

Rip Van Winkle: an Allegory of the American Revolution

201629196

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The setting of Rip Van Winkle is in the years before and after the American Revolution War. Washington Irving uses allegory to interpret the inhabitants' national identity of the newly shaped society as the point view of folklore. There are variety kinds of interpretations about the core meaning of the story. In my opinion, this story is an allegory of the American Revolution. The period before the protagonist, Rip Van Winkle, went to the mountain and fell asleep for 20 years refers to the time that American was still under British rule ; the period after Rip Van Winkle woke up and went down the mountain found out that everything has changed refers to the time after the American Revolution. After the revolution, the American people were struggling with forming their own identity.

In the story, the protagonist Rip Van Winkle presents the Americans and Dame Van Winkle, the antagonist of the story, presents the British colonies in America. Washington Irving uses his protagonist to symbolize the struggle of early America. To explain this, Dame Van Winkle had the right to nag her husband, very much like the Royal British. Dame's right came from the fact that Rip put no attention on his farm.

As Washington Irving mentioned, “ His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow was always getting lost or else eating up the vegetables in the garden. Nothing ever grew well in his fields (text book p.11).” The inferior position of Rip may be the cause that gave Dame the reason to be angry with him and nagged him.

The first part of the story is about the condition that Americans live under British rule. Rip Van Winkle is a henpecked husband who lives under his wife’s shadow. The dislike of Dame Van Winkle appears in the text many times. Whenever people of the village discussed the Van Winkle family’s quarrels, they always decided that Rip was right, and that Dame Van Winkle was wrong (text book p.10). The author states, “Rip Van Winkle’s troubles increased as the years of his marriage passed. A hard woman never becomes softer with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that cuts better with constant use (text book p.11).” Or “Morning, noon and night, her tongue was incessantly going, everything he said or did was sure to produce more angry talk (text book p.11).” Both show that the pressure that Dame brings to Rip constantly makes him unbreathable. They can also interpret as the harsh colony of England has become stricter and stricter every year and makes the American people feel unbearable. Royal England taxed their colonies in their own favor. Hence, the quarrel of Winkle’s family can be seen as metaphor in the fact that the Royal England was losing respect from its colonies, just as the villagers were on Rip’s side when Rip’s

rebellion against the authority of his wife.

The middle part of the story is about the American seeking for their identity.

Rip Van Winkle went back to the town which he used to live in and found out that the town is no longer the one he is familiar to. His house was destroyed, the village inn turned into a large wooden building, the name of the person who is in picture on the sign was changes from King George the Third to General Washington, and the villagers he knew none of them. All the changes made Rip feel confused and anxious and leaded him to doubt his identity. He put a lot of effort to understand that there had been a revolutionary war, that the country had freed itself from England, that instead of being a subject of His Majesty George the Third, he was now a free citizen of the United States (text book p.17).

The last part of the story is about the acceptation of the new identity. In the text book, the author stated, "The changes of states and empires made little impression on him. But he well understood one kind of independence- independence from a sharp-tongued wife. Luckily he had that independence now; he could go in and out whenever the pleased (text book p.17)." Although it took time for Rip to accept, he soon used to the new village and get along with the villagers well. The phrase Washington Irving used in the story "independence from a sharp- tongued wife" can be explained to be the Independence of America, "independence from England". The

people in the States could finally enjoy the new freedom; they were free to do what they wanted to do.

In conclusion, the entire story has many metaphors shows that how the new society in the States needs to establish an identity before and after the American Revolution. The protagonist, Rip Van Winkle can be interpreted as early Americans who lived under the rule of England, the Americans after the Revolution War. His character describes the society of America as seen in the England point of view; whereas, Dame Van Winkle, presents England. Americans were trying to avoid the tyranny of the colony of England, just as Rip would do everything possible to escape his overwhelming wife.