The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WASHINGTON IRVING

Washington Irving was a fiction writer, biographer, historian, essayist, and US ambassador who worked during the first half of the 19th century. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," along with "Rip Van Winkle," are the short stories for which Irving is best known. Irving was born in New York and was named after General George Washington (who hadn't yet been elected President at the time of Irving's birth, as the Constitution had not been either written or ratified by 1783). Irving studied law before becoming interested in historical writing and short fiction. His writing eventually earned him fame and status, and he was one of the first American authors whose writings received international recognition. He spent 17 years living in Europe (primarily Britain and Spain) and was well regarded abroad. Later in his life he moved back to Tarrytown, New York, and lived on an estate he named "Sunnyside." He left this estate to serve as the US ambassador to Spain for four years before returning. He continued writing and keeping up with correspondence until his death in 1859.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" takes place around 1790. It's been fourteen years since the Declaration of Independence, but only seven since the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Revolutionary War. The war is still remembered vividly in Tarry Town, and many of the ghost stories related by the inhabitants recall the very real horrors of war that they so recently witnessed. In 1789, the new Constitution replaced the far weaker Articles of Confederation and created a stronger, more cohesive federal government, with George Washington as the first President. Nevertheless, the United States, over the next several decades, still struggled to create a national sentiment and history—indeed, citizens were far more likely to feel like a resident of Tarry Town or New York rather than an "American." "Sleepy Hollow" draws on this rich local history, but in doing so, it helps to forge a national tradition as well.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is one of the stories printed in *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, a collection of stories published while Irving was living in England. While most of these stories deal with an American's perspective on English life, both "Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" established Irving's reputation as the first professional American writer. Nevertheless, both these tales are heavily influenced by Dutch and German folktales. Some scholars have noted that "Sleepy Hollow," in particular, has much in common with the stories collected by German writer and academic Karl Musäus (who was going around collecting old folktales around the same time as the much more famous Grimm brothers). "Sleepy Hollow" was revolutionary because it suggested that the newly formed United States did, indeed, have a history, both literary and cultural—even if this history had much of its roots elsewhere. While it is a horror story, it is also ironic and even funny. Together with Irving's emphasis on individualism over industry and communality in an increasingly industrialized nation, these traits would come to heavily influence other Americans writing in the Romantic and Gothic traditions. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe are just two authors whose stories recall Irving's stylistic and thematic modes.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
- **When Written:** 1815-1819
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1820
- **Literary Period:** American Romanticism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** Tarry Town, upstate New York, early 19th century
- **Climax:** Ichabod is chased by the Headless Horseman through Sleepy Hollow, before being thrown off his horse at the haunted bridge to the church.
- **Antagonist:** The Headless Horseman, and Brom Bones (who may even be the same character)
- **Point of View:** There are various layers of narration to the story. The third-person omniscient narrator presents the reader with the first-person account given by a fictional historian, Diedrich Knickerbocker, who himself has heard the story from another storyteller and at times inserts elements or comments from his own experience.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Ocean Blue. Influenced by his travels in Spain, Irving also wrote a biography of Christopher Columbus during his years in Europe.

Literary Squabbles. Edgar Allan Poe, while influenced by Irving's works, also claimed that Irving's writings were overrated and that his reputation was much higher than it deserved to be.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story opens with a note that it has been found among the possessions of the "late" Diedrich Knickerbocker, who is the narrator of "Sleepy Hollow." Knickerbocker describes the setting, the quiet, bucolic "Tarry Town" in upstate New York that time seems to have passed by. A few miles from town is a small village called "Sleepy Hollow" which has a somnolent, bewitching quality: all the inhabitants, and indeed anyone who stays in the village for awhile, are prone to see visions and ghosts. The townspeople, most of whom have Dutch heritage, love to gather and tell supernatural tales. One of their favorites is of the Headless Horseman, an old Hessian trooper whose **head** was shot off during the Revolutionary War, and who gallops off in search of it each night.

One of those "tarrying" in Sleepy Hollow for a time is our protagonist, Ichabod Crane, a schoolteacher from Connecticut. Ichabod, tall and lanky with a voracious appetite, is stern and strict in the schoolhouse but can be shrewd and ingratiating when it suits him, such as at the farmhouses of the students where he lodges. He leads the psalm singing lessons at church and enjoys flirting with the young women, who admire him for his intellectualism. He also enjoys gathering with the old Dutch wives to hear ghost stories and to tell his own, many of which come from **Cotton Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft,"** his preferred book. On his way home, however, Ichabod is also spooked by the stories he's just heard, and every rustle and chirp terrifies him.

One of Ichabod's students is Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of a wealthy Dutch farmer, Baltus Van Tassel. Ichabod is initially attracted to Katrina for her beauty and coquettish nature, but he falls headlong in love with her once he visits her at her father's farm and sees the culinary abundance that would await him if he managed to win her heart. Ichabod is initially confident in his ability to win over Katrina. However, many other rivals are competing with him—in particular, the brawny, clever, and mischievous Brom Bones, who wanders the villages looking for trouble with his gang of sidekicks (though all in good fun). Ichabod knows he's no match for Brom Bones physically, so he avoids confronting him. For a time, both of them continue on their courtship of Katrina separately, and while Brom Bones plays several practical jokes on Ichabod, neither of them seems to gain the upper hand with Katrina.

One autumn afternoon, Ichabod is teaching at his schoolhouse when he receives an invitation to a quilting frolic at Baltus Van Tassel's estate that evening. Thrilled and nervous, he spruces himself up and even borrows a horse, Gunpowder, from the ornery old farmer Hans Van Ripper. Initially, the party seems to go well. Ichabod gorges himself on all the food, and manages to dance with Katrina all night while Brom Bones sulks and fumes. Towards the end, everyone begins to tell ghost stories, especially of the Major André, who was taken prisoner during the war, and of the Headless Horseman. Ichabod lingers afterward to talk to Katrina as the other guests begin to leave. Nevertheless, though Knickerbocker doesn't mention exactly what happened, Ichabod leaves the Van Tassel farm shortly afterward looking crestfallen.

As Ichabod rides Gunpowder back home, he begins to think of all the tales of horror he has just heard at the party. He approaches the tree near to where Major André was captured and, though terrified, slips under it safely. But as he nears the stream where Major André was taken prisoner, in a place called Wiley's Swamp, he catches sight of a massive, shadowy figure on horseback. Ichabod calls out "Who are you?" but receives no answer, and quickens the pace of Gunpowder, while the figure follows behind him. At one point, the two riders climb a hill and Ichabod realizes that the figure is headless—it must, he thinks, be the Headless Horseman of the famous story. He rides faster and faster, at one point losing Gunpowder's saddle and fearing how angry Hans Van Ripper will be. But he continues riding, attempting to reach the church where, according to the tale, the Horseman will vanish. But as he crosses the bridge, the Horseman hurls its head at Ichabod, who crashes to the ground.

The next day Ichabod is missing, and a search party eventually finds the fallen saddle and horses' hoof tracks next to a smashed pumpkin. Some time later, an old farmer returns from New York with the news that Ichabod had run from the village from fear and to escape Katrina's rejection but had become a successful lawyer and judge. The Dutch wives, however, insist that the Headless Horseman carried him off.

In the postscript, Knickerbocker claims that he heard this story at a business meeting in New York. After its end, one elderly gentleman had asked the storyteller what the story meant. The storyteller responded with a confusing, nonsensical logical syllogism, and the gentleman claimed he still doubted the story's veracity. At that point, the storyteller claimed he didn't believe half of it himself.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ichabod Crane – A young schoolteacher from Connecticut, who comes to Sleepy Hollow to teach the town's children, presumably just for a time. He rotates between living at the homes of his various students for his food and lodging. Ichabod is tall, lanky, and somewhat awkward-looking. He loves singing and dancing—he also gives singing lessons—and believes he is excellent at both (there's a touch of irony in the narration that suggests he may not be as talented as he thinks). Ichabod is shrewd and clever, knowing when to treat his students strictly and when to be more obsequious to his hosts. He also has a tremendous, almost voracious, appetite. At the same time,

Ichabod is gullible and has a wild imagination: he adores reading and listening to ghost stories, even though they continue to terrify him at night after he's heard them. For Ichabod, reality and fiction are less distinct than they are for most people—especially in Sleepy Hollow, where Ichabod comes under the influence of the "witchy" air. If not for that, Ichabod may well be just another example of an aimless youth, "tarrying" about with little direction or ambition. But, by the end of the story, we learn that Ichabod may have left this bewitched town and made something of himself after all—propelled back to reality by one final imaginative trick.

