

Spaces of Initiation in Washington Irving's Stories

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Abstract

America has always been a space of challenges for the ones who wanted to discover more things about it. Space becomes a special place in which destinies are made and in which man can find a proper initiation. The wish to know more about the New World pushed man to explore and assimilate the land and the cultures he encountered. American literature undertook the mission to render in symbolical terms the space in which its characters evolve. The paper will analyse two of Washington Irving's short stories, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, showing how initiation can be obtained in various circumstances.

Keywords: Washington Irving, space, Puritans, identity, Transcendentalism

American literature represents one of the most challenging spaces of culture in the literatures of the world. Much of its appeal resides in the fact that it is closely linked to the mentality which created it. From the beginning of the Puritan Age until the modern and postmodern epochs, American civilization has always impressed by its national and symbolical value. In American culture, space has identified with the frontier that needed to be conquered. The frontier is of two types: real and imaginary. The real frontier coincides with the concrete representations of the spatial construct. In the years of the early settlement, the frontier was the margin of the village beyond which lay the wilderness. For the Puritans, it was the delimitation between the known land and the one of dangers lurking in the forest. The imaginary frontier raises more challenges as it coincides with the fears troubling the human soul. As religion was all-powerful for the Americans, and they interpreted everything in spiritual terms, the wilderness was the place of the devil where man could lose his immortal soul.

In time, this belief changed. An important role was played by transcendentalism, the philosophical and literary trend characterizing the 19th century. In the Puritan Age, the main concepts were those of self-denial and self-humiliation. Man had to obey the commands of the leaders, to be aware of his sinful nature, and to be ready to face the punishments brought upon him by God. Though the Puritans believed that they had been chosen by God to settle the New World, they had the conviction that the appropriate retribution awaited all of them. The hope to go to Heaven was based on the virtuous life man had on earth. Transcendentalism opposed this doctrine, and instead of self-denial, it brought self-awareness and self-reliance. Nature was no longer a place of unknown dangers but became a teacher and a guide on the road toward spiritual revelation. Nature was the intermediary between man and the Over-Soul, the name given by the transcendentalists to the divinity. Space was enlarged, and it represented the whole universe. It was no longer the confined space of the Puritan community, but it contained the immensity of the New World.

Literature followed in the footsteps of philosophy, but it added its own connotations to the symbol of space. It concentrated on the concept of initiation seen in cultural terms. Initiation coincided with the forging of an identity, characterizing man in his quest. Several types of space can be found in American literature. One of them is the magical space in the works of Washington Irving. His two famous stories, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* describe places that are opposed to the common space of the community. In the first story, the protagonist, Rip Van Winkle, is attracted to the supernatural world when he watches the crew of sailors playing nine pins in the forest. The woods are an important place where magic rules the land.

From an anthropological perspective, the forest is a place of challenges and initiation. According to Gilbert Durand (1977), the forest is a closed space in which specific events happen. It is also a space of intimacy as it closes down on the protagonist and offers him shelter. Magic plays an important role in the course of the adventure. It can be benefic or malefic. As James Frazer (1995) notices in his book, benefic magic has a curative role in the sense that it purifies the protagonist of all the links with the common corruptive world. It offers man the possibility to develop spiritually by offering him access to the supreme revelation. Malefic magic is the instrument of evil because it traps man in a dangerous illusion and makes him believe that he can control the representations of the otherworld. In the end, man will discover that he was tricked and becomes disappointed with his revelation. In both cases, what matters is the degree of initiation in the mysteries of the universe. The lesson which is learned is of utmost importance for the protagonist.

The description made by the supposed author Diedrich Knickerbocker (actually an alter ego of Irving himself) underlines the specificity of the place where the action happens. It is characterized by magic and a feeling of curiosity as to the features of the surroundings. "Every change of seasons, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains" (Irving, 1988). The author creates a dream-like atmosphere as if the land were out of time, belonging to a supernatural environment. Thus, he anticipates the strange adventure his protagonist will have. The nature of Rip is in accordance with the uniqueness of the place since he is different from the other villagers. He prefers the forest instead of the village, the walks in the woods, and not the work at home. "The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (Irving, 1988).

