

FROM “DER ZIEGENHIRT” TO “RIP VAN WINKLE”

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Der Ziegenhirt

Peter Klaus, ein Ziegenhirte aus Sittendorf, der seine Heerde am Kyffhäuser weidete, pflegte sie am Abend auf einem mit altem Gemäuer umschloßnen Platz ausruhen zu lassen, wo er die Musterung über sie hielt. Seit einigen Tagen hatte er bemerkt, daß eine seiner schönsten Ziegen bald nachher, wenn er auf diesen Platz gekommen war, verschwand und erst spät der Heerde nachkam. Er beobachtete sie genauer und sah, daß sie durch eine Spalte des Gemäuers durchschlüpfte. Er wand sich ihr nach, und traf sie in einer Höhlung, wo sie fröhlich die Haferkörner auffas, die einzeln von der Decke herabfielen. Er blickte in die Höhe, schüttelte den Kopf über den Haferregen, konnte aber durch alles Hinstarren nichts weiter entdecken. Endlich hörte er über sich das Wiehern und Stampfen einiger muthigen Hengste, deren Krippe der Hafer entfallen mußte.

So stand der Ziegenhirte da, staunend über die Pferde in einem ganz unbewohnten Berge. Da kam ein Knappe und winkte schweigend ihm zu folgen. Peter stieg einige Stufen in die Höhe und kam, über einen ummauerten Hof, an eine Vertiefung, die ringsum von hohen Felsenwänden umschlossen war, in welche, durch überhangende dickbelaubte Zweige, einiges Dämmerlicht herab fiel. Hier fand er, auf einem gut geebneten, kühlen Rasenplatze, zwölf ernste Rittermänner, deren keiner ein Wort sprach, beim Kegelspiel. Peter wurde schweigend angestellt, um die Kegel aufzurichten.

Anfangs that er dies mit schlotternden Knien, wenn er, mit halbverstohlenem Blick, die langen Bärte und die aufgeschlitzten Wänste der edeln Ritter betrachtete. Allmählig aber machte die Gewöhnung ihn dreister, er übersah alles um sich her mit festerem Blick und wagte es endlich, aus einer Kanne zu trinken, die neben ihm hingesezt war und aus welcher der Wein ihm lieblich entgegenduftete. Er fühlte sich wie neu belebt und so oft er Ermüdung spürte, holte er sich aus der nie versiegenden Kanne neue Kräfte. Doch endlich übermant' ihn der Schlaf.

Beim Erwachen fand er sich auf dem umschloßnen grünen Platz wieder, wo er seine Ziegen ausruhen zu lassen pflegte. Er rieb die Augen, konnte aber weder Hund noch Ziegen entdecken, staunte über das hochaufgeschoß'ne Gras und über Sträucher und Bäume, die er vorher hier noch nie bemerkt hatte. Kopfschüttelnd ging er weiter, alle die Wege und Stege hindurch, die er täglich mit seiner Heerde zu durchirren pflegte; aber nirgends sah er eine Spur von seinen Ziegen. Unter sich sah er Sittendorf, und endlich stieg er, mit beschleunigtem Schritte, herab, um hier nach seiner Heerde zu fragen.

Die Leute, die ihm vor dem Dorfe begegneten, waren ihm alle unbekannt, waren anders gekleidet und sprachen nicht so, als seine Bekannten; auch starrten sie ihn alle an, wenn er nach seinen Ziegen fragte und faßten sich an das Kinn. Endlich that er, fast unwillkürlich, eben das und fand, zu seinem Erstaunen, seinen Bart um einen Fuß verlängert. Er fing an, sich und die ganze Welt um sich her für verzaubert zu halten; und doch kannte er den Berg, den er herabgestiegen war, wohl als den Kyffhäuser, auch waren ihm die Häuser mit ihren Gärten und Vorplätzen alle wohl bekannt. Auch nannten mehrere Knaben, auf die Frage eines Vorbeireisenden, den Namen: Sittendorf.

Kopfschüttelnd ging er in das Dorf hinein und nach seiner Hütte. Er fand sie sehr verfallen; und vor ihr lag ein fremder Hirtenknabe in zerrißnem Kittel, neben einem abgekehrten Hunde, der ihn zähnefletschend angrinzte, als er ihn rief. Er ging durch die Oeffnung, die sonst eine Thür verschloß, hinein, fand aber alles so wüste und leer, daß er, einem Betrunknen gleich, aus der Hinterpforte wieder hinaus wankte, und Frau und Kinder bei ihrem Namen rief. Aber keiner hörte, und keine Stimme antwortete ihm.