Diedrich Knickerbocker – The narrator of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," who apparently heard the story from a storyteller at a business meeting in New York. Washington Irving often used the persona of Knickerbocker in these stories, as an elderly, eccentric chronicler of Dutch history who insists upon the accuracy of his tales. Knickerbocker first appears as the pseudonymous author of Irving's 1809 "History of New York," and some of Irving's later tales are meant to come from Knickerbocker's papers. This device, called "framing," helps establish "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as a "true" story rather than a fictional yarn. By claiming veracity for his story through the use of Knickerbocker, Irving plays with the boundaries between history and storytelling, and does his part in contributing to the nascent development of American literature in early American history.

Brom Bones – A strong, plucky, mischievous young man and major rival to Ichabod for Katrina Van Tassel. Brom Bones (whose full name is Abraham or Brom Van Brunt) loves to play practical jokes, get himself into duels, and brag about his exploits. His very name reveals his brute strength and contrasts with Ichabod's spindly figure and fearful spirit. But Brom Bones is largely harmless, and the townsfolk both admire him for his muscle and roll their eyes at him for his immaturity. However, Brom Bones may be cleverer than he appears. He pays close attention to Ichabod's fear of ghosts and goblins, and the story suggests that it may very well be Brom Bones who chases after Ichabod in the guise of the Headless Horseman, carrying a pumpkin for the spirit's head. If his plan was to chase Ichabod away from Katrina, it worked: Brom Bones does end up marrying the damsel.

Katrina Van Tassel – The only daughter of Baltus Van Tassel, a wealthy Dutch farmer, who is courted by several village youths but especially by Brom Bones and Ichabod. Katrina is not portrayed very favorably in the story: she is a flirt and encourages both her suitors to continue pursuing her even as she refuses to choose just one. Nevertheless, Katrina is certainly independent for the standards of her time: within the constraints of being a woman in 18th-century America, she exerts her own kind of power through her beauty and the wealth that marrying her would confer.

Hans Van Ripper – An old, ill-tempered Dutch farmer, who lends Ichabod his horse, Gunpowder, so that Ichabod can ride it to attend Baltus Van Tassel's quilting frolic. It is suggested that Ichabod may have fled the village out of fear of Van Ripper—indeed, he loses Van Ripper's nice Sunday saddle in the course of his race from the Headless Horseman, and immediately thinks of the old farmer's wrath that he will face.

Headless Horseman – Also known as the Galloping Hessian of the Hollow. The Dutch wives of Sleepy Hollow especially enjoy telling ghost stories about the Headless Horseman, the ghost of a Hessian trooper (a German mercenary who fought for the British) whose head was blown off during the Revolutionary War. As the story goes, since his death, he leaves the churchyard where his body is buried each night and gallops off in search of his head.

Storyteller –The source, according to Knickerbocker, of the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which he tells at a business meeting in New York that Knickerbocker attends. When he is asked about the moral of the story, he responds with a nonsensical logical syllogism that nevertheless suggests that reality might be just as strange as the supernatural. Irving also uses the storyteller as another way to blur history and storytelling, and raise questions about both.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Baltus Van Tassel – Father of Katrina Van Tassel, and a wealthy farmer whose estate bursts with natural and culinary abundance. Van Tassel gives his daughter a relatively high amount of independence, allowing her to choose her suitors and eventual husband of her own accord.

Major André –A soldier in the Revolutionary War who was caught and taken prisoner by the British before being hanged. Major André is a real historical figure, but in the story he is also a ghost who haunts Sleepy Hollow.

Old Brouwer – An inhabitant of Sleepy Hollow who never believed in ghosts—that is, until he supposedly meets the Headless Horseman while out riding one night, and upon reaching the bridge to the church, is thrown into the brook under it.

Elderly Gentleman – An attendee at the New York business meeting who listens to the storyteller's tale, and who doubts the extent to which it's true.

Doffue Martling – A resident of Sleepy Hollow who claims to have nearly destroyed a British ship singlehandedly during the Revolutionary War.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HISTORY AND STORYTELLING

At the beginning of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," we learn from Diedrich Knickerbocker, the fictional historian narrating the tale, that it took place "in a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since"—meaning in 1790, thirty years before the story was published in 1820. A classic example of Irving's irony and humor with its description of 30 years ago as a "remote period," this quotation nonetheless underlines a real problem for early American storytellers, who lacked a long, distinguished American history from which to draw. They could neither rely on this history as material for fiction nor rely on its aesthetic legacy in fitting their own stories into a larger meaning. Irving's use of older Dutch and German sources was one way to get around this problem. In fact, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is full of references to Dutch names, places, and social groups. Early American New York was, indeed, inhabited by many people of Dutch origin, but the references also served to create an artificial historical heritage. Irving even claims historical veracity for this tale by creating the fictional character of Diedrich Knickerbocker. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is supposed to have been found among Knickerbocker's papers, so Irving's story is no more than a transcription of this "true" story. Such a device, called framing, helps to lend a sense of age and legitimacy to the tale (and would have been especially attractive to Irving, as a historian and essayist himself). This historical frame is also complicated and nuanced—while Knickerbocker is referred to as a "historian," there are parts of the story he doesn't know. It turns out that Knickerbocker's story is *also* a frame for the tale of another storyteller, who appears in the postscript. "I don't believe one-half of it myself," this storyteller admits concerning his own tale, thus melding and confusing history and fiction in both humorous and disconcerting ways.

In addition, even within the tale, history and storytelling interact and often fuse. Tarry Town is described as one of the quietest places in the world; even Ichabod Crane is only "tarrying" there, passing his time idly until his "real" life can begin. History doesn't happen in Sleepy Hollow—it takes place elsewhere, offstage. Nevertheless, many of the tall tales the Dutch residents tell, including those of Major André and the Headless Horseman, take place during the Revolutionary War and are unthinkable without this true historical context. By mixing history with tall tales, therefore, Irving helps to construct an artistic heritage to go along with a budding historical legacy for the new American nation.

REALITY, IMAGINATION, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," if we listen to its narrator, is only one of many tales crowding Tarry Town and especially the neighborhood of Sleepy Hollow, "one of those highly favored places which abound with chronicle and great men." Ichabod Crane in particular falls under the influence of these chronicles until he is unable to separate reality from his imagination. However, he is not the only one to have trouble telling fact from fiction. There is a "witching influence" that hangs over the whole of Tarry Town, one that fills it with dreams and ghost stories and is "imbibed" not only by its residents but also by anyone that tarried there for awhile. Are people in Tarry Town simply more prone to the supernatural and the imagination? Or is there, in this odd, magical place, simply less of a distinction between the natural and supernatural?

In any case, Ichabod is especially given to this sort of fantasizing. He adores listening to the Dutch wives' stories about terrifying spirits and haunting ghosts. But unlike others, Ichabod is unable to accept the stories as just that—stories. His enjoyment turns instantly to horror and fear – in other words he accepts the intrusion of these tales into his own reality. Brom Bones takes advantage of Ichabod's inability to separate reality from fiction, and plays on Ichabod's wild imagination—indeed, Ichabod's weakness is the reason Brom Bones ultimately wins the battle for Katrina Van Tassel.

Nevertheless, the story is not entirely clear on whether Ichabod's melding of reality and imagination is solely a weakness or a fault. While he does lose Katrina, we do hear a rumor that it was only thanks to the terror of the Headless Horseman that he finally left Tarry Town and, ultimately, was able to make something of his life, becoming a successful lawyer and judge. And while the story seems to admonish against taking ghost stories too seriously, this warning takes place within a version of a ghost story itself. Supernatural tales and imaginative stories, Irving seems to say, do have their place—though perhaps only as long as we understand they're just stories.

WAR AND BATTLE

The plot of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is largely concerned with a battle—one for the heart of Katrina Van Tassel. Or rather, perhaps, a war, made up of various battles and conflicts between Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones. This imagery is not an accident: Irving's story takes place in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, around 1790. This language of war and battle would have made sense to a reader in a newly born nation fresh from the battlefield—a nation which was attempting to forge its own, internal hierarchies. The battle for Katrina takes place on various

planes: Brom Bones plays practical jokes on Ichabod, for instance, while Ichabod's attempts to win over Katrina are compared to the conquests of a knight errant going off into battle. Implicit in their competition is a tension between the physical and the intellectual spheres, between Brom's brute strength and "manliness" and Ichabod's role as a schoolteacher. Even within Ichabod's sphere, there is a contrast between his magisterial reigning over the classroom and his need to ingratiate himself to the families that host and feed him.

