

Rip Van Winkle

Analysis

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Washington Irving

Irving is largely credited as the first American Man of Letters, and the first to earn his living solely by his pen. Eulogizing Irving before the Massachusetts Historical Society in December 1859, his friend, the poet Henry

Wadsworth Longfellow, acknowledged Irving's role in promoting American literature: "We feel a just pride in his renown as an author, not forgetting that, to his other claims upon our gratitude, he adds also that of having been the first to win for our country an honourable name and position in the History of Letters".

Irving perfected the American short story and was the first American writer to place his stories firmly in the United States, even as he poached from German or Dutch folklore. He is also generally credited as one of the first to write both in the vernacular, and without an obligation to the moral or didactic in his short stories, writing stories simply to entertain rather than to enlighten. Irving also encouraged would-be writers. As George William Curtis noted, there "is not a young literary aspirant in the country, who, if he ever personally met Irving, did not hear from him the kindest words of sympathy, regard, and encouragement."

Some critics, however—including Edgar Allan Poe—felt that while Irving should be given credit for being an innovator, the writing itself was often unsophisticated. "Irving is much over-rated", Poe wrote in 1838, "and a nice distinction might be drawn between his just and his surreptitious and adventitious reputation—between what is due to the pioneer solely, and what to the writer". A critic for the *New-York Mirror* wrote: "No man in the Republic of Letters has been more overrated than Mr. Washington Irving." Some critics noted especially that Irving, despite being an American, catered to British sensibilities and, as one critic noted, wrote "of and for England, rather than his own country"

Rip Van Winkle had grabbed his gun and his dog, Wolf, and headed out to the woods. He rested under a tree where evening came on quickly. As Rip was getting ready to journey back home, he heard a voice calling his name. He went to see who was calling his name. He discovered an old man carrying a keg on his back. Rip and the old man walked to a ravine in the mountain. There they found a band of odd-looking people. Rip and the old man drank from the keg the man was carrying on his back. Rip fell into a deep sleep, which brings us up to his awaking.

Rip Van Winkle woke up and it seemed to be the next morning. "The birds were hopping and twittering among the bushes, and the eagle was wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze." I think this symbolizes that the jeopardy that Rip was in the night before was over. The text said that the people in the ravine were rolling balls that echoed sounds of thunder through the ravine. That makes me picture a dark storm rolling in. This sets the scene with a little tension because Rip did not know what to make of the people in the ravine. He was a little frightened by them. So the birds singing and the sun rising the next morning seems to set the mood at ease again.

Rip thinks about what went on the night before. He remembers the old man, the keg of liquor, the party, and the flagon. The flagon was the cup that Rip Van Winkle drank from the night before. Rip Van Winkle said, "Oh! That flagon! That wicked flagon!" I thought it was humorous that he blamed the cup for getting him "tipsy" and causing him to sleep through the night.

The first hint that is given that Rip did a little more sleeping than he thought was the moment he reached for his gun. "He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean, well-oiled fowling-piece he found an old firelock." It stated that the barrel was rusted and the stock was full of holes from worms eating away at it. Rip's first thought was that the people from the mountain had played a trick on him and stolen his gun. My first thought was different from Rip's. I figured that he would know that the rusted gun was his. The text mentioned more than once how his gun was well-oiled and well taken care of. Also, the story told how Rip would spend hours walking

through swamps and fields just to kill a squirrel or a pigeon. In my personal opinion I would think if Rip took that care of his gun he would know exactly what it looked like. Even if it had rusted a bit he would still be able to recognize it. I imagine he was dazed and confused when he woke up and just did not recognize his gun. He also noticed that Wolf, his dog, was nowhere to be found. He whistled for him but to no response.

Thinking that the people in the mountains had stolen his gun and dog, Rip set out to the spot where he was the night before to reclaim his possessions. As he got up he was very stiff and his bones did not want to cooperate. Rip passed it off to sleeping on the ground but to the reader that is a true sign that Rip probably slept longer than just one night. I also found humor in that Rip was scared that he might develop rheumatism from sleeping in the night air. He was not frightened off being sick, he was just scared of what his wife would do to him he got rheumatism.

As Rip arrived at the spot where the mountain people had been, to his astonishment a stream was now running through the ravine. "A mountain stream was now foaming down it, leaping from rock to rock, and filling the glen with babbling murmurs." To me, this relates how quickly nature changes. It can recreate itself into something totally different. It went from an amphitheater ravine, to a mountain stream with no trace of the people or Rip Van Winkle's remains. Also I think that the stream might be a slight symbolization. Where it says the "water leaped from rock to rock" that almost sounds like the water was the men that had been there the night before. It is almost like they were having fun jumping from rock to rock to spite Rip Van Winkle.