Bald umdrängten den suchenden Mann mit dem langen, eisgrauen Bart Weiber und Kinder und fragten ihn um die Wette: was er suche? Andre, vor seinem eignen Hause, nach seiner Frau oder seinen Kindern zu fragen, oder gar nach sich selbst, schien ihm so sonderbar, daß er, um die Fragenden los zu werden, die nächsten Namen nannte, die ihm einfielen. "Kurt Steffen!" Die meisten schwiegen und sahen sich an, endlich sagte eine bejahrte Frau: Seit zwölf Jahren wohnt er unter der Sachsenburg, dahin werdet ihr heute nicht kommen. "Velten Meier!" Gott habe ihn selig! antwortete ein altes Mütterchen an der Krücke, der liegt schon seit funfzehn Jahren in dem Hause, das er nimmer verläßt.

Er erkannte, zusammenschauernd, seine plötzlich alt gewordene Nachbarinnen; aber, ihm war die Lust vergangen, weiter zu fragen. Da drängte sich durch die neugierigen Gaffer ein junges, rasches Weib, mit einem einjährigen Knaben auf dem Arm, und einem vierjährigen Mädchen an der Hand, die alle drei seiner Frau wie aus den Augen geschnitten waren, "Wie heißt ihr?" fragte er erstaunend. "Maria." "Und euer Vater?" "Gott habe ihn selig! Peter Klaus; es sind nun zwanzig Jahr, daß wir ihn Tag und Nacht suchten auf dem Kyffhäuser, da die Heerde ohne ihn zurückkam; ich war damals sieben Jahr alt."

Länger konnte sich der Ziegenhirt nicht halten. "Ich bin Peter Klaus, —rief er,— und kein anderer!" und nahm seiner Tochter den Knaben vom Arm. Alle standen wie versteinert, bis endlich eine Stimme, und noch eine Stimme rief: "Ja, das ist Peter Klaus! Willkommen Nachbar, nach zwanzig Jahren willkommen!"¹⁾

The Goatherd: English Version of the Above

Peter Klaus, a goatherd of Sittendorf, who drove his flock to the Kyffhäuser, used

1) "Der Ziegenhirt," *Volks-Sagen, Märchen und Legenden*, gesammelt von Johann Gustav Büsching (zweite Abtheilung; bei Carl Heinrich Reclam, Leipzig, 1812), pp. 327-331.

to allow them to take a rest in the evening in a place surrounded by old walls, where he held an inspection of them. For some days he had observed that one of his finest goats, as soon as he had come to the spot, disappeared and only belatedly came up with the flock. He carefully kept watch on her and found that she slipped out through a crack of the wall. He wound his way after her, and came upon her in an excavation, where she merrily gleaned the corn of oats which fell down one by one from the ceiling. He looked up to the dome, shaking his head over the rain of oats, but could find out nothing more with a fixed stare around. At length above himself he heard the neighing and stamping of some valiant stallions, whose manger the corn must have fallen from. So there stood the goatherd, astonished by the horses in such a quite uninhabited mountain. There came a page, who silently beckoned Peter to follow him. Peter climbed some steps on the hill, and, after crossing a walled-in courtyard, came upon a hollow, surrounded by high precipices, where some gloaming fell down through the overhanging thick-covered boughs. Here on a well-smoothed, cool lawn he saw twelve grave-looking knights playing at ninepins, speaking not a single word. Peter was urged in silence to set up the pins at right positions.

He did, at first, with his knees shaking, and then he, with a half-stealthy glance, looked at the long beards and bulging bellies of the noble knights. By degrees, however, he got so used to them as to be more daring, thus overlooking all around him with a fixed look, and at last even venturing to drink out of a can, which was placed near him and from whence the wine was sending him a delightfully sweet smell. He felt newly animated, and so every time he felt fatigued he fetched new energy out of the never-exhausted can. But eventually the sleep overwhelmed him.

On awakening he found himself on the enclosed green spot again, where he used to let his goats take a rest. He rubbed his eyes, but could discover neither his dog nor goats, and he was surprised to see that the grass had become lanky, thus giving way to the bushes and trees which he had not noticed before. Shaking his head, he walked throughout the ways and paths that he daily used to wander along with his flock, but nowhere did he catch a trace of his goats. Just below his eyes he saw Sittendorf, and in the end he climbed down with hastened steps to ask about his flock.