Indeed, Irving is acutely aware of the ways in which social maneuvering is its own kind of battle, with the prizes being power and wealth rather than territory or political independence. In the early United States, though there were certainly social and economic hierarchies, there was also greater mobility and interaction between classes—both Brom Bones and Ichabod are invited to the same quilting frolic, and both are permitted to court Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of a wealthy family. In the newly egalitarian society of the United Sates, paradoxically, battles such as that for the conquest of Katrina only become more dramatic, since greater heights now seem attainable and within the characters' reach.

CONSUMPTION, APPETITE, AND GREED

One of the first things we learn about Ichabod Crane is that he is a "huge feeder," with "the dilating powers of an anaconda." His massive appetite leads him from neighbor to neighbor, supplementing the food he can afford on a teacher's income—but it also leads him into courtship and, ultimately, into danger. Ichabod is initially attracted to Katrina because of the abundance of her father's farm, which is described down to the last mouth-watering detail. Indeed, Irving's very prose is full and lush, seeming to goad the reader into the kind of greed Ichabod embodies. Even Katrina is described as being a "tempting [...] morsel." Her characterization as an object to be consumed relies on stereotypes of women prevalent at the time, to be sure, but it also refers back to Ichabod's obsession with consumption.

Ichabod's appetite goes beyond food and women: it extends to the realm of tall tales and ghost stories, which he "swallows" eagerly—though with his own version of a stomachache afterwards, when he has consumed so much that he becomes terrified by the "ghosts" lying in wait for him on the return home. Ultimately, Irving's description of Ichabod's greed and appetite can be situated within a broader social context. In the early post-revolutionary United States, much of the country still remained to be explored (and claimed). The nation still seemed to be a vast repository of natural resources and abundance only waiting to be consumed. Irving's depiction of Ichabod serves as an implicit rebuke to this kind of thinking. While economic consumption (and competition) were necessary to a society on the cusp of modernity, Ichabod's exaggerated appetite shows the drawbacks of never-ending consumption as dangerous and unhealthy.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HEAD OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN

The Headless Horseman, of course, is a major character in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." But the ghostly rider—and, especially, his **head**—also symbolize the tension between reality and imagination, between the natural and the supernatural, held by many of the townspeople. The Horseman is fixed in historical fact: there were, indeed, many Germans or "Hessians" hired by the British to fight against the American army during the Revolutionary War. Indeed, though the townspeople's stories about the Galloping Hessian may be ghost stories, it hasn't been long since a real Hessian rider (one alive and with a head) could provoke fear in them for good reason—as the enemy. By becoming headless, the horseman can become nestled within society's cultural and imaginative traditions, even while remaining based in history.

But in other ways, the horseman symbolizes Ichabod's less defensible inability to separate fiction and fact. Indeed, it loses its head just as Ichabod, more metaphorically, loses his each time he returns home spooked by the Dutch ghost stories. Brom Bones takes advantage of this lack of reason. Brom *uses* his head—both intellectually in plotting and strategizing, and practically in hurling a "head" at Ichabod.

COTTON MATHER'S "HISTORY OF NEW ENGLAND WITCHCRAFT"

As the town schoolteacher, Ichabod is both admired and mistrusted for his knowledge. Though many of the women in the town consider him a perfect gentleman, some of the farmers who send their children to study under Ichabod are prone to be suspicious of book learning and consider schoolteachers no more than "drones." Cotton Mather's book occupies a similarly ambivalent position. On the one hand, it's an example of Ichabod's cleverness and knowledge, and he cites it whenever possible (indeed, it's difficult to tell whether Ichabod reads anything else at all). On the other hand, this is a book of witchcraft—not exactly a chemistry textbook. In that sense, the **"History of New England Witchcraft"** symbolizes Ichabod's uncertain position as he "tarries" in Sleepy Hollow—having been educated as a schoolteacher, he has not yet matured enough to leave behind dreams and fantasies and make a real, practical life for himself (something he does do once he leaves Tarry Town behind and becomes a successful lawyer and judge).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories* published in 1999.

Main Story Quotes

The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions; star shoot and meteors glare oftener across the valley than in any other part of the country, and the nightmare, with her whole ninefold, seems to make it the favorite scene of her gambols. The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, and seems to be commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air, is the apparition of a figure on horseback, without a head.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Headless Horseman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

Irving opens his tale by describing in detail the setting of Sleepy Hollow, which is located in the Hudson Valley in upstate New York—an area that, in the 18th century, was almost entirely settled by the Dutch and their descendants. This passage is a combination of careful, objective description and fanciful storytelling, which sets the tone for the rest of the story, in which the boundaries between fact and fiction, between history and storytelling, are not always clear.

According to Knickerbocker (the narrator), this setting is ideally suited for a supernatural tale for several reasons. In some ways, he seems to suggest that the inhabitants of the town are simply more likely than the general population to swap ghost stories and to believe fantastical tales. This would situate his story within such a tradition. However, he also implies that there is indeed something in the very air or "spirit" of the setting that is supernatural—the shooting stars, and the meteors glaring across the sky. In this sense, Knickerbocker is merely a historian, chronicling the stories of a particular region.

It is remarkable 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 apparitions.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Knickerbocker continues his suggestion (in the voice of both a storyteller and a historian) that the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow are not simply mad or naturally superstitious, but become so by "imbibing" the very air of the place. Not only does the setting make one see visions and dream strange dreams, but it invites anyone who stops there to slow down, to remove himself or herself from the regular rhythms of daily life in order to embrace new rhythms and a new standard. Setting, in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* almost possesses a power of its own in its ability to affect other characters. By acknowledging its might, Knickerbocker prepares the reader for the entrance of the protagonist, Ichabod Crane, who—even though he is not native to this region—will before long begin to embrace the "witching" influence of the place to an even greater extent than many other residents.

I mention this peaceful spot with all possible laud, for it is in such little retired Dutch valleys, found here and there embosomed in the great State of New York, that population, manners, and customs remained 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.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane, Brom Bones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

This story takes place around 1790, not long after the end of the American Revolutionary War. At the time the United

States of America was just coming into being as a unified nation, and many people continued to feel greater allegiance to smaller, more contained areas, whether the "great State of New York" or even a certain town or group of descendants sharing a common heritage, such as here the Dutch. The end of the eighteenth century saw many great changes sweeping the country, but here Knickerbocker seems to prefer the old-time charm of a town where little has changed. Furthermore, linking the town's heritage to the Dutch allows Irving to give a greater scope of history to his story—the U.S. was still very young as a country, but Americans holding on to their Dutch roots would have a much longer history to look back upon.

Of course, as has already been suggested by the apparition of the Headless Horseman—headless from a Revolutionary War battle—even such a town forgotten by time as Sleepy Hollow is not exempt from historical change. Indeed, Knickerbocker seems to be stretching the historical truth in order to situate his tale within a particular frozen moment in time, where the rules of modernization and of objective history may not apply as they do, increasingly, in the rest of the land.

> In this by-place of nature there abode, in a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since, a worthy wight of the name of Ichabod Crane, who sojourned, or, as he expressed it, "tarried," in Sleepy Hollow, for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

The names that make up the setting in this story are often, as mentioned, an active part of the plot: the name "Sleepy Hollow" suggests a slowing down of the tempo of daily life, while "Tarry Town" (the name of the region where Sleepy Hollow is located) is appropriate because of how easy it is for characters like Ichabod Crane to linger or "tarry" there. Ichabod, we learn, is not from Sleepy Hollow originally, and indeed only means to stay there for awhile: his schoolteacher's position seems to be not a serious career but merely a means of supporting himself as he wanders through the East Coast and lives out his youth.

The notion that Knickerbocker's tale took place in a "remote period of American history"—a mere thirty years ago—is a tongue-in-cheek reminder that American history itself, at the time of the story's publication, was not long enough to have any kind of "remote" past. Thus the term "remote" has to be stretched to take into account how little time the United States had been a nation. Knickerbocker takes on the language and tone of a chronicler of myths or national origin stories, while also acknowledging the difficulty of doing so compared to a place like Europe, populated by its own tale-tellers for many more centuries.

