Theorizing Temporality in the Interpretation of Folklore: A Case Study of the Headless Horseman

by

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A thesis accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Folklore and Public Culture

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Summer 2026

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Folklore and Public Culture

Title: Theorizing Temporality in the Interpretation of Folklore: A Case Study of the Headless Horseman

This thesis filters case studies of narratives that prominently feature a Headless Horseman through a lens of temporality to explore the impact of folkloric or folkloresque narratives on the communities they circulate within. The introduction reviews a roller coaster in Indiana; the first chapter analyzes a short story and two films; the second chapter focuses on a contemporary legend in Kentucky, and the third chapter examines tourism in New York. Archival research and ethnographic interviews intersect with primarily Bakhtinian theories of chronotope to analyze settings, events, and descriptions of the Headless Horseman. I argue for understanding the Headless Horseman as a widely recognizable folk figure that is intrinsically temporally complicated. The types of temporalities constructed in narratives that feature the Headless Horseman bring past into present through memory and association in variable ways that affect how the folk perceive the history of their community and the United States at large.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Deepest thanks to the following individuals and organizations for aiding me in my quest to get to know the Headless Horseman a bit better: Allen Sircy, the McLean County Historical Society, the McLean County News, Paxton Media Group, the Purple Ostrich, Cozy Coven, Sleepy Coffee Too, The Shop, the Sleepy Hollow Tarrytown Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society Inc. of Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown.

To my advisor, Dr. Ed Wolf, and my committee member, Dr. Martha Bayless, thank you for your constant and thoughtful support not only but especially of this project. To the lovely staff of Academic Support Unit 3, thank you for answering every email (panicked or otherwise) and helping me meet every deadline.

To Dr. Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, Dr. Ellie Hasken-Wagner, and my other mentors: thank you for encouraging me to choose my own adventure.

Thank you to my friends, near and far, for brightening my days. I'm proud to be your go-to cryptid consultant. A special thank you to Nat Ivy: you wrote that we had become like family, so I will write that I am a better person for knowing you.

To my sunset: thank you for walking with me. Here's to the journey ahead.

To my aunts, uncles, and cousins: thank you for all the care and excitement, past, present, and future. A special shoutout to my cousin Jason for bringing the Headless Horseman to life in the most wonderful way when I wasn't sure where to go next. To my grandparents: thank you for answering every phone call and for braving the travails of the United States Postal Service with me. Thank you to my brothers: the best cheerleaders I could ask for. Nerds.

To my parents: I am who I am, where I am, doing what I am doing, because of the support, encouragement, and love you have given me my entire life.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As a researcher, I recognize I live and work in places already held in relationships, colonized lands with histories that stretch back to time immemorial. Before I share my thesis, I acknowledge the past and present-day stewards of the various places I connected with during this project. The time spent in each of these places has shaped me on my own journey and has enabled the creation of the thesis that follows.

I was born and raised in central Kentucky, on the historical and present-day homelands of the ᏣᎳᎩᏯᏳᏍ Tsalaguwetiyi (Cherokee, East), ᎴᏁᏃᏁᏃᎯ ᏧᏅᏬᏂ ᐊᑎᏩᎯ ᗰᐱ^Ꮓᐱ^(Osage), S'atsoyaha (Yuchi), Shawandasse Tula (Shawanwaki/Shawnee) peoples, as well as peoples of the Adena and Hopewell cultures.

I undertook fieldwork research in two places as part of this thesis. The first, McLean County, Kentucky, is the historical and present-day homelands of the ᏣᎳᎩᏯᏳᏍ Tsalaguwetiyi (Cherokee, East), ᎴᏁᏃᏁᏃᎯ ᏧᏅᏬᏂ ᐊᑎᏩᎯ ᗰᐱ^Ꮓᐱ^(Osage), S'atsoyaha (Yuchi), Shawandasse Tula (Shawanwaki/Shawnee) peoples, as well as peoples associated with the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Mobilian Jargon cultures and languages. The second, Sleepy Hollow, New York, is the historical and present-day homelands of the Mohican, Wappinger, Munsee Lenape, and Schaghticoke peoples, as well as peoples associated with the Wappinger and Munsee Delaware cultures and languages.

I wrote the majority of this thesis living in Eugene, Oregon, on the historical and present-day homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla, Kalapuya, Chelamela, and Winefelly peoples; many of whom are part of the present-day Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde or the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Oregon as a state also recognizes the Burns Paiute Tribe; the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians; the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; the Coquille Indian Tribe; the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; and the Klamath Tribes.

