

Chapter III

Washington Irving's Original Tale and the Film Version

A. The Original Tale

A. 1. Synopsis of Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*

The long short story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* begins with the geographical and natural description of a small Dutch community named Sleepy Hollow in the upstate New York during the early nineteenth century. The area is portrayed as lonely, remote, and filled with stories of supernatural and fantastical atmosphere. Everyone who happens to visit this enchanted region will involuntarily feel the effect of this superstitious tone of air. Many strange and extraordinary tales keep the area in its shadowy and often eerie existence. There are tales of its haunted valleys and streams, others account for the ghostly woman in white accompanied by eerie midnight shrieks and howls. In broad daylight, however, Sleepy Hollow and its surrounding forests are very much described as lovable and beautiful landscapes, utterly the lonely yet lovely strange little area.

Among the many queer and outlandish tales which are told about the place, there is this supreme tale which keeps this village shrouded in its eternal gloom. It is the tale of the Headless Horseman, a huge shadowy soldier who rides headless through the night, terrifying unlucky travelers. The horseman is said to be the ghost of a dead Hessian soldier who lost its head in one of the battles of the Revolutionary

War of America. People of Sleepy Hollow enjoy indulging themselves in these wildly imaginative stories and even influence those who reside there for a time.

At one period of time in Sleepy Hollow there happened to reside there a schoolteacher named Ichabod Crane who was a native of Connecticut, carrying the task of teaching the children of Sleepy Hollow. Ichabod Crane was a strange figure for his unproportioned posture with exceedingly long arms and small head really made him sort of like a walking scarecrow. Yet, as a teacher he knew how to administer respect and justice among his pupils. He acquired his lodging by rotating from one of the farmers' residence whose children he taught to that of another.

Aside from teaching, Ichabod also lent his talent in instructing the children there to sing in psalmody. He liked helping around as he spent his time in the farmer's house, and was particularly popular among the female circle, being considered as more educated than most of the other people in that village. One of the youngsters whom he instructed was Katrina Van Tassel, the blossoming girl of eighteen, the daughter of Baltus Van Tassel, one of the prominent farmers in Sleepy Hollow. Undisturbed by his own physical appearance, Ichabod often dreamt of winning Katrina's heart and also secretly hoping himself to be the heir of the Baltus Van Tassel's prosperous property and wealth. There was, however, one slight problem for Ichabod: he was not alone in his quest for Katrina's love. Many other young gentlemen fiercely competed against each other with the final purpose of taking Katrina's hand to the altar. One of these adversaries was Abraham Van Brunt or Brom Van Brunt or better known as Brom Bones, referring to his muscular and Herculean proportion. He was known all around Sleepy Hollow as a

troublemaker; for wherever and whenever there was a brawl, it can be almost certain that Brom Bones took part in it. Even his horse, called Daredevil, was known as a very wild animal around the place. Brom Bones knew each one of his rivals and was determined to use every possible way to lessen his competitors. Ichabod's craving for Katrina did not go unnoticed by Brom, whom Ichabod tried to avoid on all occasions. A physical confrontation would certainly not be a wise alternative.

The peak of this rivalry between Ichabod and Brom happened one night when all of the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow were gathered to have a 'merrymaking' or a party at Van Tassel's estate. Ichabod, who at that time stayed in the house of Hans Van Ripper, wore his best suit and rode along Gunpowder, the horse lent to him by Van Ripper. He had a great presence at the party, enjoying his mingling with the other Sleepy Hollowers, especially the housewives and the ladies and sharing stories of ghosts and goblins which include the latest sighting of the Headless Horseman. This preferment for Ichabod left Brom desperately upset and humiliated.

Upon returning home alone that night, Ichabod was utterly influenced by the supernatural stories he had been hearing and all his fear manifested itself when finally, in the woods, he encountered what he perceived as the apparition of the Headless Horseman itself. Fleeing the ghost and determined to get to the nearest sanctuary, Ichabod was panic-stricken and galloped Gunpowder as fast as he could manage. Yet he never felt that the ghost came nearer nor farther away from him. When he turned to see his pursuer, he saw that the Horseman lifted his supposedly decapitated head and threw it towards him. He felt the thing hurled at him by the ghost and the impact thrown him off his horse.

The following morning, Ichabod was never to be found anywhere; his horse was found wandering about without him. A splattered pumpkin marked the spot where he had fallen. Some people believed he was really taken by the ghost, some others thought Ichabod was so frightened that he decided never to return to Sleepy Hollow again. Yet some believe this had been the handiwork of Brom Van Brunt who later successfully took Katrina to the altar.

