

Tone and mood analysis of the legend of sleepy hollow

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Many people argue that books are always better than the movies, but is that always true? Mood, tone and attitude are major components in stories, as they determine how the reader feels. In Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* the mood, tone, and attitude are very distinct throughout the story. In the Disney cartoon reenactment, there is a much more cheerful and fun feel than there is in the original story. However, the mood and tone in key parts of the story remain fairly similar in both versions. There are parts of the story that retain the same mood and tone, and some parts that are different entirely.

In the opening scene of both versions, there is a difference in mood and tone. The author/ director's goal in the first part of any story is to establish a setting and introduce characters, which both versions do very well. In the original short story the author expresses a very poetic and sincere tone, for example, Irving states " A drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere" (Irving 3). The usage of words like " drowsy" and " dreamy" help convey a poetic tone throughout the section. As for the mood in this section, it is very gloomy, however, because it talks about ghosts and spirits that haunt the land. Irving says, " The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region" (Irving 3). In this sentence, Irving describes how the town is haunted by a ghost, which is very creepy, and gloomy. In contrast, the Disney film starts out with a super cheerful musical, that conveys a pleasing mood and tone. The townspeople in this part of the film seem to be super cheerful and happy, as they are all smiling, and singing (Disney). There is also a part of the scene in which Ichabod, the protagonist, is showed whistling and trotting cheerfully across

the rolling green hills towards the town (Disney). All these activities are usually associated with happiness, thus conveying a cheerful/pleasing mood and tone. As for the attitude of the scene, it remains consistent from scene to scene in both the original text and the Disney adaptation. The author's attitude towards the characters in both works, is playful and sarcastic, as the descriptions of the characters are very exaggerated, and practical jokes are played often.

In the aforementioned scene, the mood and tone are both different, but in the dance/party scene, the tone is kept more or less the same, but the mood is changed. For example, in the original story, when the eating and dancing is over, the mood goes from cheerful to being dark and gloomy quickly. At the start of the scene, the narrator describes how amazing the house of the Van Tassels is, when he says "Heaven bless the mark! I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves" (Irving 21). When the narrator is describing how fantastic the banquet is, the readers feel a sense of happiness as it is super easy to imagine that they are actually at the party. Soon after the party, however, people start to tell stories of ghosts and goblins. For example, Irving says, "Besides there is no encouragement for ghosts in most of our villages, for they have scarcely had time to finish their first nap and turn themselves in their graves" (Irving 23). Here Irving is talking about the spirits that haunt the town. This sets a dark, eerie mood, as most people find ghosts creepy and frightening. In the film, however, the mood is much different, as the mood is clearly humorous. For example, in the original short story, Brom Bones tells the tale of the Galloping Hessian in

a very dramatic, suspenseful way, but in the movie, he tells it in a musical form. During the musical, Ichabod acts very comedically. For example, he dumps a mound of pepper onto a hard-boiled egg, eats it, and spits fire from his mouth (Disney). Katrina and the rest of the crowd are also finding his actions humorous as they are laughing hysterically as well (Disney). Adding these elements to the movie makes the mood very different from Irving's original story.

There are also many parts of the movie that maintain the same mood and tone of the original, especially in one particular spot, the chase scene. In this scene, Ichabod has just left the party and is traversing the dark, gloomy woods at midnight. The author's tone in this section is definitely gloomy, Irving states, " As Ichabod approached this fearful tree, he began to whistle, he thought his whistle was answered: it was but a blast sweeping sharply through the dry branches" (Irving 27). If this wasn't enough to prove that Irving was trying to create a gloomy/spooky tone, Irving also states " all the stories of ghosts and goblins had crowding upon his recollection" (Irving 27). These two quotes both show how Irving demonstrates a dark, gloomy tone making Ichabod super fearful of his situation. It is evident that he is fearful because he is reminded of ghost and goblin stories, and feels as if he's not alone in the forest when he thinks that something is whistling back to him. For mood in this section, Irving makes the reader feel scared and anxious. In the quotes above, the author makes the reader feel like they are in Ichabod's shoes. He does so by going into deep detail, to help the reader create a mental image of the scene. In this case, since Ichabod is clearly scared out of

his mind, so is the reader. In the film, the situation is more or less the same, the tone is still dark and gloomy because the director wanted to maintain the same sense of fear. Many elements are also added to the movie, like the cattails that sound like horse hooves, and the glowing eyes in the tree, that give the movie a dark and gloomy feel (Disney). For mood, it is consistent with the original because all the elements of the environment in which Ichabod is traveling through, create a sense of fear in the reader. Whether it be the dark twisted trees or all the creepy sounds of the woods.

The impact of mood, tone and attitude, has an adverse effect on how people feel about a story or movie. Because of this, it is important for directors to take into consideration when making a remake or adaptation of a piece of writing. In many places, the tone and mood varied between versions, but in the most important scenes, it remains similar, to keep the overall feel of the original. Overall the Disney remake did a good job of keeping mood, tone, and attitude similar in their adaptation of Irving's original story, with a few tweaks in minor places.

Works Cited

- Irving, Washington. *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*. 1820.
- Kinney, Jack, Clyde Geronimi, and James Algar, directors. *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*. Walt Disney Productions, 1949.