> His appetite for the marvelous, and his powers of digesting it, were equally extraordinary; and both had been increased by his residence in this spell-pound region. No tale was too gross or monstrous for his capacious swallow.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

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Explanation and Analysis

Although Ichabod is not originally from Sleepy Hollow or Tarry Town, he fits in well with the "spirit" of the place, in that he adores supernatural tales and fantastical ideas—even if this propensity has been "increased" by spending time in the region. Ichabod's wild imagination is a humorous inversion of the expectations we normally have for a schoolteacher character. Interestingly, although Knickerbocker has praised the sleepy charm of the region and its inhabitants, Ichabod's imaginative mind is, here as elsewhere, usually portrayed as an example of his immaturity and his inability to embrace reality. Perhaps this stems from the fact that he wholeheartedly "digests" tales rather than enjoying them at a distance.

Indeed, Ichabod's likes and desires are often described with the language of food and consumption, from his "appetite" to his "capacious swallow." Just as he can be gluttonous in eating, so Ichabod reveals an equal gluttony in his desire for marvelous tales.

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 to ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane, Katrina Van Tassel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, the way Knickerbocker narrates the story of Ichabod's sojourn in Sleepy Hollow has a tongue-in-cheek humor to it. Ichabod may terrify himself with the tales (that he nevertheless adores) of "ghosts, goblins" and witches, and yet a woman—that is, Katrina Van Tassel—is shown to be even more powerful in her hold over him. This equivalence reminds us both of Ichabod's hyperbolic reaction to supernatural tales and of his difficulty of distinguishing between reality and the supernatural. Against both, Knickerbocker suggests that Ichabod's attitude will be one of attempting to fight what he understands as great force with his own kind of force. He will attempt to "conquer" Katrina just as he conquers his fears, as he tends to treat her as a material object to be won more than as another person.

As the enraptured Ichabod fancied all this, and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burdened 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.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane, Katrina Van Tassel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

Ichabod is attracted to Katrina, viewing her earlier—to continue the language of gluttony—as a "tempting morsel," but here we learn that there is a more powerful motivation for Ichabod to win her over and marry her. As the daughter of a wealthy farmer, Katrina (or rather her future husband) stands to inherit not just the wealth of the farm but also the rich culinary delights that can be harvested from the fields of wheat and corn and from the fruit orchards.

This passage also exemplifies Ichabod's tendency towards wild imaginative escapades, not only in the realm of the supernatural, but also in any enterprise. Here his imagination truly gets ahead of him, galloping into a future full of entrepreneurial projects and profits, before he has made any headway in actually wooing Katrina. Ichabod's imagination will force him to be more realistic in attempting to win her over, but the force of what he imagines and the reality of his low chances of doing so will remain far apart.

Brom, who had a degree of rough chivalry in his nature, would fain have carried matters to open warfare and have settled their pretensions to the lady, according to the mode of those most concise and simple reasoners, the knights-errant of yore,—by single combat; but Ichabod was too conscious of the superior might of his adversary to enter the lists against him.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane, Brom Bones

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Knickerbocker has introduced us to Ichabod's "adversary" in his fight to win the heart and the hand of Katrina: Brom Bones, another inhabitant of the region. Brom Bones and Ichabod Crane could not be more different—where the latter is fanciful, timid, and easily frightened, the former is rational, confident, and belligerent. Knickerbocker portrays Brom Bones as in some ways a relic from an earlier time, when conflicts would be resolved through man-to-man fights and brute strength was considered the greatest weapon in one's arsenal (even in the battle for a woman's heart). Here, Ichabod is shown to be shrewd, even if he cannot compete with Brom on that level: knowing that they are not well-matched, he prefers to wage battle on a more indirect front. Still, it is difficult to know whether or not Ichabod is underestimating Brom by only considering him as an adversary in brute force rather than also one in trickery and strategy.

> The neighborhood, at the time of which I am speaking, was one of those highly favored places which abound with chronicle and great men.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

Ichabod has ridden his horse to the Van Tassel farm for a quilting party, and after the dancing many of the guests have gathered around to tell stories. Ichabod has gone to the dance principally with the desire to win over Katrina, but because of his love for storytelling, he cannot stop himself from being drawn into the circle to participate.

Once again, Knickerbocker assigns an active role to the setting: not only are Sleepy Hollow and Tarry Town places of supernatural activity and a bewitching influence, but they are also privileged sites for important events from the historical past. In fact, as the stories are related, there seems to be little explicit distinction made between ghost stories and historical tales. Rather, the word "chronicle" is made to stand in for both true historical facts and tales made up, or at least exaggerated in their retelling over time. The story suggests that any attempt to unravel history from storytelling is, if not futile, then certainly fraught with difficulties.

> Local tales and superstitions thrive best in these sheltered, long-settled retreats; but are trampled under foot by the shifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

The guests at the Van Tassel quilting party are still exchanging historical and fantastical tales. As he has done before, Knickerbocker suggests that there is something about this region that is frozen in time, immune to the historical changes and modernizing processes that have come to characterize much of the rest of the young American nation. Here, he specifies more precisely what that means for storytelling. In other areas of the country, people come and go at such a rate that few remember what things were like even in the recent past. In Tarry Town, however, Ichabod is the rare interloper into a society that has remained in the same setting for many generations. As a result, it is much easier for local stories to be passed down from person to person. In addition, it is more possible for such tales to be confirmed by the inhabitants, since many of them may have witnessed the events of the past themselves. Such witnessing puts a veneer of authenticity on tales that might otherwise be dismissed as fiction, even if those who are telling the tales admit that they exaggerate and fictionalize elements of them.

> The story was immediately matched by a thrice marvelous adventure of Brom Bones, who made light of the galloping Hessian as an arrant jockey.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Headless Horseman, Brom Bones

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

Many of the guests at the Van Tassel party are discussing the most famous superstition of the region, that of the Headless Horseman, who was killed in the Revolutionary War and now gallops around chasing anyone who crosses his path. They have just related the story of old Brouwer, who didn't believe in ghosts until he met the Horseman one night and was chased by him, ending up being hurled into a stream.

Brom Bones, as usual, seems entirely unaffected by the frightening tales swapped by the others. He takes the opportunity to remind everyone of his own prowess as a horseman and of his inability to be conquered even by a malicious ghost. Only by the Horseman vanishing at the last minute, Brom claims, did he fail to capture and unseat him. Brom thus makes clear to Ichabod, among others, that he is not someone to be trifled with. However, his "making light" of the situation also suggests that he has escaped at least some of the bewitching influence of the region. By making fun of the Headless Horseman rather than duly expressing awe and fear of the apparition, like the others, he shows himself to be firmly anchored in reality and factual accounts of history—in other words, seemingly not a "true" citizen of

Sleepy Hollow.

He saw the walls of the church dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He recollected the place where Brom Bones's ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," though Ichabod, "I am safe."

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Brom Bones, Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving the party, Ichabod is confronted by a towering figure on horseback. Soon, with dread, he realizes that it is a headless body on a horse carrying its head in its saddle. The horseman pursues Ichabod through the dark paths and towards the church. Ichabod remembers this church from the story told by Brom Bones: it was there that the horseman had disappeared, so it is there that he believes he will be safe.

Ichabod thus is shown once again to embrace the tales told by fellow Sleepy Hollow inhabitants as historical truth, even though he knows that Brom Bones is prone to bragging. Although he mistrusts Brom Bones as a competitor for Katrina Van Tassel, Ichabod is credulous enough to accept his story, especially since the tale has been echoed in other versions by so many other guests at the party. These tales have become Ichabod's own reality, and he acts for his own safety in line with this reality.

In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt; the tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented in the road, and evidently at furious speed, were traced to the bridge, beyond which, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, where the water ran deep and black, was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

The day following the Van Tassel party, Ichabod Crane cannot be found anywhere, and a search party fails to turn him up. Knickerbocker describes the evidence that they do find, much of which the reader can piece together as belonging to Ichabod's escapade the night before. It is apparent that Ichabod was there, since his hat must have flown off.

The shattered pumpkin, however, is noted in the narrative without any further explanation being attached to it. It is up to the reader to recall that the headless horseman had hurled his "head" at Ichabod, who fell to the ground, and to imagine what that "head" might be. Of course, the fact that Knickerbocker refrains from interpreting the scene means that we cannot know for sure. But significantly, the story does not draw to a close with Ichabod's immaturity and wild imagination being revealed as a fraud, while fact-based reality wins out. Instead, the story leaves us with a historical, material possibility coexisting with the supernatural explanation that Ichabod would have embraced.