In Irving's story (1988), Rip Van Winkle finds himself included in the magical space which is the forest. The purpose of Rip is to escape his nagging wife and to have the possibility to enjoy himself in the tranquility of the forest. Space becomes for him a shelter where he can express himself and find the peace he needs. When he meets the ghost of Hendrik Hudson and his crew, he is not surprised at all, and accepts to drink from the liquor offered to him. In his case magic is beneficial because he will escape the tormenting life at home. The forest is the place of adventures and of the ultimate fulfillment. It is the space in which he can find his true identity as there is no one there to tell him what to do. The adventure whose meaning is chance comes quite unexpectedly to Rip.

In a long ramble on a fine autumnal day, Rip had unconsciously scrambled to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains. Panting and fatigued, he threw himself, late in the afternoon, on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned the brow of a precipice. (Irving, 1988)

Besides the magical qualities it possesses, the forest is a space of liberty and the unknown. The forest is alluring and beautiful, a place of imagination and the supernatural. In his book *The King and the Corpse*, Heinrich Zimmer defines the forest in the following way: The forest flickers in an enchanting light, there are new dangers, new initiations. It is the realm of the soul itself which the soul can decide to know and explore to find in it the most intimate adventure (Zimmer, 2016). The protagonist is called by a strange man, sounding out of nowhere. The peculiarity of the scene lies also in the fact that he is in a special spot, the highest and the most beautiful.

He thought his fancy must have deceived him and turned again to descend when he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air—Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! Rip now felt a strange apprehension stealing over him. (Irving, 1988)

The stranger's appearance is peculiar, too. He wears old clothes and talks like one of the first Dutch colonists. The fact that he carries a *stout keg* full of liquor makes him more peculiar. He acts like an instigator, introducing the protagonist in the adventure. The description identifies him with the goblins living in the forest and populating the German folk tales. They can be benevolent or evil, depending on the merits of the protagonist. They are usually befriended if a certain incantation is used. In Rip's case, the stranger comes himself to the protagonist because the fantastic dimension willingly opens for the hero. He is lured into accepting the gift of the stranger. It is an instance of a personal choice, just like in the folk tales when the hero is offered the alternatives of reality or fantasy. The place where magic is performed on Rip resembles the enchanted forests of mythical spaces. Its uniqueness stands for the special initiation of the protagonist. At the same time, it is beautiful and admirable as it is similar to the romanticism of the German tales.

Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheater, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of which impending trees shot their branches, so that you only caught glimpses of the azure sky and the bright evening cloud. (Irving, 1988)

Rip becomes part of the supernatural also because he deliberately accepts the gift of the mysterious man. He acts as if it were normal to find the ghostly crew in the woods and to witness its entertainment. The liquor he drinks is a magical potion that causes him to sleep and awaken after twenty years. The story implies that Rip had already been part of the supernatural dimension and only needed to be invited to discover it. Space becomes thus a place of knowledge because Rip learns about his true identity. After he returns from the forest, he becomes the recipient of memories, and he is perceived as an exemplary model by the villagers. There are two spaces which confront each other. The magical space of the forest opposes the common realistic space of the village. The latter is unchanged as it is concrete and monotonous. The former is attractive, modeling itself on the needs of the protagonist. The otherworld is fascinating and beautiful, mirroring the protagonist's true nature. Space is associated with time, which is dual too. It is the time of the community which follows the habits of its inhabitants. It opposes magical time, which is static and unchangeable. Both time and space have decisive influences on the protagonist, who must correctly decipher them.

There are three types of space in Irving's (1988) story. The first one is the space of the community, which corresponds to the profane space analyzed by Eliade (2000). It is a dimension of stability, of predictable events in which everything is ordered according to customs and laws. Rip does not feel at ease in this space—he longs for peace and a quiet existence. The tavern is a space within another space, representing the inner aspects of the community.

In the tavern, the protagonist feels free by identifying with it and getting the respect he needs. The outside space is menacing, as Rip cannot relate to it at all. The second space is an intermediary one, corresponding with the forest in which Rip has an encounter with the supernatural. It coincides with the rites of passage the protagonist goes through.