Land acknowledgments are only one small part of acknowledging complex legacies of violence, genocide, colonization, settlement, displacement, and forced migration that have shaped the United States as we know it today. Indigenous peoples, languages, and cultures survive and continue to steward and shape the lands they are and have been connected to. I encourage anyone who's reading this to further research the history, language, and cultures of the peoples mentioned here; and support Indigenous activism, grassroots movements, businesses, organizations, and peoples, wherever you are and wherever you go.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Beware - the Headless Horseman may steal your glasses! Glasses straps available for purchase at gift shops!"

The text above is written on a sign mounted near a doorway near the end of the queue for The Legend, a wooden roller coaster located in the Halloween attraction area in Holiday World and Splashin' Safari (located in the appropriately named town of Santa Claus, Indiana). This sign is the last thing riders see before entering the building where they will board The Legend. The reference to a folkloric, near-legendary figure to remind visitors of a common component of theme park ride safety is one of several ways designers immerse riders in the coaster's theme.

Riders entering the queue are ushered down a set of stairs and greeted by a different large sign mounted to the side of the track above eye level (see Figure 1.1 below).



Figure 1.1. The logo for The Legend roller coaster at Holiday World and Splashin' Safari.

The silhouette of a headless rider holding a pumpkin head, framed by an orange moon, is meant to put the viewer in mind of one character, from one story. Holiday World's official website writes, "The theme of The Legend wooden roller coaster is *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. On it, riders race through the woods as if chased in terror by the relentless Headless

Horseman," (Holiday World 2014). The Legend features fast speeds up to 60 miles per hour. The wooden track is loud and cacophonous and takes riders out into the woods and through constructed tunnels. There are also multiple "headchoppers," or sudden drops through those tunnels, and a bell mounted above the building that is solemnly rung as farewell as each train leaves the station.

When I visited Holiday World and rode The Legend on August 1, 2025, I was struck by another, different ride element. After each rider stepped into the cart and buckled their seatbelt, the staff completed a series of safety checks. As the bell began to ring from above, over the sounds of clashing wood and metal and chain as the train left the station, one staff member leaned into a microphone and said:

"Ride is clear, but beware, the Headless Horseman may be near! As you race along the track, whatever you do...don't look back."

The Legend is one of Holiday World's signature attractions, drawing attention from "casual" park visitors and dedicated roller coaster fans alike (Wayback Machine, Holiday World 2000, 2002). The ride has been renovated multiple times since its opening in 2000 to improve hourly rider capacity and add new experiential elements. The Legend's enduring popularity is also reflected in its crowd-sourced theme and its twenty-five awards from *Amusement Today* spanning the time from the coaster's opening to the present day (Amusement Today 2025). But more importantly, and reflective of its inclusion in this thesis, The Legend exemplifies a temporally complicated narrative experience that features the Headless Horseman.

This thesis will utilize the concept of chronotope to center temporality in the analysis of folk narrative, arguing for a conception and assumption of time within folklore outside of a capitalistic progression. Alternate temporalities, as Joann Conrad terms them, help realize fuller

understanding of a narrative's impact and significance. Chronotope's focus on the relationship between time, space, and meaning uniquely suits its application to folk and folkloresque narratives. Analyzing a range of examples of folk and folkloresque narratives that feature the Headless Horseman as a motif reveal multiple chronotopes that link back to Conrad's "alternative temporalities." Each chronotope explored here creates or collapses temporal, spatial, and experiential distance. This chronotopic and experiential distance, or lack thereof, creates not only narrative meaning but a variety of real-world effects in cultural context, in this case ranging from a tourist economy to a mass-media homogeneity to a memorialization of conflict. Without centering idea of alternate temporality in narrative analysis, scholars can struggle to completely conceptualize how that distance is created and therefore better understand how the narratives are experienced and what material effects they can have.

Literature Review and Definitions

Folklore

Folklore for the purposes of this thesis will be defined as vernacular expressive culture that isn't commercial on a large scale. Folklore is qualified by multiple existence, where "an item [of folklore] will exist in more than one time and place," as well as in variation (Dundes 1999 viii). Dundes also mentions authorship and mode of transmission as qualifications; in this thesis, authorship and mode of transmission shift in context and over time, requiring broad assumptions and definitions. Scholars like Michalopoulos and Xue 2021, Ben-Amos 1971, and Popescu 2011 have used Dundes' or a similarly expansive definition and qualifications in their works. This thesis will also assume the arguments Dorothy Noyes made using Bauman's "The Social Base of Folklore" – namely, that folklore is not just a form but a process, that folklore is dynamic in form

and process, and the interplay between vernacularity and the daily negotiation of identity (Noyes 2016).