A. 2. About Washington Irving and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*

The writer has collected and compiled some information on the life and the works of Washington Irving from several sources, namely *The Cambridge History of American Literature Volume I*, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* and *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*.

Washington Irving is known among many people as the "Father of American Literature". He was born in 1783, the year the United States won its freedom, and named for the military hero venerated as the Father of His Country, George Washington. Although contemporaries both at home and abroad recognized his seminal importance as the man who declared the nation's literary independence, later readers have dealt less kindly with Irving. Most have ignored his claims to precedence and dismissed him as inherently less interesting and "modern" than his successors such as James Fenimore Cooper or Herman Melville. The title "Father of American Literature", in this sense, indicates that Irving was a figure of an

outdated phase of culture –archaic and pre-Romantic, too remote to engage twentieth-century sensibilities.

Irving was the son of a wealthy British merchant and during the Revolution had taken side with the rebels. He turned to a literary career after his training as a lawyer, which did not interest him at all. He wrote for various newspapers and published, with his brother William Irving and friend J. K. Paulding, a series of whimsical and satirical essays and poems, collected in book forms as *Salmagundi; or, the Whim-Whams and Opinions of Lancelot Langstaff, Esq. And others* in 1808. He followed this with his highly successful burlesque *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, by Diedrich Knickerbocker, a pseudonym chosen to represent the solid, phlegmatic Dutch burgher created by Irving. Over the following years Irving struggled unsuccessfully to save the family business from bankruptcy, visiting England and building friendships with such prominent literary figures as Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, John Murray and several others on the process. Ignited by encouragement from Sir Walter Scott, he wrote *The Sketch Book* which contains essays and tales under the pseudonym of 'Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.', published serially in the United States from 1819 to 1820, and in book form in England in 1820. It was this work which made him a celebrity in both continents as well as the first American writer to enjoy an international reputation. The book is filled with sketches of English life (*The Christmas Dinner, Westminster Abbey*, etc.), essays on American subjects, and American adaptations of German folk-tales (including *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*). This was followed by other works such as the popular

Bracebridge Hall, the less well-received *Tales of a Traveller* and also his historical works *Life and Voyages of Columbus*, *Conquest of Granada*, *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus* and *The Alhambra*, all of which he wrote during his stay in Spain as diplomatic attaché to the American embassy in Madrid. He moved to London in 1829 to become secretary to the American legation under Martin Van Buren.

His later works include *The Crayon Miscellany*, *Astoria*, *Adventures of Captain Bonneville, USA*, *Mahomet and his Successors*, *Wolfert's Roost*, various biographies, and his monumental five volumed life of George Washington. Washington Irving never married, and he died as a bachelor.

It is indeed inevitable these days that Washington Irving is most well-known for his lighthearted yet realistic folktales. *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* happen to be his most popular works. Unlike many of his contemporaries who wrote novels, Irving strayed along the path of an essayists, humorist, satirist, and 'portrait artist' all rolled into one in his writing, hence his 'Geoffrey Crayon' pseudonym.

There is the independence of art and its alliance with death figure in Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, which also expose the inadvertent collision of the imagination with cash-conscious modernity. Especially in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, the clash between the imagination and the enterprising modern world is articulated in the rivalry of Brom Bones and Ichabod Crane for the hand of Katrina Van Tassel. The association of death casts a shadow over the narrative, which is said to have been "Found among the Papers of the late

Diedrich Knickerbocker". Furthermore, in terms of genre, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* abounds in gothic tales and shadowy superstitions, none more frightening than the story of a Hessian soldier's ghost that rides forth nightly in search of its head. Ichabod Crane who originates from Connecticut is a restless Yankee intruder into the enchanted rural region inhabited by the Dutch. He is the personification of a man who, despite his physical appearance, possesses the 'consuming' habit of thought prevalent in the new century: his 'devouring mind's eye' perceives the physical environment as objects to be ingested or as property to be 'turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness'. Meanwhile, Brom Bones, by disguising himself as the Headless Horseman, succeeds in expelling his rival from Sleepy Hollow and maintaining the domain of art from the predatory materialism of the Yankees. A postscript at the end of the story attributed to Knickerbocker reaffirms the victory of the aesthetic. The story is told through the narration of an unnamed 'pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old figure'. This man employs a nonsense syllogism to perplex a listener who suspiciously demands to know the moral of the story and what it wants to prove. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", however, remains one of the most widely recognized work that Irving has ever produced. It might be said that the tone of the story is lighthearted and humorous, but its appeal towards the many generations of readers who still enjoy it long after it was written proves that this tale indeed stands against the test of time.