According to Arnold Van Gennep, the rites of passage refer to three stages of initiation. They are separation, transition, and reincorporation. In the first stage, the hero withdraws from his current status and prepares to move from one place to another. During this stage, he abandons all the links with the community. Leaving behind daily routines would be leaving the village and going to the forest, where he meets the strange man. In social terms, it means abandoning his position as a husband and becoming a free man. The transition or liminal stage is the period between levels during which one has left the former status but has not reached the third stage of transformation. At this point, the hero is at the threshold of experiences; it is a very vulnerable position since evil can attack and deviate him from his quest. In the case of Rip, such an initiation corresponds to his sleep in the forest. It is a personal transformation occurring unconsciously and preparation for the new reality awaiting Rip. In ritual terms, his sleep is a spiritual purification from the common daily existence and a gate towards reintegration. The third stage is the one of reincorporation. It is a moment in which the passage is consummated by the ritual subject. After passing through the previous stages, the hero can return to society. In the case of Rip the rites of passage presuppose abandoning a false mask and reintegrating into the community as a new man. Rip becomes an effigy of the past, a symbol of collective memory. He finally obtains the social position he has always longed for. Initiation is complete when he realizes the importance he has for the community.

When he finds himself in the forest Rip enters the space of illusions and of the supernatural. Magical space opens to him because he accepts the potion offered to him by the captain. The liquor is the means by which he gets integrated into the supernatural space. The potion is an instance of the water symbolism analyzed by Eliade (2000) in a dual way. He considers that water can be beneficial or malefic. In the first example, he identifies it with the water of life which is regenerating and fertile. He believes that in all religious systems waters preserve their fundamental function: they disintegrate, they abolish all forms, being purified and regenerating (Eliade, 2000). Waters are the universal matrix where all begins and all ends. The waters of death correspond to natural disasters, to the complete annihilation of every form. They can be identified with floods, implying the destruction of space. Waters of death also include magical potions that bring the protagonist to the realm of the unconscious and ultimately to death. Immersing in water implicates the hero

in the eternal process of death and regeneration. Being a cosmic function, water stands for the plurality of forms and a perpetual process of change.

In Irving's (1988) story, the aquatic symbolism is represented at two levels: the microcosm in the magical potion and the macrocosm at the level of the river along whose banks the ghastly crew plays its game of nine pins. The magical potion is offered to Rip by the strange man, and the protagonist accepts it immediately. He never asks questions regarding the origin of the potion or the man who gives it to him. This deliberate gesture shows that Rip was already part of the fantastic world without knowing it. Rip drinks from the liquor as if it were his own.

He was naturally a thirsty soul and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another and he reiterated his visits to the flagon so often that at length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined and he fell into a deep sleep. (Irving, 1988)

The offer of the drink is not made openly, but it is more of an unconscious temptation Rip cannot resist. The objects of the otherworld fascinate and represent the essence of magic and the supernatural. Rip feels at ease in the woods as he finds the peace and the solitude he longs for there. The passage in the forest, corresponding to an integration into the realm of the sacred, is a sort of prologue for the new life awaiting the protagonist. It is an intermediary space, corresponding to a rite of passage.

The fact that Rip feels uneasy in society is proof of his belonging to a superior dimension. Due to his presence, the two types of space intersect each other, finding a common ground for their evolution. The latter corresponds to the dimension the crew comes from. Rip has only a glimpse of the sacred when he watches the game the crew plays. He is not completely integrated into the sacred because he must return to society and tell them his story. As a recipient of memories, Rip is needed to initiate the others in his turn.

Sacred space is also the place of games. The crew plays a game of nine pins as if nothing could distract them from their activity. Games correspond to the magical space because they have a ritual connotation. Space becomes thus a projection of the inner wishes of man, who tries to give a common shape to the supernatural. Games are also tests for human moral values. Any such game can be decoded in a mythological and psychological manner. From a mythological perspective, a game is the equivalent of a descent into the primordial chaos, in the stillness that precedes the act of creation. In his book *Homo Ludens* Johan Huizinga (1998) analyzes the ritual functions of games. Games provide man

with sacred knowledge, a secret and magical science as for him any knowledge lies in a direct relationship with the very cosmic order (Huizinga, 1998). Space acquires, thus, a magical connotation because it contains the elements of a ritual. In this space, the common rules of reality are suspended as new rules must be obeyed. The game of nine pins the crew plays is a gate towards contemplating the mysteries of the sacred. Rip sees one of the forms of the supernatural that is in accordance with his vision of the world. The game and the potion given to him are both symbols of the magical space. The fact that Rip watches the game and takes it for granted is another proof that he was already part of the fantastic dimension.