Folk

To define the folk, I will quote *International Folkloristics*: "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common linking factor," (Dundes 1999 vii). Conceptions of folk, and who the folk can be, have varied from the founding of folklore studies into the present such that there are as many definitions of folk as there are of folklore; see Benedetti 1987, Mullen 2000, Bailey 2021, Thompson 2024 for more discussion. The folk and folk groups, as mentioned above, are assumed to be dynamic and constantly communally negotiated. In this thesis, the "common linking factor" that unites the folk will be familiarity with the Headless Horseman in some way, or with a place linked to the Headless Horseman, but the specific parameters of this familiarity will vary and be more specifically defined chapter to chapter based on the case study.

Folk narrative

Folk narratives have been variously defined in folklore studies, often depending on a conceptual assumption of form (text) or process (performance). Linda Dégh wrote that folk narratives are dynamic and performance-based; the meaning and experience of folk narratives is dependent on the relationship between the performer, the audience, and potentially the text as an object (Dégh, Dorson 1972 65). This thesis follows both Dégh's arguments and her assumptions; for other discussions of folk narrative relevant to this thesis see for example Laudun 2021, Dégh 1994, or Dégh 2001.

The folkloresque

Discussions of the folkloresque in this paper are based on Michael Dylan Foster's definitions of the folkloresque and the folkloresque cycle. The folkloresque is when a piece of commercialized media uses or imitates folklore to appeal to an audience. In a folkloresque cycle, commercial products are financially and culturally successful because they are created using various processes of integration, like assemblage, direct or fuzzy allusion, adaptation, or parody that "reassemble" distinct motifs or motif-based folklore in a new way. The folkloresque can become folklore through cultural recognition, variation, and use by the folk – meaning the folk play an important role in arbitrating the relationship between folklore and the folkloresque. The folkloresque can describe both a form (a piece of media) and the processes of creation, experience, and perceptions of both the piece of media and the "folk" who interact with it. Foster describes this cycle as having a dynamic "circular" bent, a linear progression in the methods of production of the folkloresque and in the ways that folklore moves through the cycle that continually changes and/or moves back and forth between the two (Foster, Tolbert 2015 56).

Dynamics of the cycle between the folkloresque and folklore have been analyzed (see Rudy and Mcdonald 2016, Attebery 2024, Chappell 2005), but generally only so far as to identify a particular product as folkloresque and describe its impacts. In this paper, the folkloresque will be used to describe commercial narratives that feature the Headless Horseman, as well as partially characterizing processes of experience and consumption, like tourism, that also center the Headless Horseman.

Chronotope

Chronotope is a concept popularized within the humanities by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian theorist who professed to borrowing the word from "mathematics [and] Einstein's Theory of Relativity,". The root parts of the word "chronotope" literally mean "space-time";

Bakhtin defines chronotope as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981 84). This connectedness manifests through a series of spatial or temporal markers (or indicators) in a material form. As part of his theory, Bakhtin asserts that more than one chronotope can appear within a single text, or more specifically that a chronotope "can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes," which offers an expansive and layered view of the way(s) time and space can interact within a text (Bakhtin 1981 252). Bakhtin also writes that chrontopes have four kinds of significance: narrative, representational, generic, and semantic. A chronotope, therefore, materially manifests space and time in ways that give meaning to the plot points of the narrative, the visibility of events, the genre the narrative fits into, and the "dialogical" relationships between author, text, and audience (Bakhtin 1981 289-291).

Bemong and Borghart write in *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* that since Bakhtin never concretely defines what a chronotope is, there has been a "proliferation of heterogeneous chronotopic approaches to literature, and more generally, culture," (Bemong, Borghart 2010 5). In addition to mapping out the various theoretical and applicative approaches of other scholars, they break down Bakhtin's use of motif in his discussion of chronotope. In "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin often used chronotope and motif interchangeably, especially when discussing chronotopes that reoccurred across different texts. This assumption runs parallel to the assumptions many folklorists have made about motif; see below.

Chronotope has previously been employed in analyzing folklore to discuss time and space in folk narratives. In terms of intersecting chronotope with a folkloristic theoretical framework and methodology, Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996) exemplifies the

potential for the chronotope concept to describe not only the textual or literary to describe folk narratives in context broadly. Basso argues in chapter one that places linked to oral traditions can bring other kinds of time, especially the past, into the present through transmission and experience. The places that Basso visits are and create chronotopes. Basso argues more broadly in the book that understanding the significance of place is key to understanding and making meaning of oral tradition, worldview, and cultural knowledge. Camilla Ingemark used chronotope to frame analysis of enchantment as an interaction of time and space within Swedish folk narratives that focused on encounters with the supernatural. In doing so, she questions assumptions of humanity and identification with the human (Ingemark 2006). Brigittine French (2012) combines the theory of chronotope with ethnographic methodology to analyze collective memory and processes of narrative creation, circulation, and recognition. For other folkloristic applications of chronotope, see Wirtz 2016, Conrad 2018, Wiggins 2024, Anderson 2011, Mills 2018.

