

Discussion on the Escape Complex in Rip van Winkle

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Abstract

The escape complex, as a matter of fact, exists in a part of American collective unconscious. Rip van Winkle, written by Washington Irving in 1819, was eminent and collected in The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent, through which the readers can totally understand the escape complex. This essay would like to use textual analysis to illustrate the escape complex from the plot, characterization of Rip and the language used in Rip van Winkle to make people have a better understanding about escape complex and offer people a new perspective to appreciate this story.

Key words: escape complex; plot; character analysis; language

1. Introduction

1.1 Research objective

Rip van Winkle is a short story, which was written by Washington Irving in 1819. This is one of his best known short stories and it's exactly this story helped him win his international fame. "It rapidly became the American best-seller for 1819, and the English edition of 1820 made Irving the first American author to attain an international reputation". After reading the story, I noticed the escape complex in the story. I find this complex is quiet interesting and few people have ever paid attention on the escape complex. Therefore, in this essay, I'd like to discuss on the escape complex in Rip van Winkle.

As a world famous story, it's valuable to be researched. This essay will use the plot, the characterization of Rip and the language Irving used in the story to discuss the escape complex. Escape complex, as a dispensable part of American culture, is always neglected by most people. In order to help people be familiar with this complex and have a better understanding about Irving's work---Rip van Winkle. I'd like to discuss the topic, called American collective unconscious ---escape complex in Rip van Winkle.

1.2 Research methodology

This essay will employ textual analysis to discuss the escape complex. Textual analysis is from the surface of the text to the deep level of the text, so that people can grasp the deep meaning of the general readings. That is to say, find a meaning which cannot be grasped in general readings. Textual analysis is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, in media studies, in mass communication, and perhaps even in sociology and philosophy. When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text. This essay is going to discuss this complex from three perspectives.

At the very beginning of this essay, the plot of the story will be used to talk over the escape complex of the story. And then analyze the main character---Rip to illustrate the escape complex. In the end, employ the language Irving used in the story to reflect on the escape complex.

1.3 Research significance

The essay bears three research significances. They are lying in the following three aspects.

First and foremost, discussion on this complex can offer people a new perspective to appreciate this easy and a deep understanding of the essay, which is help for deepening American-Chinese cultural exchange.

In addition, with a new perspective is proposed, the content of American literature class can be more abundant and interesting. Meanwhile, this can offer students a chance to get to know the American collective unconscious.

Last but not least, during the process of searching materials, writing the first draft, rewriting and proofing, author's writing and reading ability can be improved greatly. What's more, author's taping speed increased and the capability of using the Microsoft Word is also enhanced.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Washington Irving and Rip van Winkle

Washington Irving (April 3, 1783 – November 28, 1859) was a great American author, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century. He is best known for his short stories Rip van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, both of them appearing in his famous book The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon. It is exactly this book helped him achieve international fame. He was the first American writer to connect the culture of old continent with the new continent. At the same time, he was also the first American to bring fame and reputation to American literature.

The Irving family was a merchant class. After the Independent War, during the period of the reconstruction of the society, he left his motherland to the European Continent. His brothers were all merchants. Their business extended to the European, but Irving was not very good at business. Even he spent two years trying to bail out the family firm financially but eventually had to declare bankruptcy. Frustrated by bad investment he turned to writing. Under the press from his parents, he went back to America to be involved in the political circle. However, he cannot find a position for him in the political circle. Then he returned to writing. As a matter of fact, Irving shared the same escape experience with Rip.

In fact, Irving's escaping was influenced by his ancestor. During the 1620~1635, the Enclosure Movement forced the English man to escape to the North-America, which was also be called the New Continent. Following his English ancestors, Irving and his parents left their hometown to the North-America in 1760. Later, during the Independent War, the society was unrest and the economic depression. It was exactly this period witnessed hundreds and thousands of people fled from America to the European Continent. As an indispensable element in American national collective unconscious, his ancestors' escaping rooted in his deep heart.

After collecting information from the internet and library, I come to have a better understanding about Rip van Winkle. When Irving failed in his family business, he and his brother's talk was filled with nostalgia. Then he found himself waking from a long sleep, locked himself in his room and spent a whole night finishing the first draft of the story. As Irving wrote, "I shall feel very anxious to hear of the success of this first re-appearance on the literary stage – Should it be successful, I trust I shall be able henceforth to keep up an occasional fire" "2000 copies of the first octavo-sized installment which included "Rip Van Winkle" were released on June 23, 1819, in New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, published by Cornelius S. Van Winkle and sold at a somewhat expensive 75 cents". The British edition was published by John Miller shortly after that. Under the help of his friend Walter Scott, Irving was able to convince John Murray to take over British publication of the Sketch Book.

