

What characteristics  
of romanticism do  
you see in either rip  
van winkle

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Romanticism in Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" The Romantic Period began in England in the late 1700s and the early 1800s. Romanticism in America began just as close and was exemplified in the works of authors like Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper. In Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," several Romantic elements are exemplified - the hatred of industrialization, the emphasis on nature's beauty, the inclination towards the supernatural, and the defiance of reason. One element of Romanticism in "Rip Van Winkle" is the hatred of the industrial age. The industrial age, when it began in Europe during the Enlightenment, was a time of toil and labor. It was a time when diligence was the rule and hunger was the consequence. However, Romanticism was an antithesis to industrialization, and so in this particular Romantic story, Rip Van Winkle shows "an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (Irving 2). He hates labor and he becomes the epitome of an easy life although he himself does not refuse any call for help from his neighbors. Moreover, Rip Van Winkle's son Rip is also another character who shuns labor for he "promised to inherit the habits [of his father]," and he even carries with him his father's clothes (3). Nevertheless, this repugnance of labor and work somehow makes Rip Van Winkle appreciate what others are too busy to do - nature. Another characteristic of Romanticism found in Irving's story is the glorification of the beauty of nature. The imagery employed by the author in the story speaks of such wonderful beauty - "the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle-roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape" (2). This is such a rather romantic description of the freshness of the landscape - something

that no one would be able to observe except those who do not do much like Rip Van Winkle. Another instance of nature glorified is when he escapes from home with Wolf, for it is only at this time that he notices “ all the lower country for many a mile of rich woodland” and “ the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, with the reflection of a purple cloud” (4). Had Rip Van Winkle not run away from his wife, he would not have seen a whole new world of beautiful nature. However, it is not only nature that he discovers for nature is depicted in the Romantic times as mysterious. A third element of the story is interest in the supernatural. The “ short square-built old fellow, with thick bushy hair, and a grizzled beard” that calls his name on the mountain is a mysterious figure (5). The other people who live in the amphitheater on top of the wild mountain - “ odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins” - and that fact that they have “ beards of various shapes and colors” are actually (5). These are supernatural and mysterious characters since people like these do not just appear on any wild mountain. Moreover, the beverage that these mysterious people drink, which has the flavor of excellent Hollands and which makes him fall into a deep sleep, is equally mysterious because of its ability to make someone sleep for 20 years (5). Perhaps, another instance of mystery in the story is the very fact that he wakes up an old man without knowing that he has slept for the past 20 years. Everything here so far does not seem reasonable and so lacks logical sequence. One final element of Romanticism is the story’s tendency towards imagination and lack of reason. Rip Van Winkle’s twenty years of sleep is indeed mysterious for when he wakes up, he himself says, “ Surely... I have not slept here all night” (6). This means that Rip Van Winkle has never

thought that he would be able to sleep for 20 years when he feels it was just one night. Besides, no one would be able to sleep that long even if he or she were in a state of coma. Another part of the story that is mostly founded on imagination is the “ odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins” (5). These people are imaginary because they simply cannot exist on the mountain, especially because they have “ beards of various shapes and colors,” which is virtually impossible (5). However, aside from these imaginary things, there are also other things at the beginning of the story that are contained in Irving’s story that defy reason. For example, the fact that Rip Van Winkle’s son Rip “ promised to inherit the habits” when in fact he can clearly see that his father shuns labor (3). It is definitely unreasonable why young Rip would do this and why Rip Van Winkle would not give his son the advice not to follow him. Still, another instance in the story where there is a lack of reason is when his already grown up daughter Judith Gardenier tells him that “ it’s twenty years since he went away from home with his gun, and never has been heard of since,” without even finding any means to find him or to organize a search rescue for him (9). This is preposterous as people could at least have looked for him. However, if Rip Van Winkle indeed became invisible during the 20 years that he slept, then this claim would not be only fantastic but also equally unreasonable. Washington Irving’s “ Rip Van Winkle” is a story that exemplifies the most essential elements of American Romanticism. Through Rip Van Winkle’s avoidance of labor, one can see the concern for the hatred towards industrialization. Another element is the praise for natural beauty, which is shown in the imagery of nature and freshness in the story. A third aspect of Romanticism is the inclination

towards the supernatural, with the example of the spirits that he has seen on the mountain as well as the drink that makes him sleep for the next twenty years. These also support another element of Romanticism that is present in the story - the defiance of reason and the glorification of imagination. Aside from the supernatural part of the story, other parts that defy reason include the fact that young Rip emulates his lazy father and that the family never tried to find a way to search for him when he was gone. Top of Form Bottom of Form Works Cited Irving, Washington. " Rip Van Winkle." 2012. Print.