively like and unlike "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

The Life of Washington Irving (1935) by Stanley T. Williams is a two-volume biography, notable for its thoroughness and for the strong sense Stanley creates of thoroughly disliking his subject.

Davy Crockett's *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* (1834) is a collection of tall tales, many of them about Crockett himself but also including stories of other rugged outdoorsmen outsmarting Eastern men from the cities.

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1900) is a humorous tale by Mark Twain. A stranger uncovers the secret corruption of small-town America by promising unearned wealth to some of Hadleyburg's important citizens.

The Dark Way: Stories from the Spirit World (1990), edited by Virginia Hamilton, contains twenty-five stories from Italy, Kenya, Russia, the United States and other countries, featuring the exploits of witches, devils, and tricksters.

Further Study

Aderman, Ralph M., ed. *Critical Essays on Washington Irving*, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990.

A survey of Irving criticism, with a selection of early nineteenth-century reviews as well as twentieth-century scholarly articles.

Bowden, Edwin T. *Washington Irving: Bibliography*, Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Volume 30 in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, this is the most complete and up-to-date bibliography available.

Bowden, Mary Weatherspoon. *Washington Irving*, Boston: Twayne, 1981.

The best introduction for the general reader, dealing chronologically with each of Irving's major works.

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

Insightful literary analysis of Irving's major works, which Hedges believes are those written before his return to the United States.

Tuttleton, James W., ed. *Washington Irving: The Critical Reaction*, New York: AMS Press, 1993.

Sixteen critical essays about Irving's work. Three of the essays treat "Sleepy Hollow" directly, and two others help establish the context for the early work, including *The Sketch Book*.

Wagenknecht, Edward. *Washington Irving: Moderation Displayed*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

An accessible biography and critical overview, emphasizing Irving's stature during his own lifetime as the United States' most significant writer.

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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:

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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.

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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:

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