The people, who came upon him in front of the village, were all unfamiliar to him, dressed like different people, and did not talk like his acquaintances had done. And they all stared at him, when he asked about his goats, and grasped their chins. At length almost unintentionally he did just the same, and found, to his astonishment, that his beard had grown one foot. He began to think himself and the whole world around him to have been bewitched. Yet he knew well the mountain, which he had come down from, as the Kyffhäuser, and the houses with gardens and forecourts were all well known to him. And to the question of a traveller some boys responded with the name: Sittendorf.

Shaking his head, he went into the village and towards his cottage. He found it

extremely dilapidated, and before it there lay an unknown shepherd boy in a tattered smock near an emaciated dog, which, showing its teeth, whimpered to him as he called it. He slipped into the house through the opening, which the door had formerly closed, and found all so desolate and vacant that he, like a drunk, staggered out at the back door, calling his wife and children by names. But no one heard him, and no voice answered him.

Soon women and children thronged around this searcher with the long hoary beard, and vied with others in asking him: what is he searching for? He seemed so queer to others, he thought, to ask about his wife or children, or even about himself, in front of his own house, that he, to be free from the questions, called the closest name that had occurred to him. "Kurt Steffen!" Most people kept silent and saw each other, but at last an aged woman said: For twelve years he lives under the Sachsenburg, where you will not reach today. "Velten Meier!" God rest his soul! answered an old granny with the crutch, he has been lying for as long as fifteen years in the house which he never leaves.

He recognized, shuddering at the same time, the women in his neighborhood who had suddenly become aged, but his desire to ask further was gone. Through the inquisitive onlookers there hurriedly shoved a young woman with a one-year-old child in the arm and a four-year-old girl led by the hand; all of the three bore a striking resemblance to his wife. "What is your name?" asked he, amazed. "Maria." "And your father?" "God rest his soul! Peter Klaus. It has been twenty years since we searched for him day and night in the Kyffhäuser, from whence the flock had come back without him. I was seven years old then."

The goatherd could no longer keep himself back. "I am Peter Klaus, —he called,— and none other!" and seized the boy from his daughter's arm. All stood as if petrified until at last voice after voice called: "Yes, this is Peter Klaus! Welcome neighbor, welcome after twenty years!"

Plagiarism? Blatant Imitation?

A loud cry of plagiarism arose against Washington Irving, as is universally known, when some British magazine writers, having discovered that "Rip Van Winkle" had been founded on the old folk tale of "Peter Klaus," had revealed the fact to the world, as Irving himself allegedly put it, "as if it were a foul instance of plagiarism marvellously brought to light."² Irving was reportedly accused of shamelessly stealing the plot; "[p]assages from the old German tale of 'Peter Klaus' have been placed side by side with passages from Irving's narrative, to reveal imitation so blatant that much of Rip's unhappy experience seems little more than direct translation."³ We had long been desirous to learn

2) Elmer L. Brooks, "A Note on the Source of 'Rip Van Winkle,'" *American Literature* (Reprinted by Kraus Reprint LTD., Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1966), Vol. 25 (1953-1954), pp. 495-496.

3) Lewis Leary, "Washington Irving: 1783-1859," in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, ed. Leonard Ungar (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), p. 306.

how shamelessly directly Irving was able to put "Peter Klaus" into "Rip Van Winkle," until recently the blessed opportunity to peruse the alleged German version of "Rip" has come our way. Elmer L. Brooks suggests that although the story of the goatherd of Sittendorf told in J. C. C. N. Otmar's *Volks-Sagen Nacherzählt von Otmar* (Bremen, 1800) has been pointed to as Irving's source by a certain critic, as an *immediate* source, the odds seem to be a little in favor of Johann Gustav Büsching's *Volks-Sagen, Märchen und Legenden* (Leipzig, 1812), in which the Peter Klaus tale begins on page 327.⁴⁾ Eager to get access to the folk tale of Peter Klaus in Büsching's volume, Takahashi asked his old friend Shinji Usui, German Professor at Osaka Pharmaceutical College, to do him a favor. Usui was good enough to take the trouble to write Professor Dr. Hansjürgen Linke of der Universität zu Köln, who was kind enough to respond in a flash, sending him a photocopy of "Der Ziegenhirt," the tale of the prodigal sleeper, compiled in Büsching's book. Without delay Usui benevolently forwarded it to Takahashi for perusal. On acquiring the long-coveted material, first, Takahashi entreated Fujikawa to put it into Japanese; second, Takahashi put it into English, referring to Fujikawa's translation; and then, to decide whether an alleged blatant plagiarism was de facto committed by the supposed Father of American Literature, we checked on the similarities and differences between the original and the adaptation, a job that has led us to our firm conviction that if Irving were to be accused of plagiarizing the plot during the process of creating one of the most memorable characters in American fiction, Shakespeare, too, would have to be put on the public stocks for stealing the motif and locale from some Danish legend when giving life to Hamlet. Irving did more than give the German folk motif a local habitation and a name, as Daniel Hoffman points out, thus infusing it with subliminal universal significance, and at the same time, by an authorial alchemy no doubt unconscious on his part, expressing in it the very spirit of his nation and of his time.⁵⁾ True, the German legend gave Irving the basic structure, some implements and anecdotes for adaptation. Still, it is clearly noticeable that Peter is to Rip what a skeleton is to a beautifully fleshed torso. It is to Irving's credit that he has transformed a mere German folk tale hero into the first American literary prototype of a runaway male, who leaves society for nature, but, it must be stressed, comes back home to be welcomed: a personage decisively different from the runaway-male image of Natty Bumppo in the *Leatherstocking Tales* by James Fenimore Cooper in that the latter constantly prefers savage life in the wilderness wood, stream, lake, and prairie to law-enforcing civilized white men's society, although he claims that he will live and die a white Christian.