In many folk tales, the protagonist is invited to enter the mythical space of adventures. The hero must cross the threshold since in the absence of adventures he cannot pretend that he is one. The supernatural space opens to him, alluring him in it. The hero must accept everything that happens to him, otherwise his initiation fails. The one who offers him access to the fantastic land is a being belonging to this other space. In the book entitled *The Morphology of Fairy Tales*, Vladimir Propp (1970) calls this function the donator. He makes the difference between donator, hero, and instigator and assigns each term with specific values. Due to the donator, the hero is allowed to enter the otherworld and partake in the secrets of the divine. The donator is a person who has already been initiated in the fantastic and who is able to guide the hero in his quest. Space becomes thus familiar, like a shelter for the hero. He has to decipher the signs, being helped by the donator. He offers the hero either magical objects or advice needed to accomplish the adventure. The donator changes the hero in a beneficial way.

In the case of Rip, the donator is the strange man who accompanies him to the place of the game. He acts like a guardian of the threshold, guiding him in the unknown. He is a donator who calls Rip by his name and confers him much power. To call somebody by his name implies knowledge that comes from a deep understanding of magic. At the same time calling someone by his name means that the donator gives an identity to the other person, and this confers him a high degree of authority. Not only is the strange man aware of Rip's identity, but he also knows exactly who Rip is. Thus, the act of providing him with a drink is compensation for the years in which the hero had been mocked by the community. Sacred space opens to Rip, providing him with a home that is appropriate for his well-being. Magical space is the place in which Rip can be himself, in which he gives up his false mask of a man who was forced to wear it in the community. His identity is found in the woods, where he is free to be what he really is. Space transforms into a place of initiation and wisdom because Rip will learn many things about

himself when returning to the village. It is a welcoming space that provides man with the ultimate knowledge about the human self.

At the end of the story, Rip becomes a living relic of the past, contributing to the history and destiny of the community. The adventure he had becomes part of the collective memory of the village. The ghostly crew itself turns into a group of characters haunting the mountains and valleys of the region. The story he tells the others is evidence of the strange events that befell him. "Even to this day they never heard a thunderstorm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskill, but they say that Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of nine pins" (Irving, 1988). The end is proof that magic and the supernatural control the human world in all its details.

In *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* the protagonist Ichabod Crane enters a malefic space, risking the life of any human traveling through it. The frightening rumor of the headless horseman transforms space into a deadly trap. Those not initiated in the local lore are caught in this place. Space represents a labyrinth where there is no way out except in death. It is the place of evil and threat. "Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie" (Irving, 1988). The effect on the inhabitants implies hallucinations, a dream-like experience, and visions. There is a classification of the spirits haunting the place, among which the most frightening is the headless horseman. "It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannonball in some nameless battle in the Revolutionary War" (Irving, 1988). The power of the ghost extends to other places as well, making it a master of enchantment.

Space is no longer compact as in the story of Rip, but it is fragmentary and unsure. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade (2000) makes the difference between the two types of space. According to his view, sacred space is fragmentary; namely, it is organized around a center of the sacred. Space is oriented according to this center, which gives it unity and concreteness. On the contrary, profane space is homogeneous and relative. It can trap man in a labyrinth of illusions. The purpose of profane space is to annihilate the sacred one and keep man in its trap forever. Sacred space can be enacted if Man has deep faith that gives him the strength to reverse the effects of the profane. To enter the sacred space, man needs to know its rules and accept the limitations imposed by the sacred.

In Irving's (1988) story, two spaces oppose each other. There is the space of the village and the one of the forest. The first one offers protection and confidence to the inhabitants. It is the place where the school, the church, and the houses of the community are.

Nothing is strange about it. Life goes on peacefully in the profane space of the village. It is interesting to mention that though the community gathers around the church, it is not a sacred space, the one that encompasses it. The people of the Hollow seem to be as respectable as the others living in the state of New York. However, they are prone to fall under the spell of the horseman and become part of his actions. The profane space is represented by the attitudes and the mentality of the people.

The protagonist of the story is Ichabod Crane, who comes to the village to be the school teacher of the local children. He is different from the other inhabitants as he comes from a different state (Connecticut) and does not share the superstitious beliefs of the locals. Irving describes Ichabod in detail, underlining his physical appearance which goes very well with his family name, which refers to a bird. The approach is ironic as if Irving laughed at his own creation.

