

Rip van winkle: an allegory of the american revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Rip Van Winkle is a short story by American author Washington Irving published in 1819, as well as the name of the story's fictional protagonist. The story is set in the years before and after the American Revolution War. It mainly tells that the man named Rip Van Winkle who attempted to escape from his wife's ceaseless tongue drank some wine and then fell asleep for almost 20 years. After that, he went back to the town only to find that everything has changed. There are many kinds of sayings about the deep meaning of the story. In my opinion, this story is an allegory of the American Revolution.

An Allegory is a narrative having a second meaning beneath the surface – a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. It is also an expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblances. In the story, I think the author expresses his conservative and negative thoughts about the American Revolution. Through the story, the author satirizes the consequences of the American Revolution War and also expresses his bewilderment of great changes after the war. Following are three aspects that can explain why.

First, Rip Van Winkle's reaction to the great changes after the War. When Rip woke up and went back to the town which he used to live in, he felt puzzled and despairing facing the sudden changes of his home and friends. His house was ruined, the village inn turned into a large wooden building, he knew none of the people, and even the dogs barked at him – All these changes made Rip feel sad and worried and even caused doubt about his identity.

After Rip settled down, he “ went back to his old ways” and soon became an admirable person in the town.

The changes of states made little impression on him and the only thing he could understand is just “ independence from a sharp-tongued wife”. I think Rip’s reaction to the changes stands for the reaction of most of American people. The success of the war did not bring radical changes to people’s life. The newly emerged words like congress and election were difficult for them to understand and they know little about how the war had changed the country except the vague conception of independence.

Meanwhile, they were at a loss about what they are and what they should do after the revolution. So on this point, the author actually shows his disappointment of the limited influence of the American Revolution War. Second, the comparison between Rip Van Winkle and Dame Van Winkle. In the story, Rip is described as “ one of those fortunate people, with foolish, well-oiled natures, who take the world easy and cheerfully, eat fine food or poor, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble”.

He was willing to help all his neighbors but hated “ any kind profitable labor”. Rip had a good relationship with people and “ was thought highly of by everyone except his wife”. Dame Van Winkle was a termagant and sharp-tongued woman who always blamed for Rip’s idleness and carelessness. She could teach Rip a lesson in any possible way and even the most respectable person could not be safe from her tongue. By comparison, it is obvious to see that the author approves of Rip’s lifestyle and character.

By praising Rip's kindness and helpfulness, simple and cozy way of living, the author criticize the problems that existed in the society of that time. After the American Revolution, more and more people tended to work only for profit and live for money. The rapid development of capitalist economy had driven people to lose the original virtues. Third, the author's deep affection for European culture. Washington Irving had lived in England from 1819 to 1820 during which time he became obsessed with English culture. His experiences in England later became the source and inspiration of his works.

Rip Van Winkle is one of the stories which are based on European folktales. From the story, we can see many things with characteristics of European ancient civilization, such as the beautiful scenery of the mountain, the wearing of the strangers and the game named " ninepins". Through these descriptions, the author creates a mysterious world of the story and also expresses his affection for European culture. In the story, the reason why Rip fell asleep for 20 years is that he could not help drinking the wine of the stangers.

And all the things happened in the 20 years was nothing but a long sweet sleep to Rip. I think this reflects that the author was drenched in European culture, just like Rip fell asleep because of the wine. Although the author did not show his opposition to the American Revolution, we can see that the author was disappointed at the limited influence of the war and confused about where this country was going. So the author's attitude towards the American Revolution is conservative and negative.