Brom Bones, too, who, shortly after his rival's appearance conducted the blooming Katrina in triumph to the altar, was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Brom Bones, Katrina Van Tassel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

Much of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* has been concerned with the competition between Brom Bones and Ichabod Crane to win the hand of Katrina Van Tassel. Here, Brom Bones is shown to have won that battle, as he marries her and gains access to her father's estate and wealth. Even without facing Ichabod in direct, face-to-face battle, Brom has managed to conquer him. At the same time, it is

suggested that Brom is much wilier than others, including Ichabod, believed. Brom is unable to fully hide his satisfaction at Ichabod's abandonment of the village, insinuating through his laugh and knowing looks that his own plot was at work in driving his rival away.

The narrative thus suggests that greater knowledge might be what can do away with supernatural beliefs. Brom is able to dismiss the fear of the marvelous because he knows what really happened that night with Ichabod (perhaps), while the other inhabitants of the village must resort to other beliefs.

> 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 favorite story often told about the neighborhood round the winter evening fire.

Related Characters: Diedrich Knickerbocker (speaker), Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

Directly after seeming to convince the reader of the true answer to the mystery of Ichabod's disappearance, Knickerbocker balances that view with another, that of the "old country wives" who were always Ichabod's preferred companions for exchanging supernatural tales. Now the cycle continues without him, as Ichabod becomes one more character in these women's arsenal, just like the many figures that have preceded him and that have served as fodder for their stories.

Once again, Knickerbocker is ambivalent on the relationship between reality and the supernatural, between imaginative tales and historical fact. On the one hand, we are told that the women are, in fact, the "best judges" of such events, implying that they are to be trusted as historical chroniclers. On the other hand, these purportedly historical facts are told around the fire, for what seems like the evening entertainment of the town. Of course, this does not mean that the wives' opinion is false—indeed, at the quilting party historical anecdotes from the war were recounted along with supernatural tales. But the effect is to once again blur the line between what counts as "truth" and what does not.

Postscript Quotes

> "That there is no situation in life but has its advantages and pleasures—provided we will but take a joke as we find it:
> That, therefore, he that runs races with goblin troopers is likely to have rough riding of it.
> Ergo, for a country schoolmaster to be refused the hand of a Dutch heiress is a certain step to high preferment in the state."

Related Characters: Storyteller (speaker), Ichabod Crane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

In the postscript, the storyteller is asked to tell the "moral" of the legend of Sleepy Hollow, and this quotation is what he comes up with. On first glance, the passage seems nearly nonsensical. It employs terms like "therefore" and "ergo" that recall the language of philosophical argument, or at least of maxims stemming from the culture of the highly educated. But the relationship between cause and effect—between failing to marry a Dutch heiress and gaining an important state position, for example—is far from clear.

Of course, the storyteller is alluding to Ichabod Crane's own luck, following the rumor that he *did* end up in an important position after the luckless mishaps of his youth in Sleepy Hollow. Ichabod, the storyteller suggests, actually won the battle against Brom at the end of the day, because he was able to break out of the sleepy village frozen in time. Still, we cannot take this "moral"—that every situation of life "has its advantages and pleasures"—entirely at face value, given the obvious tongue-in-cheek tone of the storyteller's words. Indeed, this tone suggests that any effort to assign a fixed meaning or a final cause to events is bound to be at least somewhat random. Rather than draw conclusions about Ichabod's trajectory and make a pronouncement on what it means for the listeners' own reality, the storyteller evades such an "educational" purpose and instead revels in the sheer delight of storytelling.

> "Faith, sir," replied the story-teller, "as to that matter, I don't believe one-half of it myself."

Related Characters: Storyteller (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

The elderly gentleman who has, along with Knickerbocker, been listening to the storyteller's tale, claims that he still has doubts about whether the story is true or not. One natural reaction would be for the storyteller to insist that the tale is, in fact, true, and to try to come up with various means to prove its veracity. But he does not even try: instead, he agrees with the gentleman.

Knickerbocker, the narrator, has been interested throughout the story in revealing the fault lines between what is considered real and what is considered supernatural—but the story ends without Knickerbocker ever stating his own views on the matter. Instead, he has various figures—Brom Bones, the country wives, and now the storyteller—express their own opinions. The storyteller's thoughts, though, are far from clear. Does he not trust whoever told *him* the story? What does "it" refer to—the entire tale, or just the apparently supernatural elements? Which "half," then, does he choose to believe? Rather than dismissing the imaginative elements of the story out of hand, the narrative instead chooses to end on an open note, leaving the reader to construct his or her own version—and to tweak and interpret it even more as it is passed down the generations.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

MAIN STORY

The story opens with a note that it has been found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker, the story's narrator.

Irving uses this framing device—in which he is just presenting a narrative found within the papers of someone else—to give his story a claim to legitimacy and historical veracity.

Knickerbocker describes the setting of the story, Greensburgh or Tarry Town—a small port town next to the river that "ancient" Dutch sailors called the Tappan Zee.

Given that the Dutch had only been in North America for a few hundred years, the word "ancient" exaggerates the truth while also giving the story a ring of the legendary, and, by extension, claiming a history for the new nation of the United States that could support a cultural and literary tradition.

The name of Tarry Town derives from the fact that the husbands of the women in the surrounding country tend to linger or "tarry" at its tavern.

In the story, names tend to stand in for themes and characteristics—here, the town as a place that time forgot.

Two miles from this village is a valley nestled between hills, which Knickerbocker calls one of the quietest places in the world. He remembers wandering into it while shooting squirrels, and notes that he would happily choose this valley to retreat from the world's noise and distraction.

Knickerbocker does not often insert his own opinions and perspective into the story; here, it has the effect of further fleshing out the setting, as well as setting the stage for the contrast between an idyllic, peaceful village and its supernatural hauntings.

The place is called Sleepy Hollow because of the calm, even dreamy atmosphere that infuses the entire valley. Its inhabitants are descended from early Dutch settlers, and people suspect that an old German doctor or else an Indian chief might have cast a spell over the place. The residents of Sleepy Hollow tend to be superstitious and are prone to see visions and hear voices.

Again, the name "Sleepy Hollow" describes the town as well as Knickerbocker's own descriptions, though more succinctly. The "witching influence" is portrayed as mysterious and even primordial, lending the setting a greater sense of natural history.

Sleepy Hollow's inhabitants love telling ghost stories about their region. One of the most pervasive tales is that of the Headless Horseman, who rides by on horseback through the night—supposedly it is the ghost of a Hessian trooper whose head was shot off by a cannonball during the Revolutionary War. The "authentic historians" of the town claim that the ghost rides out each night in search of his head, to join it with his body that is buried in the churchyard, and returns to the churchyard before dawn.

This is the first major example of reality, history, and the supernatural melding into one. The Revolutionary War certainly caused a great deal of death and destruction, but the "authentic historians" also chronicle entirely imaginative affairs. Telling stories, of course, is one way for the villagers to come to terms with the turmoil of the war.

It's not only the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow who tend to see the Headless Horseman riding by at night, but also anyone who stays in the valley for awhile, and comes to breathe in the bewitching, dreamy atmosphere until he too sees such visions.

Irving's construction of a ghost story leads to some ambiguities—it isn't always clear if Sleepy Hollow is more susceptible to actual ghosts and apparitions, or if the whole village, as a sleepy little town, is more prone to such imaginings.

This valley is exempt from the changes and developments taking place elsewhere in New York; instead, the people and its customs remain the same. The narrator can easily imagine returning to Sleepy Hollow, where he hasn't been for years, to find the same families living in the same way as before.

The notion of Sleepy Hollow as a town that history passes by recalls Irving's other famous story, "Rip Van Winkle," but it's also paradoxical—as the ghosts and spirits reveal, the town was influenced and even traumatized by the war.

In a "remote period of American history," or thirty years ago, a young man named Ichabod Crane, from Connecticut, spent some time "tarrying" in Sleepy Hollow as a schoolteacher. Ichabod is tall and thin with long limbs and a small, flat head. He wears his clothes loose and looks like a scarecrow.

Again, Irving's language is used (often humorously) to create a sense of history where little exists: the "remote history" of the United States is just 30 years ago. Ichabod's physical qualities are indicative of his dreamy, absentminded character—he seems to have fallen into his position without quite knowing why or how.

Ichabod's one-room wooden schoolhouse, located at the foot of a hill next to a brook, is hardly decadent: holes in the walls are plugged with pages from old copybooks. The hum of the students' voices contrasts with Ichabod's authoritative commands and the sounds of a whip used on the slower children. Though he keeps in mind the maxim of "Spare the rod and spoil the child," he takes it to mean that children should not be spoiled—and therefore neither should the rod. But Ichabod reserves the whip for the stronger, tough-skinned, sulky students, while he spares the weaker, smaller children.

