

Chronotopes in “Rip Van Winkle”

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Abstract

This study argues that Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) is a multi-chronotopic short story. The study addresses the chronotopes of space and time in Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” This study maintains a fundamental, functional role for space/time in the short story, demonstrating that it is not enough to think of time and place as a background for the plot, but rather as symbols. The main goal of this study is to apply Mikhail Bakhtin and Eduard Valsov’s theory of chronotopes to Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” This study will be implemented qualitatively and descriptively. This study is notable as it attempts to analyze “Rip Van Winkle” with a different approach of literary theory. Such application of the chronotope concept can be connected to historiography. As for the outcomes, this paper has delineated that through chronotopes, “Rip Van Winkle” is politically charged, historically immersed in, and socially apurtenant .

Keywords: Bakhtin, Chronotope, Place, Time, “Rip Van Winkle”

Introduction

Framing the time and space of a story is a fundamental facet of the narrative that sets the mood and sets up the context of the narrative. The setting can transfer the reader to an alternate world, historical period, or a particular location and creates an exotic atmosphere that magnifies the feelings and actions of the characters. The time and space of a narrative can mold its themes, characters, and plot.

Undoubtedly, all narratives occur in time regardless whether it is chronological, simultaneous, flashbacks, or flash-forwards. “Rip Van Winkle” by Irving is a story about a man’s unconventional escape through time to the time ahead during the American Revolution where his wife is dead. Van Winkle resides in the New York Catskills before the American Revoltion. The time travel is a technique Irving uses as a hook for the readers. It is the vehicle that seperates Van Winkle from his time and spatial setting to post American Revolution at the expense of twenty years of Winkles’ life.

There are different kinds of chronotopes within the narrative of “Rip Van Winkle.” Bakhtin explains the correlation of time and space as inextricable. In *The Dailogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin refers to the chronotope as “the artistic connectedness of temporal and

special relationships that are artistically expressed in literature " (p. 84). The different kinds of spacio-time chronotopes in literature refer not only to the geographical location and the time in which the story happens but also to social and historical dimensions. The chronotopes deliver metaphorically charged thematic content in "Rip Van Winkle." In essence, the chronotopic motifs are helpful theoretical means for exploring "Rip Van Winkle."

Review of Related Literature

The theory of chronotope, proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, demonstrates robust importance. Basically, a chronotope is a literary technique that intertwines time and space within a literary work, forming the general atmosphere and meaning of a literary work. The chronotope is important because it not only delivers a framework for apprehending the spatiotemporal dimensions of a literary work but also contributes to shape the general atmosphere, theme, and character development (Baga, 2020, p.113). In this study, the story is never read solely as an isolated text; however, it is read through social and historical lens. This firm connection of a literary work to historical events synchronizes with Bakhtin's theory that evolution occurs against a fixed background with little or no consideration given to historical transformation in the world in which the individual develops. Bakhtin states that "literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside the total cultural context" (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 140). In an article entitled "Changing Regimes: The Case of Rip Van Winkle" Pearce (2011) has stated that "Washington Irving's conceit of having his Rip Van Winkle sleep through the transition from British colonial to independent republican America allows Irving to play the part of friendly critic of the American regime" (p.2). In another article entitled "Rip Van Winkle and the American dream," (n.d), the writer has claimed that Irving appears sceptical in the American dream. Rip Van Winkle does not epitomize the American dream, but quite the opposite. He has no motivation to improve himself, and he does not toil for himself and his family. All he wants to do is to converse trivially with his friends.

Discussion

The conception of "chronotope" is substantial in literary theory. The "chronotope" is defined as the visceral affinity of spatiotemporal relationships that are aesthetically expressed in literature. In essence, it's the synthesis of time and space within a literary work. Chronotope is inextricably linked to the cultural and historical milieu of a literary work. It reflects the socio-political environment. Temporal and spatial Chronotopes have metaphorical significance through which authors deliver meaning of their works. "Rip Van Winkle" is replete with different kinds of chronotopes, such as concrete, alien, native, static, dynamic

The first kind of chronotope detected in Irving's story is the concrete chronotope. The concrete chronotope is the space that resembles a real, historically existing location. (Vlasov,1995, p.43). Rip Van Winkle provides concrete chronotopes that match real locations, such as the Catskills and the Hudson River.

The alien chronotope comes in sharp contrast with the native chronotope. This dichotomy is presented skillfully in "Rip Van Winkle." There is a struggle throughout the narrative between the protagonist and the locale (Vlasov,1995, p.43). The alien chronotope means that the space in the narrative seems eccentric, unfamiliar, and even hazardous for the main character/narrator. On the other hand, the native chronotope means that the space is

known to the main character, and he/she knows the locale minutely as he/she is born in (Vlasov,1995, p.43). The chronotope of space before Rip Van Winkle's sleep is in sharp contrast with the space after his awakening. It is construed that the dichotomy between the two spaces and times is so simplistic that the New York Catskills before the American Revolt diametrically defies the New York Catskills after the American Revolt. Irving has an intricate pair of worlds within his short story. Before he sleeps, Rip is used to every thing in his village including its people : "He would never refuse to assist a neighbor even in the roughest toil, and was a foremost man at all country frolics for husking Indian corn, or building stone-fences; the women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands, and to do such little odd jobs as their less obliging husbands would not do for them" (pp. 9-10). Accordingly, the village is a native chronotope. When Rip awakens, he discovers a world that is radically different from the one he used to. Rip finds himself in a world transformed politically,culturally, socially, and architecturally. Rip feels alienated in his homeland : "Rip's heart died away at hearing of these sad changes in his home and friends, and finding himself thus alone in the world " (p.21). So, the post- Revolution village is an alien chronotope.