2.2 Comments on Rip van Winkle

Amassed oceans of researchers have ever studied this story. They have different perspectives on the story.

Firstly, some people are interested in researching the nature in Rip van Winkle. Teng Fang, a lecturer of Dalian University, wrote an essay talking about the eternal nature. She believes that nature is a place where will never change. And nature is a spiritual heaven. Rip is tired of his wife's scolding and unwilling to fulfill his obligations. In order to escape his duty, he took his gun and his dog, Wolf, to the woods.

Meanwhile, some people are concentrating on the reinterpretation of the characters in Rip van Winkle. Yang Qinghua, a post graduate student of Capital Normal University, held the idea that Irving left the reader a first impression that Rip is a very good-natured man, who is good-tempered and warm-hearted. However, Irving described Dame van Winkle as a shrew, termagant and virago.

Those researchers are intended to reveal the demerits of Rip van Winkle and clarify that Dame van Winkle is a victim.

What's more, some people are interested in Irving's nostalgia. Fu Wenping, a lecturer of Yangzhou College of Education, wrote an essay to study Irving's nostalgia. Rip is fond of the life he used to live. After he sleeps twenty years, things people now interested are meaningless to him. That's why he kept telling people his stories in the hotel after he wakes up.

Finally, a lot of people pay attention to the feminist of the story. XueXiaohui, an associate professor of Xi'an International Studies University, figured out who is the victim. Women, like Dame van Winkle, are belittled by men, such as Rip and Irving. The victim is Dame van Winkle, but not Rip.

Nevertheless, little people use effort to discuss the topic---escape complex. Therefore, in this essay, I'd like to research this story from another popular respect---escape complex shown in the story.

2.3 Research on Escape Complex

The escape in American history can be dated back to the sixteenth century. At that time, the religious and political enforcement as well as the famine became the trigger for the Europeans to escape to the New Continent. They came to America to seek a freedom and food. They are the founding father of the US. Unsurprisingly, the offspring of them own the potential escaping conscious.

Escape is a key phenomenon of the American society. Now, it becomes an indispensable theme of national collective unconscious. In general, escape means abandon the old society and seek for new hope. Sometimes, it's also means escape the reality, running away and concealing them. People want to escape, that's because they have contradiction with the environment they are living, which is unable to be adjusted. Therefore, they want to go away and find a comfortable place to go on their dreaming life.

Complexity is a kind of emotion which is strong and be constrained. It is always hiding inside people's heart and influencing their characteristic formation. Complex is the result of the combined action of people's nature, the realistic of the outside society and the national collective unconscious. In order to escape the bother of the society, people always choose get away from it and live in an isolated place.

The term "complex" was created by Ziehen Theodor in 1898, and was carried forward by Carl Jung in the period when he cooperated with Freud Sigmund, which is a major concept of the psychoanalysis school. Carl Jung was the first one to use it. He believed that the complex is the combination of concept, emotion and image. He described complex as "a knot in unconscious". Complex can be regarded as a knot that comes into being with a group of unconscious feelings and beliefs, which can be detected indirectly, and it is difficult to understand the behavior of the performance. Carl Jung found evidence of the existence of the complex early in his career. In the 1910's, he noticed that the behavior patterns of the subjects in the word association test implied that

people's unconscious feelings and beliefs. Later adopted by Freud, he believed that the complex is a kind of conscious repression and sustained in the unconscious activities, and the core of the instinct impulse of desire. In a word, escape complex refers to a hiding escape tend emotion.

3. The Escape Complex in Rip van Winkle

3.1 The plot of Rip van Winkle reflects on Rip's escape complex

As a matter of fact, the whole story has two conflicts. The first conflict is as the master of his family, Rip has many obligations. However, he is sluggishness and unwilling to fulfill his duty. The second conflict is he is craze about the society before he sleep and indifferent to the independent society.