To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield. (Irving, 1988)

Ichabod becomes the victim of the prejudice of the villagers because he is eccentric and keeps on singing religious hymns. Irving (1988) satirizes the Puritan tradition of mingling daily activities with religion. In a Puritan community, nothing happened without having a religious connotation. Since the object of the story is to criticize the habits of an early American settlement, profane space comes to dominate the space of the community. Given its relativity, profane space does not allow the protagonists to escape the limits of the village. Ichabod fits in the community by doing some housework, by which he repays the lodgings he receives from the farmers. He becomes popular and is accepted by the families that take him in. The habit of singing religious hymns is part of his attempt to gain more money, as the salary he gets is small. By performing all these activities, "the worthy pedagogue got on tolerably well and was thought to have a wonderfully easy life of it" (Irving, 1988). Though in the beginning, he is treated with suspicion, he eventually integrates into the community despite his eccentricities.

Ichabod is a stranger, he is English in origin and not Dutch like the rest of the people. He comes there in order to become the teacher of the local school. He teaches the children mostly religious matters. Ichabod is described as vane, full of himself and proud of his knowledge. He has the dream of marrying Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of the richest family in the village. He imagines himself the master of the community, without realizing how ridiculous he is. Ichabod belongs to two worlds, the real one

in which he is a simple teacher and the one of his illusions where he is all powerful. The second one dominates him and he considers that the members of the community should respect him. Illusions are a dangerous element because they offer the protagonist the feeling that reality is replaced by imagination. He lives in a space of his own that is populated by his dreams of power. His secret wish is to be married to a rich girl through whom he will climb up on the social ladder. "Our man of letters was peculiarly happy in the smiles of all the country damsels" (Irving, 1988). His wish to spring up adds to his ridiculous attitude. Beside that he also spreads information from other parts of the country, contributing to the gossip of the village.

Paradoxically, Ichabod spiritually belongs more to the sacred space of the forest than to the profane place of the village. The members of Sleepy Hollow are caught in a time and space that never changes. They are caught in a routine that coincides with their daily duties. The villagers are not able to detach themselves from the limited common existence. Space is always the same to them, and they accept it as it is. Each family has its own private space represented by the house and the field. There are two types of space: a small one and a large one. The small one coincides with the house and the enclosure of the family. The large one belongs to the community. Each of the two spaces is governed by specific rules which define them. To the small space belong the habits of the family and their routine. To the large one belong good manners and the construction of a certain image that should offer the villager the position he deserves. In the home, the inhabitant behaves in a natural and simple way. In society, he adopts a mask that coincides with his position.

In the case of Ichabod, there is a double mask that he wears. The exterior one reflects his occupation as the teacher of the children in the village. He does not appear different from the model of a teacher in his epoch. He treats the children honestly and tries hard to give them a certain education. The mask he wears is a genuine one and corresponds to his status. The second mask is the one of the man he pretends to be. Profane space obliges him to hide the second mask because it is inappropriate for the others. He believes that he is a courageous, confident, and self-reliant man. He makes the mistake of taking the imaginary mask for the real one. Dreams and illusions replace the commonsense aspects of his life. He gets lost in the labyrinth of his wishes as he is unable to make the difference between the two dimensions. Profane space swallows him and transforms Ichabod into an instrument of destiny.

One of his characteristics is the fact that he believes in witchcraft and magic. In a paradoxical way he proves to be part of the supernatural dimension because of his attitude.

He fits very well into the fantastic realm represented by the forest and the ominous horseman. What Ichabod does not understand is the fact that the forest is a different space, having its own specific rules. He believes that if he sings religious hymns he will be the master of the unknown and he would even defeat the ghost itself. He uses inappropriate means in order to tame the dangerous woods. He does not see that the forest is the place of imagination where his down to earth solutions do not apply. "His appetite for the marvelous and his powers of digesting it were equally powerful. Both had been increased by his residence in this spellbound region" (Irving, 1988). The fact that he feels at ease in the middle of nature tells of his capacity to integrate in the mysterious unknown. He confuses reality with imagination, assimilating his dreams with practical matters. Irving (1988) mentions insects and birds which fill his imagination. Sometimes Ichabod himself is taken for a spirit of the woodland as he sings religious hymns, much to the awe of the local farmers.

Ichabod's wish is to please the rich and beautiful Katrina Van Tassel, whom he marries in his dreams. Ironically, Irving (1988) considers her more dangerous than the horseman himself. He is also eager to describe the farm she lives in and the great prospects she has. Ichabod's vanity turns the situation to his own advantage, and he lives the illusion of becoming the master of the house. "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" (Irving, 1988). The author profits from the situation in order to describe the house of the Van Tassels. Thus, he introduces another space, namely the domestic one in which specific rules apply. The detailed description configures the image of a pioneer home, having all the advantages of a well-to-do homestead. It is a space of the family that is neither sacred nor profane, a sort of inner dimension containing the members of the family. It is the only space not affected by the threat of the ghostly horseman. Family rules are more powerful than superstitions.