In terms of transformation , chronotopes can be static or dynamic. Static chronotope means that the place is unchangeable and fixed (Vlasov,1995, p.43). In contrast, dynamic chronotope means that the place in the novel transforms and becomes different as the narrative unfolds (Vlasov,1995, p.43). Rip van Winkle lives in a little somnificent village of obscure name at the bottom of the Catskill Mountains.It was a Dutch settlement that was reigned by George III. In the story, the village epitomizes the dynamic chronotope. When Rip Van Winkle comes back to the village after twenty years , he finds everything changed (p.10). The village becomes more crowded, and his old neighbours are not there.There become clusters of houses where nothing is more like before, and those that were recognizable and accustomed to him have disappeared.The roof of his house has toppled over, and the house has become vacant and aparently abandoned.The inn has become a hotel.The only place that the same as it is with no change is Catskill Mountains, providing a static chronotope.Rip Van Winkle, the story's protagonist, presented in the beginning of the story as an unfortunate, affable man who is well-liked but somewhat unsuccessful and inefficient in his role as a husband and father. He has always a desire to evade his domestic responsibilities, often taking refuge in the Catskill Mountains. Irving presents Rip as a man severed from the social changes taking place around him, representing a yearning for a pre-Revolutionary past.Rip's time and spatial travel and his succeeding sleep for twenty years function as a metaphor for his hesitance to accept change. His waking up in a changed world spotlights the march of time and the inescapable changes that take place in society. Through Rip Van Winkle, Irving probes the conflict between convention and progression, demonstrating the obstacles encountered by individuals who challenge progress.Rip's going back to the mountains, which seem to stand still, puts emphasis on the idea of permanence amidst change.

There are many specific minor chronotopes in "Rip Van Winkle," including his house, the road, the amphitheater, and the inn. First, Winkle's house is a specific chronotope punctuating a dark and sore past. Rip lives in a sadly hoary and battered house: "He found the house gone to decay—the roof fallen in, the windows shattered, and the doors off the hinges" (p.18). The house symbolizes a history of trauma and oppression. The road is a prominent chronotope in the story. Rip's obsessions include roaming through the Catskill Mountains and the woodlands: "As he rose to walk, he found himself stiff in the joints, and wanting in his

usual activity" (p.16). As a place for roaming, the road is a symbol of the journey of life, and in the short story it comes to represent the human drive to move forward.

An example of a specific chronotope in "Rip Van Winkle" is the Union Hotel that substitutes the Inn after the revolution. The Inn, with its drowsy proprietor and portrait of King George III, stands for the apathy and indifference of the time when the United States was a bunch of settlements under the British regime. The narrator tells us Rip Van Winkle goes to the inn to combine "idle personages" (p.12) and chat "about nothing" (p.12). Conversely, the Union Hotel symbolizes the vigor, spirit, and patriotism in the new nation. The men inside are actively discussing the forthcoming election of the president: "In place of these, a lean, bilious-looking fellow, with his pockets full of handbills, was haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens—elections—members of Congress—liberty—Bunker's hill—heroes of seventy-six—and other words, which were a perfect Babylonish jargon to the bewildered Van Winkle" (p.19). Here, the concept of dialogism is apparent: "Dialogism continues towards an answer. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answers direction" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.280).

The amphitheater is a space-time chronotope where past and present are often made to fuse seamlessly: "Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheatre, 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" (p.15). Theatre has always a remarkable ability to transfer us to different worlds, conjure up deep feelings. It disintegrates the limitations. The theater represents the core of fading demarcations between the past and the present. The theater has the potential to catalyze an underlying intersection between the past and the present. This interlocking of past and present as a means of political or social messaging is a chronotope. The chronotope of the amphitheater is significant as it bends time and transforms place.

Lastly, a major chronotope in "Rip Van Winkle" is the stoic chronotope (Bakhtin, 2011, p.144). This kind of chronotope is featured by the main character talking to himself/herself (Bakhtin;2011, p.145). After his awakening, Winkle begins to meditate his being "I'm not myself—I'm somebody else—that's me yonder—no—that's somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they've changed my gun, and every thing's changed, and I'm changed, and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (p.21), and he enters a panic as he describes his predicament. Rip Van Winkle is engaged in dialogue with himself. Through these conversations, he develops his own personality. According to Bakhtin, monologism means cutting out dialogism (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293).

Conclusion

The affluent spatiotemporal background in "Rip Van Winkle" forms a great diorama of historical developments, geographical variations, psychological ebbs and flows of the main character, and problems of generations. The story covers the 20 turbulent years of transformation in the country, pre-Revolution to the post-Revolution period, emphasizing the idea that change is ineluctable. The story can be an allusion for the fluctuating destiny of the country.

This study takes Bakhtin and Vlasov's theory as a way for an exploration of how space and time are represented in "Rip Van Winkle." Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" is an ageless American short story that goes beyond its initial enchanted escapades to dig into substantial themes of historical and social change through chronotopes. Written during the early 19th century, the short story reflects the social and political atmosphere of post-Revolutionary period through different kinds of chronotope, such as concrete, alien, native, static, dynamic.

This study is distinguished as it uses a different approach of literary theory to analyze "Rip Van Winkle." Drawing from former contributions, this study develops the discipline because it involves pioneering practical applications of Bakhtin and Vlasov's theory to "Rip Van Winkle". The study is based on a speculative approach that contributes to provide a deeper apprehension of the text and contextualize its space-time chronotopes. This study deconstructs space-time chronotopes to reveal hidden meanings and paradoxes. Through such analysis, this study helps reveal power dynamics within the short story.

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