B. The Film

The writer has gathered some information on the 1999 film *Sleepy Hollow* mainly from the online sources on the Internet and from an article in *Newsweek* dated April 26, 1999 as well as *Sight and Sound* magazine dated January 2000. There have actually been several film versions based on Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, including a Disney cartoon narrated by Bing Crosby in *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* and a made-for-TV movie starring Jeff Goldblum and Meg Foster as Ichabod and Katrina, respectively. However, the film version which the writer has chosen for the analysis is the 1999 cinematic version titled *Sleepy Hollow*, directed by Tim Burton based on a story and screenplay by Andrew Kevin Walker and Kevin Yagher. The film is produced by Paramount Pictures and Mandalay Pictures.

B. 1. Synopsis of the 1999 Film Version *Sleepy Hollow*

The 1999 film version of *Sleepy Hollow* tells the story of a small and remote Dutch village in the upstate New York, where a series of gruesome murders had been committed. The setting takes place sometime in 1799 America, on the brink of a new century. Several beheaded bodies were found without any trace of their heads. The film opens with the scene of a beheading by a mysterious killer on a horseback.

There was a young detective or constable in New York City named Ichabod Crane who was considered by his superiors to be very unusual and annoying in his method of investigating and solving crime. Because of his stubbornness of doing an autopsy on a dead body found floating in a New York canal, he was summoned by his burgomaster to put his incomprehensible way somewhere else, which was to Sleepy Hollow.

Ichabod Crane was indeed a man of reason who was too much ahead of his time. Therefore, the only indirect way for his master to dismiss him was by sending him to Sleepy Hollow to investigate the beheading case.

By taking a ride in a coach, Ichabod arrived in Sleepy Hollow, an eternally misty and haunting place. He came just in time for a celebration in the house of a prominent citizen of Sleepy Hollow named Baltus Van Tassel and his second wife Lady Van Tassel. He was inadvertently welcomed by a kiss from Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of Baltus. His coming caused jealousy from Brom Van Brunt who happened to court Katrina at that time. He was provided a place for lodging in Baltus Van Tassel's residence and was soon introduced to the town's important figures: Doctor Lancaster, Reverend Steenwyck, Magistrate Samuel Philipse, and Notary James Hardenbrook. From these men, Ichabod was told about the story of a headless horseman who had been going on a killing spree in Sleepy Hollow by decapitating the heads of its citizens. The victims were from the Van Garret family, one of the prominent landlord families in Sleepy Hollow. In a flashback sequence, the origin of the Headless Horseman was revealed. The horseman was said to be the ghost of a Hessian warrior sent by a German princess to preserve the land.

Unlike many other soldiers who killed for money, the horseman killed because he enjoyed it and he did so by decapitating his enemies' heads. The horseman's life came to an end when he was captured and decapitated because of the two mysterious little girls whom he met in the woods. His head was said to be buried separately from his body and this was why the horseman came back from his death and terrorized the people: to search for his missing head.

Being a man who was always reasonable and scientific about everything, he dismissed the story of the Headless Horseman as a nonsense and he was determined to prove that the real killer was a man of flesh and blood. His investigation was put to the test when he examined the dead bodies of the victims. He tried to find clues which could link one victim with the others. He found out that the victims were somehow related and that this fact would endorse his reasoning of motivated murders.

Secretly, Katrina began to develop a fondness for Ichabod and because of this Brom Van Brunt tried to scare him away by disguising himself as the Headless Horseman.

After his arrival, Ichabod witnessed several decapitations happening to other Sleepy Hollow citizens, one of whom was Jonathan Masbath. When Masbath was buried, his young son, the only remaining Masbath, volunteered himself to help Ichabod track down the killer. At first Ichabod refused this offer, but he knew that he was going to need help to solve the crime in Sleepy Hollow, so he accepted the young Masbath as his informal assistant. Together they began their perilous task of uncovering the truth about the murders and the Headless Horseman.

Upon one chance encounter with Magistrate Philipse, who was about to tell a sinister secret to Ichabod, the real Headless Horseman showed up and decapitated Magistrate Philipse's head right before Ichabod's eyes. This horrendous experience left Ichabod with no choice but to comply with the fact that there was indeed a murderous headless horseman in Sleepy Hollow.