Domestic space is set in opposition to the space of the community. Each dimension is represented by specific people who act as its guardians. Among Ichabod's rivals is the most vocal one, Brom Van Brunt, also called Brom Bones, due to his massive appearance. He is an intermediary between the two spaces, linking them by his presence. Irving (1988) describes him in detail because he is everything that Ichabod is not. Brom and Ichabod are the two main masculine characters, each evolving in his own space. These two personal spaces center around the two protagonists, containing all the moral values they presuppose. Brom opens himself to the space of the forest as well, proving that he is initiated into the secrets of the woods. He is individualized by his physical force that, like in any folk tale, singles him out from the rest of the community.

A special type of space is configured by the mixture of the public space of the community and the private space of the protagonist. In his case, the public space is represented by the school where he teaches the villagers' children. It is an inner, intimate space that corresponds to the personal wishes and achievements of Man. Ichabod is the master of this space, which is at the edge between the sacred and the profane dimension. It is also the space where the dreams and illusions of the hero take shape. Ichabod makes the mistake of confusing the two spaces, believing more in imagination than reality. On the contrary, private space represents the true self of the protagonist, comprising the life he leads. When invited to the Van Tassels' party, Ichabod believes that the space of his inner wishes and the public space mix. Reality and imagination become one, confusing even more the hero. Initiation is not yet achieved because he is unable to make the difference between the two.

Irving (1988) makes the difference between the exterior space, namely the village on a fine autumnal day, and the interior space of the protagonist who has dressed up for the event. It is a contrast between the beauty of nature and the ridiculous appearance of Ichabod. The two instances mingle in order to underline even more the vanity and arrogance of the school teacher. The name of the horse he rides, Gunpowder, is also in accordance with the pompous attitude of the hero. Ichabod has a limited approach to nature which, for him, is represented only by the prospect of eating well. Irving (1988) enumerates different kinds of fruits, cereals, and vegetables. They are all part of the domestic space of the village, which is an image of the profane space seen in its abundance of harvest. The description is very lyrical, carrying a transcendental tinge. The beauty of nature is perceived in the evening when day and night mingle, creating the compact space of the twilight.

A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The horizon was of a fine golden hint, changing gradually into a pure apple green and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. (Irving, 1988)

The beautiful landscape is set in opposition to the ominous presence of the ghostly horseman. Irving keeps the reader in suspense, pretending that nothing dangerous may happen.

The passage towards the world of the supernatural is made softly by the narrator, who introduces it through the tales the people tell at the party. Irving (1988) concentrates on the specificity of the stories, making a difference between the people living in Sleepy Hollow and the ones in the village. The tales they tell are also different because they belong to diverse spaces. The power of the supernatural is felt in the attitude

of the narrators as well. The attraction was made by the stories about specters, fantastic creatures, and mysterious objects. Irving (1988) ironically presents the pretended religious faith of the inhabitants that is dominated by the belief in the supernatural. The hypocrisy of the people is thus underlined. He also mentions that the influence of the fantastic is so powerful because of the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. Hence, the space of the ghostly presence overwhelms the domestic space of the village. It is a transformation of one space into the other, given the superstitious beliefs the people have. "There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting the land" (Irving, 1988).

Sacred space is represented by the forest. Ichabod is sent to the forest by the desire to please Katrina and show her how courageous he is. The journey he takes in the forest on his way back home is an exploration of the supernatural. Space is formed of two elements, belonging to reality and imagination. The latter makes Ichabod turn every landscape he sees in an instance of the fantastic. His superstitions change the forest into a recipient of dark magic and dangerous spells. The presupposed presence of the horseman only increases the tension. Real space becomes an extension of the narrative space created by the tales of the inhabitants. It is as if the stories have turned real. Fear and apprehension govern the episode. "In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, he beheld something huge, misshapen, black and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom" (Irving, 1988).

The forest is a labyrinth, and only the initiated can go through it. According to Eliade (2000), sacred space is fragmentary and is represented by islands where the sacred rules apply. Sacred space also contains rules that must be respected. A sacred space implies the existence of a center around which it is concentrated. Much of the spiritual initiation depends on the correct reading of the signs. The forest where Ichabod gets lost represents a reversed instance of the sacred space. It lures the protagonist in its depth and gives him no chance of salvation. It is a new kind of space with its own specific rules. The common laws that usually apply to the sacred or profane space disappear and are replaced by the chaos brought by evil. The forest is the dominion of the headless horseman, the ghost that takes humans with it.