Chronotope as a concept in recent years has also been applied in various ethnographic contexts, expanding beyond Bakhtin's original concept of literary and generic applications. The tourist chronotope (that will be explored in chapter three) has been of particular interest for contemporary scholars looking to describe social dynamics, change, and interactions within specific cultural spaces. In my research, I've been especially influenced by Ajlan, Gadel-Rab, and Arafa (2026), who use a tourist chronotope in conjunction with a geographic methodology to describe perceptions and experiences of sound and light shows in Egypt; Ai, Zhang, and Yu (2025), who use chronotope to discuss the relationship between politicization, social-linguistic structures, and space in rural China; Fujii (2021), who draws a connection between chronotope and heritage tourism to describe the tourist experience on the Blackpool Tram; and Pietikäinen

(2014), who uses chronotope to exemplify the impacts of public signage using a multilingual, ethnographic, conditions-based analysis.

Motif

Motif is generally defined in folklore studies as recurring and recognizable units of theme or narrative. Famously, Alan Dundes used a structuralist linguistic approach to divide motifs into allomotifs and motifemes, the former being the smallest possible characteristic of a motif, the latter being variants of motifs (Dundes 2007). While I won't be drawing from Dundes' structuralist framework, his work symbolizes the assumption of motifs as the meaning-making element in folkloric narratives, an assumption I will also make here (see also Georges 1997, Dundes 1997, Ben-Amos 2021, Goldberg 2010).

In terms of the Headless Horseman and motifs, let's begin with Stith Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, a seminal reference within folklore studies for decades (see Karsdorp et al 2015, Bronner 2007). Thompson includes the following entry in section E (The Dead): "E422. The living corpse. Revenant is not a specter but has the attributes of a living person. He wanders about till his "second death", complete disintegration in the grave." Listed under E422 are select subtypes: E422.1.1 "Headless revenant," linked to E501.7.1 "Wild huntsman headless"; E422.1.1.2 "Revenant with ball of fire in place of head"; E422.1.1.3 "Actions of headless revenant"; E422.1.1.3.1 "Headless ghost rides horse"; and finally, E422.1.1.4 "Headless ghost carries head under arm," (Thompson 1956 906). Conceptualizations of the Headless Horseman or headless horseman generally in the field of folklore studies have revolved around use and recognition of these motifs (see Headless Horseman section below).

For the broader "living corpse" entry, Thompson cites tales or older indexes collected from England, the United States, Estonia, Ireland, Finland, and the "West Indies" and "Africa".

(Thompson 1956 906). The West Indies today comprise the various nations and peoples living on the archipelagoes of the Greater and Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelago. The "Africa" citation is drawn from an amalgamation of traditions and beliefs across the continent, including (but not limited to) Bantu and Zulu cultural systems and/or peoples living today across central and southern Africa, including in Benin, Ghana, Togo, South Africa, and Malawi (Redfield 1926).

Based on the above entries from Thompson's motif-index, I suggest there are certain markers of recognition that help structure the motif of the Headless Horseman: a dead man; a "bad" death; unrest or unfinished business; a grave; a dead man's body; a removed or replaced head; horse-riding; pursuit; interactions with the living; and a "second" or more final death. Within a narrative, the Headless Horseman as a motif might comprise: a ghost missing his head who rides a horse; a "bad" death that causes unfinished business for the ghost; a temporary or replacement head for the ghost; unfinished business involving the ghost's head; unfinished business involving the living; the headless ghost interacting with the living; the headless ghost pursuing the living; the living helping resolve the unfinished business; and the ghost "dying" a second time after the unfinished business is resolved.

A note before I proceed further: Thompson's generalizing citation style recalls criticism of many folkloric indices as being Eurocentric and exclusionary to marginalized people(s) and concepts, for example homosexuality (see Legman 1962, Haase 2010). Thompson's subtypes are primarily drawn from accounts sourced from England and the United States (a notable exception being a colonial-era tale from India). To account for the broad name recognition of Thompson's index within folklore studies, I mention the motif of the Headless Horseman he identifies and describes to contextualize how the Headless Horseman has frequently been studied within a

folklore studies context up to this point. To account for those general criticisms and for the limited sampling of tales underpinning the subtypes, I am not relying on Thompson-associated motifs to identify representations of the Headless Horseman discussed in this thesis. Instead, borrowing from Joann Conrad's 2014 discussion of motifs as a temporally dynamic unit of narrative, in this thesis I assume that motifs are not only static structural narrative units but a dynamic means of narrative recognition, performance, and experience.