Days after this incident Ichabod began having bad dreams about his dark childhood. It was revealed through a dream sequence that Ichabod's mother, a supposedly witchcraft-bound woman, was killed with a torturing device resembling a coffin by his own father, who was a priest.

Meanwhile, Ichabod began his new theory that the horseman did not kill its victim randomly; he suspected that there was someone, a living person in Sleepy Hollow, who controlled the actions and terror of the Headless Horseman. With the aid of young Masbath, he met a mysterious and intimidating witch woman who dwells in the forest. He was told to follow the Indian trail in order to find the horseman's resting place.

The place turned out to be a strange-looking tree called The Tree of the Dead. With Katrina joining the team, they began to look around the tree and Ichabod discovered all of the decapitated heads of the murder victims hidden beneath the body of the tree. Further digging revealed even a more gruesome finding: the rotten body of the Hessian soldier without his head. Just as they all pondered about his matter, an extraordinary event took place. The tree's roots slithered and out of the confinement of the twigs came the Headless Horseman. It

did not seem to pay attention to Ichabod and his companion and rode along towards Sleepy Hollow.

Ichabod pursued the horseman. In the town the horseman decapitated the heads of a whole family, including a small child. Brom Van Brunt, who happened to be in the place, decided to confront the horseman. The horseman was invincible and was especially good at hand to hand combat. Ichabod came to the rescue but got hurt by the horseman's attack. Brom, unluckily, was slaughtered by the horseman's horrendous sword and axe.

The development of the case brought Ichabod in search of the living person and the motive behind the murders. At first, he suspected Baltus Van Tassel by linking the connection among the other victims. This allegation brought the relationship between Ichabod and Katrina in a bad term. He also found out that Lady Van Tassel had an affair with Reverend Steenwyck.

During a stormy night, the Headless Horseman came to attack the village. Baltus Van Tassel saw the horseman's coming, but he was unable to save his wife. All the villagers gathered round inside a church, in which the horseman could not enter. Panic enveloped the people as they started blaming each other on the horseman's attack. Baltus, the alleged one, shot Reverend Steenwyck, and was himself finally killed with a spear thrown by the Horseman from outside the church. As soon as Baltus' head was taken, the horseman raced along back to his resting place.

With the death of Baltus Van Tassel, Ichabod moved his suspicion to Katrina Van Tassel, who would inherit everything her father had in the event of his death.

This fact and the pentagram called 'the devil's eye' underneath Ichabod's bed strengthened Ichabod's reasoning that Katrina had been behind all the murders. Young Masbath contradicted Ichabod for this, but Ichabod was adamant about his opinion and chose to leave Sleepy Hollow.

On his way back to New York, Ichabod realized the strangeness of the dead body of Lady Van Tassel as well as his realization that the mark under his bed was not meant for a bad spell but a protection against evil. Ichabod returned to Sleepy Hollow just in time to confront Lady Van Tassel, who was alive and well, about to harm Katrina and the young Masbath. This Lady Van Tassel was not the real mother of Katrina because her own mother had died years before and the new Lady Van Tassel was actually an ex-maidservant of the first lady. Through Lady Van Tassel's flashback story it was revealed that she was actually the daughter of Archer family, who in the past had to live in poverty and relocate in the woods because of the Van Garret family; since the Van Tassel family and the Van Garret family were related, she also held them responsible for her family's bad luck. From that moment, she had been determined to avenge the two families for her misery. Things became perfect for her when she and her twin sister (they were revealed to be the two mysterious little girls previously mentioned during the capture of the Hessian soldier), who later became the witch woman, witnessed the beheading of the Hessian soldier. She made a pact with the devil that if she could use the horseman's power she would give her soul to the devil. She kept the horseman's head and had been using it for achieving her goal.

Ichabod, Katrina, and young Masbath fled Lady Van Tassel just in time when she summoned up the Headless Horseman from its grave. They went inside a windmill, where the Headless Horseman pursued them in order to kill Katrina on Lady Van Tassel's order. They escaped from the burning windmill and ran to the woods. In a carriage chase scene, Ichabod battled the indestructible Headless Horseman. They fought until they reached the Tree of the Dead. Ichabod, wounded from a gunshot by Lady Van Tassel, had managed to take the horseman's head from the lady and returned it to the horseman, just before Katrina's head was about to be decapitated. The horseman put its head back on and regained his flesh and blood appearance. The horseman, no longer intended on killing Katrina, took Lady Van Tassel away with him back to the tree and crossed away to the netherworld.