The prose in this section is witty, clever, and reveals Irving's stylistic skill. The narrator seems to be representing the reader with the full gamut of Ichabod's personality—he's authoritative but distracted, strict but ultimately fair. Ichabod may not know what he's doing "tarrying" in Tarry Town, but he has successfully appropriated, and embraced, the social role of schoolteacher.

Ichabod also plays with some of the older boys after school or accompanies the smaller ones home. It is in his best interest to be on good terms with the families of his students, who can be suspicious of book-learning and tend to consider schoolteachers as "drones." Besides, Ichabod has a massive appetite, and as his income isn't enough to satisfy him, he rotates among the farmers' families, who lodge and feed him for a week at a time in exchange for some light labor and errands. So that the families don't consider the schoolteacher too much of a burden—especially as he fills their children's minds with abstract learning and removes them from their farms, where they could work—he charms the mothers by playing with the young children, and is ingratiating with the parents rather than domineering as he is in the classroom.

In the early American republic, going to school was far from a given. Since most of the children would eventually be meant to work on and inherit their parents' farms, it's not surprising that there's a tension between "book-learning" one hand and practical knowledge and getting children to work as field hands and help support their families as soon as possible on the other. Ichabod is acutely aware of this tension. He knows how to change his behavior based on the situation in which he finds himself—conscious that social relations are often a battle requiring strategy like any other. And it's in his best interest to do so, since he can be sure to get a good meal out of it.

Ichabod also teaches singing and leads the Sunday chorus at church. He believes himself to be quite talented, and takes pride in this role—indeed, as Knickerbocker notes, some quiet Sunday mornings you can still hear the echoes of Ichabod's resounding voice in the chapel.

Given Irving's constant but subtle irony, we might suspect that Ichabod's voice is not as spectacular as he believes it to be.

Most people think Ichabod has an easy, tranquil life. The women in the town admire his taste and education, which he takes advantage of in order to guzzle down the treats they lay before him, or to pass Sundays gathering grapes for them or wandering with them around the millpond. He takes gossip with him along with his few belongings from house to house, and the women in particular admire how he's finished "several books" and knows **Cotton Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft"** by heart.

Here's another situation in which Ichabod adapts his behavior to his audience, knowing which aspects of his character to stress and which to hide in order to gain the most out of his acquaintances. Cotton Mather and his book will come up multiple times in the story, symbolizing both Ichabod's abstract knowledge and his overly imaginative spirit.

Ichabod, in fact, may be clever and manipulative but also believes strongly in magic and witchcraft. He has an enormous "appetite" for "digesting" marvelous stories, a quality that his time in the region only exaggerates. He often spends his evenings after school "swallowing" **Cotton Mather's** stories until it's too dark to read. Afterwards, as he returns to his lodgings, the stories so affect him that he is frightened by any birdcall, rustling in the forest, or twinkle of a firefly. He tries to distract and calm himself by singing psalms.

The quotes in this section reflect the fact that Irving himself often employs the language of appetite and consumption even when talking about things other than food. Indeed, Ichabod's appetite for meals and for stories is portrayed as one and the same, emblematic of his greedy nature. His ability to "swallow" stories whole also helps to explain why he's unable to rid himself of them afterward and continues to be afraid.

Ichabod also enjoys spending evenings with the elderly Dutch housewives, who enchant him with ghost stories and tall tales that take Sleepy Hollow and the fields, brooks, and haunted houses throughout it as their setting. The Headless Horseman, or Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, is one of them. Ichabod joins in with stories taken from **Cotton Mather** or from his past in Connecticut.

Along with (and despite) his less admirable characteristics, Ichabod is clearly likable. As a newcomer, his likability gives him an entrance into the village folklore, which the reader has already learned about from the narrator earlier in the story.

All these exchanges delight Ichabod, but he pays for it with absolute terror as he walks home from the gatherings. He mistakes bushes for ghosts, his own steps for those of a specter behind him, and a gust of wind for the Headless Horseman following him. But by morning, daylight cures him of all his fears.

Ichabod, unlike the Dutch wives, cannot simply tell stories and then go on living as if nothing had changed; for him, ghost stories become a part of reality rather than a break from it.

Indeed, during the day Ichabod finds himself confronted with a more terrifying being than ghosts and witches: a woman, or more precisely Katrina Van Tassel, the only daughter of a wealthy Dutch farmer, whom Ichabod meets through his chorus lessons. Katrina is plump and lovely, and a bit of a flirt—she shows off her looks with golden jewelry and a shortened petticoat.

This (humorous) comparison of Katrina to ghosts and witches foreshadows just how much trouble Ichabod's admiration of Katrina will get him into. The description of Katrina portrays her largely as another of Ichabod's material desires, as something to be consumed—and ultimately as something to fight for.

Ichabod deems Katrina "so tempting a morsel" as to warrant his attention—particularly once he visits her at the farm of her father, Baltus Van Tassel. The farm, situated along the Hudson, is sheltered by an elm tree next to a bubbling spring and brook. Its barn bursts with the farm's goods, from pigeons and pigs to geese, ducks, guinea fowls, and the master cock. As Ichabod looks on, he imagines each of the animals as part of a winter's feast, presented at the table with gravy and accompaniments. He is even more impressed by the meadows of wheat, rye, and corn, as well as the fruit orchards.

Several paragraphs are taken up with this description, as seen through the eyes of Ichabod. Such detail regarding the farm's abundance underlines Ichabod's massive appetite—he's not simply greedy for the trappings of wealth but for the consumption that goes along with it (somewhat understandably, given his humble status as a schoolteacher in rotating lodgings). Getting his hands on that farm would change his life, shoot him upward in society, and fill his belly for the rest of his life.

Such abundance attracts Ichabod to Katrina even more. He quickly imagines growing rich from the farm, reinvesting the gains, and setting off for the West in a wagon with all his riches packed in, as well as Katrina and all their children mounted on top.

Mixed with Ichabod's enormous appetite is his wild imagination, allowing him to picture himself married and settled down before his courtship has really started.

Ichabod's heart is definitively "conquered" once he enters the farmhouse, with its early Dutch style of an open porch and hall bedecked with pewter, fruits, and elaborate decorations.

Abundance, here, is grafted onto the language of war, as the narrator begins to intimate that Ichabod will have to fight to achieve it.

Though Ichabod has fixed his sights on Katrina, he is now faced with difficulties—those more complicated than the giants, dragons, and enemies of knights errant in stories, who never seem to struggle much to surmount these hurdles and win the heart of the lady. Katrina cannot be so easily won over, first since she is capricious, and second since Ichabod is only one of many admirers.

Here we have an explicit comparison between Ichabod's courtship of Katrina and the travels of a knight errant—another example of a fictional story seeming more attainable, more "real," than reality. It also connects Ichabod to another knight-errant who's imagination overpowers him: Don Quixote.

His most daunting opponent is Abraham Van Brunt, a strong, broad-shouldered, powerful young man nicknamed Brom Bones. Brom Bones is known for being a skillful horseman and an excellent racer, fighter, and prankster, though he is more mischievous than evil and wanders the countryside with his several sidekicks in search of fun and battles. People in the village are generally amused and admiring of Brom Bones, and tend to think of him whenever there's a practical joke or brawl in the vicinity.

Another example of names serving as a powerful descriptor of characters or places. Brom Bones doesn't exactly map onto the knight errant comparison—he's mischievous rather than being a truly evil enemy. Brom's reputation in the village backs up this characterization, and sets the bar higher for Ichabod to attempt to battle him. The surname "Bones" also connects Brom to the supernatural, but in a humorous way.

Brom Bones is also in pursuit of Katrina, which discourages other candidates, who withdraw in despair. But Ichabod, who is cheerfully persistent against pressure, decides not to openly wage war against Brom Bones but rather quietly continue his own courtship.

War is not always waged out in the open, but often takes place through more subtle, strategic moves. However, Ichabod's choice to continue shows at least a bit of delusion compared to the other candidates.

Katrina's parents allow both rivals to continue: Baltus Van Tassel tends to spoil his daughter, and his wife considers that she can take care of herself.

The stage is set and any obstacles to a potential battle, such as Katrina's parents, are swept aside.