Irving's Invention (1): Hero Richly Characterized

4) Op. cit., pp. 495-496.

5) Daniel Hoffman, "IRVING, Washington," in *American Writers to 1900*, eds. James Vinson et al. (Chicago: St James Press, 1983), p. 197.

The first of the most striking improvements, added geographical and historical backgrounds aside, is the exquisitely delineated characterization of Rip Van Winkle, “a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina (p. 29),”⁶⁾ and a resident in “a little village of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant (p. 29),” while Peter Klaus has been given only such a simple description as “a goatherd of Sittendorf,” no more appendages attached to him. Rip is, as any reader of the story may notice, one of the most unforgettable figures ever created in the world literature, old and new and east and west, for his some prototypical characteristics: simple good-naturedness, readiness to attend to any body’s business but his own (“as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible (p. 30)”), universal popularity among all the good wives, children, and dogs, and, last but not least, obedience of a henpecked husband. He is never a tragic hero; repugnance to his wife never leads to a fatal confrontation likely to ruin their marriage; although he takes gun in hand and strolls into the woods, he knows that he will ever come back home to his wife, even after twenty years.

Irving’s Invention (2): Dame Van Winkle

Dame Van Winkle may be another credit to the author. She “kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness and the ruin he was bringing on his family (p. 31),” a practice that could lead only to the result that he “shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, cast up his eyes, but said nothing (p. 31).” Dame Van Winkle is a most memorable prototype of a termagant wife, with a tart temper and a sharp tongue, which can be effective enough to prompt her husband, first, to frequent a kind of junto, “a kind of perpetual club of the sages, philosophers and other idle personages of the village which held its sessions on a bench before a small inn, designated by a rubicund portrait of his majesty George the Third (p. 31),” and then, because his wife would suddenly break in upon the tranquility of the assemblage to call the members all to naught, “to take gun in hand and stroll away into the woods (p. 32).”

Irving’s Invention (3): Voice Hallooing “Rip Van Winkle!”

The third subtle invention is the scheme which induces Rip to slip into the dreamland. In the German legend, Peter Klaus finds himself, on awakening from a deep sleep, on the enclosed green spot where he used to let his goats take a rest. The fact suggests that what invited Peter into a sound sleep is one of his finest goats, which slipped out through a

6) *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, ed. Richard Dilworth Rust (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), Vol. 8. All page references in the text are to this edition.

crack of the wall, not the page who came to the excavation to beckon Peter to follow him, nor the wine he ventured to drink in the hollow, where the twelve grave knights were playing at ninepins. Peter must have fallen into sleep in the usual resting spot, where he must have been dreaming himself chasing the finest goat, meeting a strange page, and following him to come to a strange company in a hollow. In the American version, when he awakened, the hero found himself lying "on the green knoll from whence he had first seen the old man of the glen (p. 35)." The fact tells us that it is on the green knoll that he had fallen asleep, not in the "hollow like a small amphitheatre, surrounded by perpendicular precipices (p.34)," where he had ventured to taste the wine out of the flagon so often that "at length his senses were overpowered (p. 35)." On the green knoll, it must be remembered, about to descend late in the afternoon after squirrel shooting, Rip suddenly "heard a voice from a distance hallooing 'Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! (p. 33)," an incident that would induce us to wonder why the author has introduced a loud calling here, although during the rest of the whole action from the encounter of the strange personage and Rip through the waking-up no human voice is ever heard; a strange company of odd-looking people playing at ninepins maintained "the most mysterious silence (p. 34)." In order to catch some clues to an understanding of the situation, we may have to go back to the scene of the two meeting on the green knoll. After hearing a voice hallooing "Rip Van Winkle!" he "looked around, but could see nothing but a crow winging its solitary flight across the mountain. He thought his fancy must have deceived him and turned again to descend, which he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air: 'Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! (p. 33).'" The author's intention seems to us to have been that a good chance for Rip to fall asleep should be given by the caw of the crow winging its solitary flight across the mountain; that in his fatigued sleepy ears the caw must have sounded like someone calling his own name. It has also to be added that just before beginning to descend, "he heaved a heavy sigh when he thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle (p. 33)." The thought of his wife calling him names urged his fancy to let him hold a cawing crow to be calling him. His fancy apparently deceived him, yes, so that, beckoned by the bird's calling or cawing, instead of turning again to descend, he, in fact, went down into an abysmal depth of dream of twenty years' length.