Other Work on the Headless Horseman

The Headless Horseman, and literary, media, or cultural works that feature the Headless Horseman, have been an object of academic interest stretching back decades. Much of the research on the Headless Horseman has focused either on specific folk narratives or variants or placing narratives that feature the Headless Horseman within a specific sociocultural or theoretical context. Within prior research of the Headless Horseman, there has been a theoretical historic-geographic-type association of folk narratives of the Headless Horseman with Washington Irving's short story. William Lynwood Montell, for instance, counted seven variants of headless ghost or headless rider stories in his 1975 collection of Kentucky ghostlore *Ghosts Along the Cumberland*, including one called "Headless Horseman" on page 121. In doing so, he cites Thompson's motif index, including E422.1.1.3.1, as well as "7 reports from the British Isles and 14 in American tradition ranging from New England to the Rocky Mountains" (Montell 1975 122). Montell attributes the "great popularity" of the "tale" to Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* "which has been popular with schoolchildren across the years," (122). Elsewhere, Daniel Hoffman has argued that that Irving skillfully adapted European folklore into his "beloved" Hudson Valley environment to help create and augment a need for a national body of folklore in the early years of the United States (Hoffman 1953 64).

Scholars have also focused on the processes of creation and transmission that have characterized narratives, folk or otherwise, that feature the Headless Horseman. John Flanagan argues that Irving "invoked gossip and rumor as his authorities" when writing *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and alluded to traditions "that were generally current" in his writing to help create an air of authenticity (Flanagan, Hudson 1958 64). Terry Leopold (2004) writes that "the ghost of Sleepy Hollow…might seem to many people as a part of regional or national lore," but is in fact entirely literary. In her eyes, these literary accounts have "become the story, regularized and standardized by repeated printing and reprinting, rather than originating in and maturing through the eccentricities of folk and popular traditions," (79).

Other scholars have used the Headless Horseman, frequently as featured in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, to investigate everything from the American imagination (Martin 1959, Bone 1963), environmental ambiguity (Crawford 2021), storytelling and narration (Jamil 2021), popular culture tourism (Kreh 2022), or otherness (Mills 2019), just to name a few. Still other authors have touched on literary, media, or folkloristic representations of the Headless Horseman found in specific locations inside or outside of the United States, analyzing versions rooted in Russia (Nepomnyashchy 1999), Ireland (E.W. 1833), India (Singh 2012, Grierson 1914), or Wyoming (Wilgus 1955), again just to name a few.

Reiterating this Thesis

It is clear the Headless Horseman as a figure, and representations of the Headless Horseman as a motif within narrative, are a continual well for scholarly inquiry. Revisiting the main argument of this thesis in terms of the concepts reviewed above, I will interpret the Headless Horseman as a narrative motif, often but not always comprised of the motifs mentioned above. This will diverge from Bakhtin's methodology of occasionally using "chronotope" and

"motif" interchangeably. The motif of the Headless Horseman is a structural unit propelling the narratives reviewed in this thesis. This motif is dynamic, dependent on narrative context, and uniquely functions within a series of different chronotopes to help shape and give meaning to the manifestations of space and time that occur within narrative. Narratives that feature the Headless Horseman as a motif also feature chronotopes that are made up of multiple kinds of time, times requiring an analysis that assumes other kinds of time in addition to progressive, linear, capitalistic time that is often the default in folklore studies. The narratives I will analyze here are folk narratives, or folkloresque narratives that draw from folklore and appear in the style of folklore, included because of their prevalence in the ethnographic fieldwork I undertook as part of the research process. Through analyzing each narrative in context, arguing for the manifestations of different chronotopes in context, and examining the Headless Horseman as appears within each chronotope, I will make the broad argument that chronotope can be a functional concept to theorize multiple temporalities and the reoccurrence of motif as a structural, dynamic unit in folk narratives, especially motifs common across multiple interrelated narratives.