Knickerbocker claims not to know how women's hearts function: some are won over easily, while others are variable and require constant struggle to vanquish. Brom Bones seems not to be able to exclusively conquer Katrina's coquettish heart. He comes less and less to her farmhouse, and begins to desire open combat with Ichabod. The schoolteacher, however, knows he would never win a duel against Brom Bones, and avoids him. Brom Bones has to resort to playing practical jokes on him, like plugging the chimney of his singing school so it fills with smoke, or ridiculing him while Katrina is present. However, nothing seems to work definitively.

Here, again, Knickerbocker inserts himself into the narrative to earnestly question the motives and actions of the characters—fitting with the conceit that he's a real person considering a true story. In the initial battles between Ichabod and Brom, the result seems to remain a draw—even if Brom Bones has the upper hand in terms of dreaming up practical jokes to play.

One afternoon in autumn, Ichabod is sitting in the front of his classroom swinging around his birch whip, while his students scribble dutifully or whisper to each other in hushed tones. A black man atop a ragged-looking colt arrives at the door of the school, with an invitation for Ichabod to attend a quilting frolic to be held at the Van Tassel farm that evening. The messenger rushes away, evidently feeling his mission to be critical.

In contrast to the earlier scene, here Ichabod is comfortably at the top of a different social hierarchy. His confidence at the schoolhouse is only increased by the invitation he receives to the quilting frolic, which confirms that he has at least succeeded in becoming one of the candidates to Katrina's hand.

Suddenly, the classroom's atmosphere grows rowdy: Ichabod rushes the students through their lessons and has everyone leave their inkstands and books wherever they like. He lets them leave an hour early so that he can spend an extra thirty minutes preparing for the party and putting on his only suit. Looking like a knight errant, he mounts the horse he's borrowed from an old, grumpy man named Hans Van Ripper.

With the possibility of the abundance of Van Tassel's farm replacing his meager income as a schoolteacher, Ichabod brushes aside his current duties—again, perhaps being overly imaginative about his ability to win over Katrina's heart.

Since Knickerbocker wants to tell a true "romantic story," he pauses to describe the scene: an elderly, ragged, one-eyed plow-horse named Gunpowder that nevertheless retains some of its youthful spirit, and Ichabod's gangly figure with his elbows stuck out and arms flapping as he rides.

Irving, of course, helped to found the genre of American Romanticism, which believed in the primacy of the imagination above purely rational thought, the importance of personal freedom, and the authenticity of nature. But this description is more of a parody of romanticist prose, as Irving pokes fun at the battle into which Ichabod is riding.

It is a beautiful autumn day, with chirping birds fluttering around the brilliantly colored trees of the forest, from the blackbird to the woodpecker, cedar bird, and blue jay, each with its own coat and idiosyncrasies. Ichabod looks upon these treasures as if they were a feast to be devoured—especially the apples, Indian corn, yellow pumpkins, and buckwheat fields. These remind him of the abundance awaiting him if he manages to marry Katrina.

By creating such an idyllic scene, the story sets up a future contrast between this peaceful afternoon and the same journey home later that night. Ichabod, once again, can't help but consider nature not in its passive beauty but in terms of what it can offer him—particularly if he can win the battle for Katrina.

As Ichabod crosses the Hudson, a "sloop" or sailing boat is bobbing in the distance, and through a trick of the sky's reflection looks like it's suspended in the air.

These kinds of details are typical of American Romanticism, a genre Irving is helping to forge through every description in his story.

By the evening, Ichabod arrives at the Van Tassel castle, already packed with the most well-to-do farmers and their wives and children, clothed in traditional dress (though a few of the daughters boast a slightly modern addition like a ribbon or straw hat). Brom Bones stands out from the crowd with his horse Daredevil, a mischievous creature like himself.

The description of the guests' clothing underlines Tarry Town's status as a place devoid of history—though the ribbons suggest that even Tarry Town cannot fully escape changing times and traditions.

When Ichabod enters the home, his eyes rest not on the beautiful women but rather on the tea-table heaped with Dutch delicacies like doughnuts, sweet cakes, ginger cakes, and all sorts of pies. Knickerbocker has no time to enumerate them all, though Ichabod gorges himself on all these treats, laughing to himself as he imagines being the master of all this abundance. When he is lord of the estate, he thinks, he would no longer associate with the likes of Hans Van Ripper and other impoverished schoolteachers.

By now we should expect that Ichabod would make a beeline for the dessert table. The traditional Dutch food on offer adds another touch of tradition and age to the story. Ichabod's gloating thoughts, meanwhile, reflect his sense of social competition and his acute desire to climb the social ranks.

After the feast comes the dance. This delights Ichabod, who takes almost as much pride in his dancing as in his singing. Outside, there are black people—presumably uninvited, perhaps servants or slaves—crowding at the windows to peer in, and they are amazed at the sight. Ichabod is thrilled to have Katrina as his dancing partner. Brom Bones sulks jealously in the corner.

This is the first moment at which it seems that Ichabod is finally gaining the upper hand against Brom Bones. The description of the black people outside, however, reminds us that beyond Ichabod's social strivings, there were far clearer and more serious social hierarchies at the time—these black people were likely slaves.

Afterward, some of the older guests gather around Ichabod to gossip and tell war stories—this neighborhood, indeed, was an important site during the Revolutionary War. The war is far enough in the past that each person can exaggerate and slightly fictionalize his story. Doffue Martling, for instance, claims to have nearly destroyed a British ship singlehandedly, and others similarly claim to be the heroes of their own stories.

Though Tarry Town seems not to have changed in years, the war certainly impacted the lives of its inhabitants. As major events recede into history, however, it becomes easier to build up stories and traditions around them—even if these tales blur the line between history and storytelling.

After the war stories come the tales of ghosts and specters, which also are typical of the region, and are able to last longer since the population has remained stable for so long. After all, ghosts are more likely to haunt places where they're acquainted with the inhabitants, such as in the long-established Dutch villages like these. And since this neighborhood is so close to Sleepy Hollow, the dreamy, haunted atmosphere has contaminated the settlement.

Given the blurred line between history and stories, it is unsurprising that war stories yield easily to ghost stories—especially since many of these tall tales draw on the historical war for their characters and plots. The supernatural is closer to reality in this village, particularly for Ichabod but to some extent for everyone.

Some of the guests who are residents of Sleepy Hollow tell about the kidnapping of Major André, the woman in white who haunts Raven Rock, and, above all, the Headless Horseman who has been recently spotted tethering his horse to churchyard graves. The church is isolated, located between a forest and the Hudson River, with a road leading to a stream and a wooden bridge overhung by thick trees and brush. This is one of the favorite haunts of the Headless Horseman.

Many of these ghosts, once again, were either real historical figures or have some kind of relationship to the Revolutionary War. The description of the church reveals how suitable it is for stories of haunting and ghostliness, since it is isolated, dark, and gloomy.

The guests tell of old Brouwer, who didn't believe in ghosts until he met the Horseman on his way back from Sleepy Hollow. They raced each other on horseback until reaching the bridge, at which point the Horseman turned into a skeleton and hurled Brouwer into the stream. Brom Bones, in turn, claims that he also raced the Horseman once for a bottle of punch, and that he and Daredevil would have won if the Horseman hadn't vanished at the last minute. And Ichabod adds his own stories taken from **Cotton Mather** and his nightly walks around Sleepy Hollow.

In the topsy-turvy world of Sleepy Hollow, those who are too anchored in reality will ultimately be punished by the supernatural. Brom Bones's addition to the story are obviously boastful tall tales, but they underline his eagerness to seek out competition wherever he can find it. Looked back on from later in the story, Brom's tales here will also suggest that perhaps he was laying the foundation for another of his pranks. Ichabod, for his part, believes too earnestly in the reality of the ghost stories to make up his own tales. He takes his tales from his book.

The party comes to a close, and Ichabod lingers, confident in his imminent success, in order to speak to Katrina. Knickerbocker does not know what happened at this meeting, but believes something went wrong, since Ichabod soon exits the castle looking crestfallen. Instead of gazing upon the abundant fields and orchards, he mounts his steed and heads off.

Again, Knickerbocker is not quite an omniscient narrator—there are things he doesn't know, which paradoxically makes us more willing to accept his narrative as realistic. Instead he reads between the lines—something must have gone wrong if Ichabod is no longer enraptured by the abundance around him. The suggestion is that Katrina has rejected him, that he now knows he has no chance with her.

It is late at night by this point, and it is silent enough that Ichabod can hear a watchdog barking from far off across the Hudson, as well as an occasional cricket or bullfrog. Suddenly, he recalls all the ghost stories and tall tales recounted at the party, and realizes that he is approaching the scene of many of them. In front of him is a massive tulip tree with large, gnarled branches, not far from where Major André had been kidnapped.