Irving's Invention (4): Old Peter Vanderdonk as Colaborator

The fourth daedal creation found in the new version of the story is old Peter Vanderdonk introduced as interpreter and corroborator of Rip's story, who was "a descendant of the historian of that name, who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province," and "the most ancient inhabitant of the village and well versed in all the wonderful events and traditions of the neighbourhood (p. 40)." By enlisting Peter Vanderdonk for corroboration, Irving has achieved a feat of transmutation: a Gothic

tincture of the tragedy of the great navigator Henry Hudson replacing the Kyffhäuser legend in the original. In the German version, Peter Klaus saw in the hollow “the twelve grave-looking knights” with long beards and bulging bellies, no more adjuncts added. But it is quite probable that readers of Büsching’s collection of folk tales may, when coming to “Der Ziegenhirt” on page 327, call to mind another story “Der Kyffhäuser” on page 319. The latter is about a little superstition of Friedrich der Große (Friedrich the Great (1712–1786)), who reportedly is still living in the Kyffhäuser mountain, sometimes giving audience to people to enjoy causeries.⁷⁾ We might infer that the twelve knights Peter Klaus saw in the hollow could be imagined to have been Friedrich’s body guards keeping vigil. In the American adaptation, old Peter Vanderdonk, the corroborator, assured the villagers “that the Kaatskill mountains had always been haunted by strange beings (p. 40).” His interpretation of Rip’s extravaganza is “that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the Half Moon (p. 40).” What enticed Irving to use the ghostly images of the Half Moon crew must have been the tragic fate of Henry Hudson and his party. Henry Hudson was an English navigator, who, through four big expeditions, explored the Arctic and the coasts of North America. The Hudson River in New York and Hudson Bay in Canada are named for him. It is in the third voyage that in the Half Moon he and his mixed Dutch and English crew sailed up the river now known as the Hudson under the sponsorship of the East India Company in Holland. In the fourth, the last, voyage, he was involved in the tragic mutiny: in mid-June 1611 on the bitter cold Arctic a vehement quarrel broke out between Hudson and two of the men, developing into a mutiny, in which the rebellious two sailors and other crew captured Hudson, bound him, and threw him with his son and eight others (including the sick men) into the shallop. The little boat was then set adrift, and the occupants were left to starve and to freeze to death.⁸⁾ No more was ever heard of Hudson and his small party, although in 1631 to 1632 another explorer found the ruins of a shelter, possibly erected by the castaways.⁹⁾

Conclusion

Far from plagiarism or blatant imitation just like direct translation, that some British pettifogging critics claimed Irving had perpetrated, what the gargantuan maestro in the early nineteenth century did in producing “Rip Van Winkle” is a brilliant maneuver of literary mastery, such as those of his great predecessors like Shakespeare and Dante, resulting in one of the first American masterpiece short stories, ever-enticing and

7) Op. cit., p. 319.

8) *The Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, Vol. 14 (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Incorporated, 1988), pp. 522–523.

9) *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 6, Micropaedia: Ready Reference (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1989), p. 117.

unforgettable for creation of one of the genuine American mythical archetypes: a henpecked husband who is constantly running away from his nagging despotic wife into nature, but never able to detach himself from her, conscious that he will be sure to be back home whenever he leaves it. In this respect, "Rip Van Winkle" can be regarded as predecessor of James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*, in which the hero goes down into a fantastic world and returns home, ever searching for his lost wife.

Now it is relevant to note that Rip Van Winkle is, in essence, not a goatherd of the German village of Sittendorf, but none other than the Rip Van Winkle completely exquisitely fitted in the American literary tradition and history. We never recoil from pleading the innocence of Mr. Washington Irving in this plagiarism case. (29/9/1990)

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