Back to The Legend

To exemplify the structure and method of this analysis, let us return to the roller coaster, The Legend. The roller coaster is a commercial construction, a ticketed attraction meant to make money, which is not strictly folklore. However, a roller coaster is both a form, a space (the cart, the track, the queue) and an experience, a time (waiting in the queue, riding the coaster), which indicates meaning making through interpretation and new kinds of folklore can come from interaction with that commercial product. The narrative of the ride can be conceived as constructed of the interpretation of ride elements and experience, the interaction itself. When

somebody rides a roller coaster, their experience of time and space changes, moves away from what we might assume as "normal" because of the speed and structure of the ride. As a rider, that warning echoing over the speakers inside the ride signaled a temporal separation from "clock-time," or everyday time as I would usually experience it. Instead, relativity of time came into play, and I felt suspended in sensation as the cart hurtled up, down, and around the track. The performed signal that the ride had ended, and I was entering back into an everyday time, was another quick notice from the staff over the microphone: "Welcome back!" The Headless Horseman as a narrative motif within The Legend roller coaster invokes the pursuit described in Washington Irving's short story, a reminder of the past entering the present – times merging within a suspended experiential time. This invocation is an example of adaptation, recontextualization, and integration of motifs in a series of commercial products. The success, longevity and recognition of those commercial, mass-media, popular cultural products (be it financial or pop-cultural) is dependent on knowledge of the motif of the Headless Horseman.

The Legend roller coaster itself is not folklore, sitting much closer to definitions of the folkloresque. There is no formal variation, no multiple existence within the ride, but the interpretation each rider might have of their experience could be considered a kind of personal narrative folklore. That experience is shaped by the coaster as a manifestation of space and time, a chronotope, with the Headless Horseman figuring within the chronotope to help the audience, the folk, recognize and make meaning of the experience they have while riding. The presence of the Headless Horseman turns the motion of the roller coaster into a pursuit, imbuing the experience with layers of cultural meaning and knowledge. The temporality of the experience is central to understanding how riders can interpret this experience – temporality invoked in part by the Headless Horseman.

Outlining the Chapters

Chapter one of this thesis examines Mikhail Bakhtin's idyllic chronotopes as they manifest in three interrelated mass-media folkloresque narratives: *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949), and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). The idyllic chronotopes of town and forest create a temporal distancing from the lived-in everyday of contemporary and even historical audiences, effecting a similar distancing from the war and inequalities present during the historical time the three narratives are vaguely situated in. The idyllic chronotope is perpetuated through the three narratives' interrelation and deep cultural influence and wide recognition. Chapter one will show that the Headless Horseman continually appears within these idyllic chronotopes and has become iconic of them, almost synonymous with the folkloresque and with the idyllic post-Revolutionary War time of the chronotopes. This association between the Headless Horseman, temporal distance or removal, and narrative interrelation creates a homogeneity of narrative experience that focuses attention away from historic issues of race, class, and inequality.

Chapter two of this thesis examines Bakhtin's adventure-time centered around a localized contemporary legend of the Headless Horseman of McLean County, Kentucky using ethnographic methods. Here, the adventure-time creates a road chronotope that moves the narrative forward and gives meaning to experience through encounter with the Headless Horseman within specific, known spaces in McLean County. The chapter will analyze how experiential encountering involves a simultaneous recognition of, distancing of, and transportation of historic events and historic time. The Headless Horseman motif as appears within this road chronotope exhibits similar themes and aesthetics as the motif that moves through the war-idyllic time described in chapter one. However, the shift in historical and

cultural context complicates the mass-media narrative homogeneity examined in chapter one. Temporality in this chapter once again plays a central role in helping signify and analyze markers of narrative and cultural-historical context of the Headless Horseman of McLean County.

Chapter three of this thesis also uses ethnographic methods to examine experiences in and perceptions of a tourism chronotope as it manifests in the village of Sleepy Hollow, New York. The tourism chronotope can both perpetuate and collapse the temporal distance described in chapter one, as well as the experiential and encounter aspects of adventure-time from chapter two. The constructed, manufactured space of Sleepy Hollow is critical for understanding the different temporalities and understandings of history that are continually discoursed by business owners and locals in Sleepy Hollow. Within this ethnography, understandings of that discourse are constructed through interviews, evidence of Sleepy Hollow's economic structure, iconography around town. The Headless Horseman, iconic of the village, has become a focal point of that discourse, and thereby a symbol of how meaning comes from interpretation and association in folk narrative. The demographics and social structures of Sleepy Hollow are also examined to discuss how the impacts of tourism land unequally across Sleepy Hollow. Once again, chronotope functions in this chapter as the springboard framework, enabling a fuller understanding of the effects, interpretations, associations, and encounters taking place in Sleepy Hollow for both tourists and residents.