Sleepy Hollow's picturesque isolation makes it attractive during the day, but an ideal setting for hauntings at night. Ichabod doesn't need much more encouragement than that for his imagination to begin imbuing the nature around him with all kinds of supernatural qualities and creating his own reality out of them.

Ichabod rides closer to the tree. He starts to believe that every sound is the sign of a spirit, though he passes the tree safely. But two hundred yards later, he approaches Wiley's Swamp, where a few logs make a bridge over a small stream and huge trees cover the ground in darkness. It was precisely here where André had been captured, and the stream is known to be haunted. Ichabod, his heart pounding in fear, attempts to race over the bridge, but Gunpowder rears up and runs side to side before pausing just before the bridge. Ichabod hears a splash beside him. Within the shadows, he sees an enormous towering shape.

As we reach the climax, events begin to pile atop each other and the cadence of the prose grows quicker and more dramatic. Even as Ichabod is frightening himself into desperation, he draws on real historical events like Major André's to justify his fear. By the time the massive figure rises out of the shadows, we are almost unsurprised, so well has Ichabod (and Irving) built up a foreboding of disaster.

Terrified, Ichabod stammers, "Who are you?" but is not answered. He closes his eyes and starts to sing a psalm. At that moment the monstrous object begins to move, and reveals itself to be a massive horseman on a black horse. Gunpowder finally breaks into a trot and the horseman trots along behind him. Ichabod immediately thinks of Brom Bones' story about racing the Headless Horseman, but when he quickens his pace, his follower does as well. As they race up a hill, Ichabod, horrified, realizes that the horseman is headless, and carries his **head** upon his saddle. The two sprint along the road, until Gunpowder misses the path to Sleepy Hollow and instead dashes downhill to the left towards the famous bridge and church.

Already, we see that Ichabod is not only frightened by the figure on a horseback, but by what that figure represents—particularly, here, the role it played in the story told by Brom Bones. While to the reader, Brom's tale was obviously mere embellishment and bragging, Ichabod holds no such certainty. Given the framework through which he sees reality, he has almost no choice but to assume that the round object held by the horseman is his head—indeed, the narration encourages us to think so too.

As the race continues, Ichabod's saddle slips from under him—an expensive one, and he immediately thinks of how angry Van Ripper, who owns the saddle, will be—but he manages to cling to Gunpowder and avoid falling off, though barely.

Even while in a race for his life, Ichabod is fearful at having lost the saddle. We already know he prefers to avoid confrontation, so it's easy to imagine how terrified he might feel about returning to the grumpy Van Ripper having lost the man's saddle.

Ichabod sees the church in front of him, and thinks that if he can reach the bridge the ghost will disappear, as it did for Brom Bones, and he'll be safe. Gunpowder leaps onto the bridge, and Ichabod reaches the other side, but as he looks back he sees the figure hurl his **head** at him. Ichabod fails to dodge it and it crashes into his own head. He falls from his horse and the rider gallops by.

Again, Ichabod interprets his own reality in terms of the stories he's heard, especially that of Brom Bones. In this case, though, the head is no longer simply an eerie, ghostly apparition but an object of battle wielded by the horseman against Ichabod.

The next morning Gunpowder is found without its saddle or rider. Ichabod does not show up for meals or at school, and a search party sets out, soon finding the saddle in the dirt by the church. Nearby are found tracks of horses' hoofs in the road that are traced to the bridge. On the bank of the stream under it, the searchers find Ichabod's hat resting next to a shattered pumpkin.

Until this moment, we've experienced the climax solely through the eyes of Ichabod. Now, the perspective becomes a more distanced, objective point of view. Knickerbocker doesn't explain the meaning of the shattered pumpkin—as readers more rational than Ichabod, we're supposed to put the pieces together ourselves: that it is a pumpkin that hits Ichabod and not a head suggests the Horseman was no ghost, and the chase a prank. So: Brom Bones is a prankster and told the story about the Horseman being in this part of the forest. It seems very likely that Brom is pretending to be the Headless Horseman.

Hans Van Ripper is appointed to go through Ichabod's possessions—which includes only several pieces of clothing, a razor, and a book of psalm-tunes. After also finding **Cotton Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft"**, an almanac, and a book of fortune-telling among Ichabod's possessions, Van Ripper decides it's not worth sending his children to school any longer. At church, the attendees gossip about the event, and conclude that Ichabod must have been carried off by the Headless Horseman. Since he didn't have family or any debt, people soon forget about him.

Ichabod's pride in his intellectualism and singing chops is now portrayed as somewhat silly rather than as objects of admiration. Van Ripper's attitude about school stems from the ambiguous position of Cotton Mather's book, as both a repository of "book-knowledge" and of irrational supernatural tales. Ripper seems to think: if intellectual people believe in this *nonsense, then I don't want my kids wasting their time with school. Nevertheless, the other villagers easily assimilate this new element into the traditional town ghost stories.*

Several years later, an old farmer returns from New York with the news that Ichabod is still alive: he had left the village partly in fear of Van Ripper's reaction to losing his saddle, and partly from embarrassment at being rejected by Katrina. He had continued teaching and also embarked upon the study of the law, before becoming a politician, journalist, and finally a justice of the "Ten Pound Court."

Here, Knickerbocker introduces another element of uncertainty, with a competing conclusion of the tale. Ichabod left town not merely out of fear of the horseman, but more out of the more pragmatic fears of having lost Ripper's saddle and the social embarrassment of having lost the battle for Katrina. Moreover, this conclusion suggests that in leaving the sleepy town of Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod himself became less dreamy, less focused on lucking into wealth and abundance through marriage, and instead diligently made a successful career for himself. In this conclusion, Ichabod's path seems to mirror that of the United States, which at the time of the story's publication was transitioning from a small-town agrarian society to one dominated increasingly by commerce, one where "striving" was valued and could make a career, one in which hard-headed reality was prized over fuzzy-headed beliefs in ghost stories.

Brom Bones married Katrina shortly after Ichabod's disappearance. He tends to put on a knowing look anytime someone tells the story, especially laughing when the pumpkin is mentioned.

Another hint that Ichabod's perspective on what happened that fateful night is not the perspective the reader should adopt.

The old country wives, though, who Knickerbocker claims are generally the most knowledgeable in the village, insist that Ichabod was carried away by the Horseman. The story becomes a favorite one in the neighborhood, and since the bridge is feared more than ever, the road to the church is altered. The school is moved elsewhere and the old schoolhouse deserted. It is said to be haunted by Ichabod. The plowboy, when wandering home on a summer evening, sometimes imagines he hears Ichabod's voice from afar singing a psalm tune.

By ending with the opinions of the old Dutch wives, Irving can be sure that his tale will "count" as a ghost story—even if he's introduced alternatives to the haunted, supernatural narrative. And even if the tale of the horseman isn't "true," it's become solidly incorporated into the tradition and legacy of the town—and, by extension, of the budding American nation.

POSTSCRIPT

Knickerbocker says that he first heard this story at a Corporation meeting among burghers in the "ancient city" of Manhattoes (i.e. Manhattan), told by a shabby old man (the storyteller). Most of the attendees enjoyed the tale, but one other elderly gentleman seems doubtful and not amused, as if wary of the tale.

By introducing yet another framing device to the story, in which Knickerbocker himself got the story from another storyteller, Irving simulates the historian's job of sifting through archives and witness testimonials. The elderly gentleman provides a counterpoint to this emphasis on fact.

He asks the storyteller what the moral of the story is. The storyteller answers that every situation in life has its advantages, as long as you keep in mind the following joke. Someone who races goblin troopers will probably have a rough ride. Therefore, if a country schoolteacher fails to win the heart of a Dutch heiress, he is certain to achieve success in politics.

This logical syllogism has spawned countless interpretations over the centuries. There's certainly some kind of relationship meant to be drawn between Ichabod's doomed courtship, his dreamy, imaginative temperament, and his later success—but it's also possible Irving is just playing with the reader as well.

The wary gentleman seems even more confused by this logical syllogism, as the storyteller looks back at him triumphantly, before the gentleman claims that he still has doubts about the tale. The storyteller responds that he doesn't believe half of the story himself.

Throughout "Sleepy Hollow," claims about the story's veracity have competed with hints that it's no more than an imaginative tale. Here, Irving seems to wink at the reader, implying that the tension will remain unresolved.

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