In terms of the first conflict, Rip, as a father and husband, doesn't do what he ought to do. Rip likes hanging around the village, helping other housewives, playing with other children and gathering with his friends. The word "other" should be paid attention. Instead helping his own wife, taking care of his own children, doing what a man should do, he spends his time in such idle ways. Which women can bear such a lazy husband! No wonder Dame van Winkle keeps scolding Rip, even his dog. That's because the dog is just like its master, failing to fulfill its duty and doing little contribution to the family.

The second conflict is as follows. The change that had occurred in the twenty years slept was to him not always for the better. Whereas, before the war, there had been peace and harmony, there came now the scramble for power between parties. What had been a disinterested dispassionate idle talk about events and occurrences of the times was now replaced by a passionate factional squabble. The speed of the life quickened. Pre-war leisurely existence acquired "a busy, bustling, disputations tone." Instead of feeling happy about the country finally independent from the yoke of British colonial rule, Rip was pleased with his new life chiefly because "he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony" (Irving 35). The story might be taken as an illustration of Irving's argument that change---and revolution---upset the natural order of things, and of the fact that Irving never seemed to accept a modern democratic America. Rip wouldn't like the world after the war, so what he can do is to contribute nothing to the war. Then he chooses to sleep. This kind of psychology and behavior exactly demonstrates the escape complex.

3.2 The characters of Rip reflects on the escape complex

In the whole essay, Irving described two characters in detail. Of course, the first one is Rip and then the second one is his wife. Firstly, in terms of Rip, Irving described him as a very mild man. Rip owns a meekness of spirit, which enables him to be loved by the housewives, the kids, and even the dogs. In a word, he is popular by all people, but his wife. He is unwilling to help others, but refuse to do anything for his family. He hates all kinds of profitable labor. So he'd like eat, wear and live in low quality than to do something to change his family's living condition. He is so henpeck that when his wife scolds him for his lazy, he would never say a word to fight back.

The second one Irving used a lot of words to depict is Dame van Winkle—Rip's wife. She is depicted as a shrew, termagant and virago. She is like a "fiery furnace", owns a bad temper and is keeping scolding Rip all the time. The villagers are all blame her when she scolds Rip. With time goes by, her temper doesn't seem to get better. She still keeps the habit of scolding others—Rip, Rip's dog and Rip's friends.

With those two characters, when there are some conflicts which cannot be dealt with, the meek one has to escape. Then everything happens in its reason. Rip escapes. Therefore, Irving did a lot of work on character depicting to foreshadow the latter things. From this the escape complex is shown deeply in the story.

3.3 The language Irving used in Rip van Winkle reflects on escape complex

Humor means the ability to laugh at things that are amusing. The first humor appears in the story is in paragraph two, "He inherited, however, but little of the martial character of his ancestors" (Irving 12). Irving made a contrast between Rip and his ancestors. He is not interested in money, so he would spend time in a leisure way than work to support his family. The second humor also shows in the second paragraph, "the fiery furnace of domestic tribulation" (Irving 12). The third is still in paragraph two, "a curtain lecture is worth all the sermons in the world for teaching the virtues of patience and long-suffering" (Irving 12). Here the lashing-tongue the wife used to his husband is exaggerated. In fact, these two humor sentences are all indicating what Rip is experiencing and how poor he is. The most amusing part is "A termagant wife may therefore, in some respects be considered a tolerable blessing; and if so, Rip van Winkle was thrice blessed" (Irving 12). This reflects the helplessness and poorness of Rip.

In the second paragraph, he used a light and humor tone to state Rip and Dame van Winkle's characteristics, which would make individuals burst out laughing and leave a deep impression on the readers. Behind his humor sentences he laid all of the foreshadowing of the story. So his humor could show the escape complex of the story.

4. Conclusion

The first two chapters of this paper have made a brief introduction about the content, what's the significant and what kind of method will be used to do this research. This essay demonstrates the escape complex of Rip van Winkle from three perspectives. The first perspective is the plot of the story. The conflicts and Rip's responsibility escaping in the story well demonstrate the escape complex. The second perspective is to explore the main characters in the story. From Rip's characteristic, his inner world and his behavior show the escape complex of the story. The last perspective is the language Irving used in the story. In the story, Rip used elaborate words to describe the natural scene. The words he used to depict a certain character were in the same style. What's more, he also used humors in the story to create a light atmosphere. The language he used can exactly reflect the escape complex of the story. All in all, escape complex have been obviously reflected and can be easily found in the story. The author do hope this essay can offer people a new way to

appreciate this story, and enrich the content of English and American literature.

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