Conclusion

This thesis is invoking and combining a series of concepts, some more familiar to folklore scholars than others. This combination of concepts is necessary to explore the shades of grey between folklore and the folkloresque, between folk narrative and folkloresque narrative,

between static versus dynamic motifs, between kinds of time and space, and various meanings of the Headless Horseman that differentiate each of the case studies discussed here. This thesis situates folk and folkloresque narratives in context and in conversation with each other to discourse temporality across a variety of contexts and places. Fasten your seatbelt and let's begin. But maybe don't look back just yet…

II. WAR-BASED IDYLLIC CHRONOTOPES IN FOLKLORESQUE MEDIA

Introduction

JoAnn Conrad wrote that "Time is intrinsic to folklore" (Conrad 2014 323). She argues that the field of folklore studies, especially the study of folk narratives, was founded on an assumption of past and present time, a dichotomy between modernity and antiquity. This dichotomy is often defined through and predicated on an "absolute...homogenous...irreversible, linear" temporality (Conrad 2014 324). This means that scholars in folklore studies have historically tended to assume that time is a linear, continual bridge between modernity, or the present, and antiquity, or the past, when collecting or analyzing folk narratives. In the established analytical frameworks of theorists like Vladimir Propp, the Grimms, or Alan Dundues, time is only ever progressing, reflecting ideas of change and modernization in a capitalist economic system that underpinned much of the field's early years. This assumption limits analytical scope, since a linear temporality effectively distances and contains the narratives themselves far away from a present time, as well as assuming a narrow worldview and experience of time of the folk who circulate any folk narrative. Reevaluating the kinds of time present in the form and experience of folk narrative widens the potential analytical scope in both areas for any scholar.

Since folk narratives are foundational to many of the main theories of folklore, and often subject to the assumption of linear time, Conrad deems folk narratives as "potential sites of alternate temporalities" (Conrad 2014 325). "Alternate temporalities" are sites within a narrative that can't be contained within linear time – for example, a written folk narrative that features a ruin of a stone castle associated with a battle King Arthur fought in. That ruin would be the site of a contained period of static past time, the time of the battle, that exists within the present time

and experience of the visitor within the frame of the narrative, or the reader without. Analyzing this narrative in terms of that alternate temporality, static past within experiential present, offers expanded opportunities to think about, say, how the conflict is romanticized or commemorated within the narrative.

Building on Conrad's suggestion of alternate temporalities, I will use three narratives that feature the narrative motif of the Headless Horseman to argue for alternate temporalities of war-based chronotopes of idyllic time within a fictionalized space. These war-based, idyllic chronotopes have had a demonstrable impact on how the figure of the Headless Horseman, and the narratives he often appears in, are interpreted by the folk in the United States. These chronotopes, identifiable in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949), and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) challenge assumptions of linear time in the interpretation of folklore and the folkloresque. This idyllic chronotope is iconic not only of the Headless Horseman as a folkloric figure but indicative of a more general and lasting colonial interpretation of the post-Revolutionary War era in the United States.

I will begin this chapter by reviewing the concept of the idyllic chronotope and prior applications within folklore studies. I will then review *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad,* and *Sleepy Hollow* as folkloresque narratives that demonstrate war-centered idyllic chronotopes. Then, I will revisit the concept of motif, in conversation with chronotope, to discuss the Headless Horseman as a focus of each narrative. Finally, I will discuss the significance of this chronotope, and its association with the Headless Horseman, in terms of interpretation and cultural association.

The Idyllic Chronotope

Of especial interest to this argument is Paul Manning's 2017 article "No Ruins. No Ghosts." Manning suggests haunting narratives as sharing a chronotope, deeply connected to landscape, that crosses lines between genres and bridges folklore and the folkloresque. This haunting chronotope is set in or runs parallel to real time within a specific space. Manning's interweaving of chronotope and texts that cross genres mirror the methodology of this paper, as well as discussions of the importance of landscape.

This chapter will run parallel to Manning's methods and main argument. Instead of contextualizing analysis through ruins and unsettlement as anchors of haunting chronotopes, I will evaluate a running theme of war as an influence on time and space, a marker of chronotope within narratives that feature the Headless Horseman. This multipronged analysis also functions as a case study in theorizing temporality and interpretation within a folklore studies methodology, a critical means of reevaluating folklore and folklore studies.