Ichabod and Katrina got married and they moved to New York City just in time for the new century to emerge.

B. 2. About the Filmmaking Project and the Filmmakers

The film *Sleepy Hollow* began with the idea of a horror filmmaker Kevin Yagher's conception to take the original Washington Irving's story to a new direction. Most of the previous adaptations have been very faithful to the Irving's story which accounts the story of a schoolteacher Ichabod Crane, who on his quest for the love of Katrina Van Tassel, has to be defeated by a trickery put on him by his rival Brom Van Brunt in the guise of the Headless Horseman. The essence of the

story is maintained: it is a humorous character study with only a vague sense of supernaturalism as an added flavoring.

The 1999 version of Irving's story is titled simply *Sleepy Hollow* and it bears very little resemblance to the original story, maintaining only the names of the main characters, the place, and the time setting. According to Kim Newman in her article in January 2000 issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine, the *Sleepy Hollow* project was originally developed by Kevin Yagher, a special make-up effects artist, who have been well-known for his animatronic doll Chucky in *Child's Play* films and the Crypt Keeper in the *Tales from the Crypt* television series. The project then turned into a bigger magnitude when Andrew Kevin Walker, a well-known screenwriter who is a specialist in exploring more modern American horrors in films like *Seven* and *8MM*, joined the project for a screenwriting task. At first, Yagher planned *Sleepy Hollow* as a low-budget effects horror film with a spectacular murder scene every five minutes or so and the plan was to make a protagonist out of Brom Van Brunt (p. 15).

Later the project turned into a really big horror project when several prominent Hollywood figures such as Francis Ford Coppola, Adam Schroeder, Scott Rudin and Larry Franco joined the film's team as producers and executive producers. Francis Ford Coppola, especially, most famous for his directing tasks in films like *The Godfather* films and *Apocalypse Now*, continued his attachment to the horror genre beginning with *Bram Stoker's Dracula* in 1992 and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* in 1994. Coppola is said to have been working up a secondary career restoring the horror genre to the literary weight it once had while at the same time trying to find ways of retelling old stories in new emotional-romantic ways (p. 15).

The director of the film is Tim Burton, a visionary film director mostly admired for his offbeat, dark, and melancholic films such as *Beetlejuice*, *Batman*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Batman Returns*. The director admitted that he was very influenced by the 60's Hammer studio horror films such as the remake of *Dracula* and *The Mummy*. Even further, the film crew gathered two of Hammer horror film veteran actors like Christopher Lee and Michael Gough. Together with production designer Rick Heinrichs, costume designer Colleen Atwood and director of photography Emmanuel Lubezki, Tim Burton tries to visualize the screenplay written by the above-mentioned Andrew Kevin Walker and Kevin Yagher into a new rewriting of Irving's classic tale.

Since the beginning, the film was designed to be a more fantastic tale, not a realistic historical reconstruction as in Irving's story. Although set in the 1800 America, the entire film was shot in Leavesden Studios in England, mostly caused by the fact that when the filmmakers scouted a number of Dutch communities in upstate New York and the Hudson Valley, where the real town of Sleepy Hollow is located, all those places are not really what they wanted on screen. While many of the villages were historically accurate, they did not match with the emotional side of the story. They need to enhance certain elements to accentuate the fantastic flair of the film. In the end, the filmmakers decided to build the entire town of Sleepy Hollow in a contained environment.

The casts of *Sleepy Hollow* include several popular actors and actresses in Hollywood as well as a number of British stage actors. Johnny Depp who has been working three times with director Tim Burton plays the lead character, Ichabod

Crane. The other casts are Christina Ricci as Katrina Van Tassel, Miranda Richardson as Lady Van Tassel, Michael Gambon as Baltus Van Tassel, Casper Van Dien as Brom Van Brunt, Jeffrey Jones as Reverend Steenwyck, Richard Griffiths as Samuel Philipse, Ian McDiarmid as Doctor Lancaster, Michael Gough as Notary James Hardenbrook, Marc Pickering as young orphan Masbath, Lisa Marie as Lady Crane, Ichabod's mother, Christopher Lee as the New York City burgomaster, and Christopher Walken plays the Hessian soldier (the Headless Horseman) in his headed form.

CHAPTER IV

SUPERNATURALISM AND ROMANTICISM: AN ANALYSIS ON HIGH CULTURE VERSUS POPULAR CULTURE