The concept which the text refers to is the one of challenge. Such provocations include appropriate behavior on the part of the participants. What Ichabod does is to interpret wrongly the challenge he makes. Entering the forest alone and without hesitation is an instance of folly and vanity. In a challenge, the opponents must be of the same value, otherwise it is not a fair contest. The two participants must be equal in what represents

the weapons they have. Ichabod makes the mistake of considering himself superior to the horseman. What he lacks is a measure that would have stopped him from undertaking the adventure. Measure is a classical value, providing equilibrium to man. Once it disappears, excesses follow, and the initiation cannot take place. At the same time, Ichabod does not understand that he is in a different place than the ones known to him. He crosses the limit without being aware of it. The horseman becomes the guardian of the threshold as he allows people to enter the forest or not. Survival is the aim of his opponents. He is the master of the forest, and he dictates the rules. It is important to notice that his existence is taken for granted by the villagers who instinctively know how to behave when approaching the woods. Ichabod pushes the limit, and he is punished.

Ichabod meets the horseman in the woods and tries to escape from him. The description made by Irving (1988) concentrates on terror, frightening pursuit and eventually punishment. Space turns into a world of nightmares and dread. The two dimensions, the human and the non-human (the ghost is called a goblin) mingle, riding one along the other, uniting and yet being adverse at the same time. The space of the fantastic invades reality and includes the horseman in the terror of the human.

The concept of the frontier functions in his case. There are three types of space in the story. They correspond to the three parts of an initiation process: departure, adventure, and return. The departure represents abandoning the community, severing the ties that link the protagonist to the common world. Only when the ties are cut can he start on the adventure. The departure is willing and quite easy. The fantastic world is attractive, it fascinates and conquers. Once the protagonist enters the otherworld, he must be careful to read the signs appropriately. He must make the difference between the real world and the supernatural one. The second part of the initiation process is represented by the adventure proper. The protagonist has unexpected encounters, meets several opponents, and has to free people from traps or evil places. Initiation depends on the success of the adventure. The protagonist learns a moral lesson during the tests that await him. Passing the tests is a sign of a spiritual revelation. The adventure must be faced as courage and moral values are essential for the change of the protagonist. He grows spiritually and becomes a different man, wiser and more profound. The return is the most difficult part of the initiation. It is hard to leave the fantastic world behind. Its fascination is hard to endure. The protagonist must return to the common world because he has a moral lesson to teach. Narrating about his adventures, he makes the others part of his own revelation.

In Ichabod's case, the pattern of initiation is incomplete. From the very departure, he makes the mistake of considering himself fit for the adventure. In an initiation process,

the protagonist must start in a state of humility, ready to accept his limits and eager to learn about his surroundings. The departure is a recognition of the lack of knowledge that has to be obtained during the initiation. Ichabod goes to the forest proud and vane, considering himself as already being the winner of the contest. His superficiality condemns him to failure. Deciding to face the horseman contradicts the rule that the people the protagonist meets during the adventure must be the same size as himself. The horseman is obviously a ghostly spirit, having powers that humans do not have. Ichabod should have been more careful when entering the space of his opponent. The adventure is also a failure because no moral lesson is taught during it; on the contrary, Ichabod disappears and is never seen again. The third part, namely the return, does not take place anymore. Ichabod gets lost in the labyrinth of the forest without being saved from his fate. Singing religious hymns cannot protect him from the presence of the horseman.

Space becomes a malefic environment in which evil rules. Its sacredness is changed into a trap closing down on the protagonist. The adventure becomes a nightmare as fears and dangers assault the character. The wilderness becomes a place of punishment for the one entering it. The fantastic is linked to crossing the limit, bringing danger and death. The one who foolishly challenges its evil master must pay. Irving (1988) does not explicitly say if Ichabod became a victim of the horseman. His disappearance is proof enough that something unusual happened. The way he explains the hero's disappearance is made up of rumors and tales with no evidence related to them. Irving (1988) is ironic when he says that Ichabod has not been spirited away by the ghost and has instead moved to another part of the country where he prospered. The whole atmosphere of the story is too much connected to the supernatural to believe that something else has happened.

Another mistake made by Ichabod is that he considered himself the center of the world to which everybody should bow. He imagines himself as the master of the community as he feels that he should be obeyed by all. The challenge he sets against the ghost is wrong because he is not the appropriate authority to be in such a position. The margin tries to become the center. The profane space attempts to replace the sacred and this brings disequilibrium to the world. Only a truly religious man can reach the sacred center. Eliade (2000) mentions that a forest can be the center of the universe because of the tendency of the trees to grow upward. The known world is always in the middle as it brings the difference between the cosmic areas. The forest is an intermediary space between the earth and the sky. Through it, the three dimensions can communicate. The known world as a familiar space is opposed to the forest, the non-familiar space. When entering the center,

man must be aware that the true world is always in the center, in the middle because the communication between the three dimensions takes place here (Eliade, 2000).

The initiated man must take into consideration that all attempts at order are concentrated around a dual difference. The two spaces, which in Irving's (1988) story are the village and the forest, are set in opposition. There is an implicit opposition between the inhabited land and the unknown and undefined space that surrounds the known one. The first is the world, also called cosmos; the other is not a cosmos, but a different world, an alien, chaotic space, full of demons and strangers associated with spirits and ghosts (Eliade, 2000). For Ichabod, the forest is just another place where he can travel. The frontier is represented by the margin of the forest, an imaginary line separating the two dimensions. Lacking the moral value to confront himself with the ghost, Ichabod is punished accordingly.

In the story, the supernatural dominates the space of the village. It influences it both in a direct manner (by the presence of the horseman) and indirectly (by the legends it brings about). Initiation is reversed since no superior knowledge is achieved by facing the unknown. Ichabod's pursuit by the ghost is narrated in a vivid way as if the narrator and the reader were there at the same time. The confusion between the two spaces is increased by the chase, bringing the end of the protagonist. The accent is placed on moving with great speed, reflecting the hero's wish to escape from his ghostly follower. The two spaces become one as Ichabod is dragged away from his journey.

The final blow brings Ichabod to the ground, being hit by the head hurled by the ghost. The supernatural wins because not even the presence of the church saves him. The space of reality gets a spiritual tinge, transforming the opposition into a matter of religion. The church cannot save the one whose pride pushed him to catastrophe. Reality (space, actually) changes according to its protagonists. The power of the ghost is not of human size, and it is invincible even on sacred ground. In this perspective, religion no longer matters, and superstitions take over. Sacred space is defeated by profane space because there is no possibility to escape one's doom. Irving's (1988) conclusion is that magic and the supernatural rule the world. However, he does not plainly say what happens to Ichabod, leaving the reader to come to his own conclusion.

The description made by Irving (1988) points in the direction of magic and superstitions. The alternative proposed by the locals about Ichabod's career is only a diversion. The meeting with the headless horseman is the end of Ichabod, who is never seen again. The pursuit identifies with the German folk tales about demons chasing away humans.

In Irving's story, the ride is set in parallel. "Away then they dashed, through thick and thin; stones flying, and sparks flashing at every bound" (Irving, 1988). The manner in which the pursuit ends is equally frightening. Ichabod's space is invaded by that of the horseman. When he receives the blow on the head the protagonist is symbolically included in the space of his opponent.

He saw the goblin rising in his stirrups and in the very act of hurling his head at him. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash—he was tumbled headlong in the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind. (Irving, 1988)

The fearful ending of the adventure corresponds to the emphasis placed on the supernatural in the story.

In both of Irving's (1988) stories, space is perceived in a dual manner, opposing the known and the unknown. If in the case of Rip, the magical space and the sleep help the protagonist to escape his daily problems, having a benefic role, in Ichabod's case, space is like a cage catching him and taking him to his doom. In both stories, the protagonists undergo radical experiences that will affect their future. Rip learns a lesson while Ichabod disappears. Both of them meet the supernatural due to the encounter with the guardian of the threshold. In Ichabod's case, the situation is more sinister because the guardian is also the punisher. Rip's story is more amusing and luminous, while in Ichabod's case, darkness prevails. Space is shaped according to the identity of the protagonist. It can be responsive or repulsive, depending on their adventures. It is the place of revelation and magical encounters. In both cases, space transforms into an image of the universe as it is understood by the protagonists. At the end of the stories, there is only the certainty of the supernatural encounters. Both stories depict the initiation of Man into the deepest mysteries of the human self. It is a moral lesson that Irving (1988) shares with his readers.

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