While chronotope has been applied within folklore studies to various ends, few scholars have studied the reoccurrence of a figure within a chronotope(s) or reinterpreted any of the chronotopes Bakhtin identifies through a folklore studies lens. This chapter will focus on the idyllic chronotope. Bakhtin defines the idyllic chronotope as time and space interacting to create an "organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory..." (Bakhtin 1981 225). Idyllic chronotopes often involve a repetition of natural cyclical time and everyday pastoral time within an "insular" landscape, standing on its own, that contains the narrative (Bakhtin 1981 103). Events cannot be separated from the landscape; indeed, Bakhtin remarks that a community and the generations of people within persist and overlap within the landscape in a way that "weakens and renders less distinct" the temporal boundaries that might otherwise encourage individualization within the community (Bakhtin 1981 225). Idyllic time is

also posited as "sublimating" the details of everyday life and as intertwining nature and human life through a "common language" (Bakhtin 1981 226). Bakhtin conceptualizes the idyllic chronotope as the closest possible bridge to ancient novels and folkloric time. Folkloric time is time that is communal and collective, focused on memories and shared knowledge, and imbues space with meaning to help pass on that knowledge (Bakhtin 1981 245). This distinction is critical here because folkloric time is collective and generalized, and idyllic time, though still collective, is localized. Additionally, folkloric time directly links any broad group of people to the world at large (us), while idyllic time draws a strict boundary between a smaller group of people and the larger or outside world (us and them). Through insularity, cyclicality, and unity of time and space, places the events of a narrative outside of "real time" as Conrad discusses it. Analyzing idyllic chronotopes in folk narratives, then, allows for movement away from, outside of, or interacting with "real time," standardized, capitalistic, homogenous-sequential time. By applying the idea of an alternate, idyllic temporality to specific narratives of the Headless Horseman, I will exemplify how identifying and analyzing the reoccurrence of idyllic time effectively contains and distances the ideas and themes of the novel, and thereby the Headless Horseman, from the present day folk experience.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is a short story originally published in 1820 by Washington Irving, a New-York-born author, historian, and diplomat, in the sixth installment of his serialized work *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*[1] In *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, the viewpoint character is Ichabod Crane, a tall, thin, superstitious schoolmaster from Connecticut who resembles some "genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped

[1] Here I cite the Project Gutenberg digitized text of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, first published online in 2008. This edition is without page numbers; sincerest apologies for any inconvenience resulting from this.

from a cornfield." (Irving 2008). In the years after the Revolutionary War, Crane arrives in the valley of Sleepy Hollow, New York. Sleepy Hollow is located a few miles from the east bank of the Hudson River, closest to the village of Tarry Town, north of New York City (although these place names were different in Irving's time). As Ichabod becomes enmeshed within the social fabric of Sleepy Hollow, he spends his time educating the youth, befriending their families, charming and wooing a local young woman named Katrina van Tassel, and becoming the subject of pranks from local young men like Brom Bones. As he spends time in Sleepy Hollow, Crane continually hears stories from Sleepy Hollow residents about the Headless Horseman, an undead Hessian soldier continually searching the countryside for a new head. One night, after an autumn party, Ichabod's journey home is interrupted by a mysterious but familiar figure that chases him through Sleepy Hollow. Soon after, he vanishes.

It's important to note that The Legend of Sleepy Hollow does not constitute folklore in most definitions of the word, since it is a commercially published story by a single author. The Legend of Sleepy Hollow instead qualifies as folkloresque per Michael Dylan Foster's definition: a text that uses folkloric material and methods to market itself commercially, shaping a "popular, vernacular, folk conception of folklore" (Foster 2015 42). The folkloresque is both a marketable product and a set of integrative processes that mix and match motifs, plot elements, and characters that have cultural associations with folklore. Building off Foster's idea of integration and the "odor" of folklore, each piece of folkloresque media discussed here integrates the language of folklore, descriptions mirroring folkloric, oral storytelling methods, as another narrative motif or marker in addition to the presence of the Headless Horseman to help establish the idyllic chronotope.

Idyllic time immediately and continually defines the narrative of The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. At the beginning of the story, even before we've met our hapless schoolmaster, Irving expounds on the "drowsy, dreamy influence" that "seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere," (Irving 2008). The reader learns that this "witching power" of the landscape causes anyone who abides there for any length of time in the area to experience visions, dreams, and apparitions (Irving 2008). Those visions, dreams, and apparitions are a temporal marker; the empowered land and atmosphere, a spatial marker; manifesting in idyllic chronotope a tethering of the residents' "life and its events" to the influence of the landscape that surrounds them. Both time and space here are expressed using colonial language; Irving, through the voice of his narrator Diedrich Knickerbocker, wonders whether this influence can be attributed to legend of a "High German" doctor in the early days of settlement or the pre-colonial-contact "powwows" held by "an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe," (Irving 2008). Not only are both descriptions evocative of colonial-settler understandings of non-Christian, European, and Indigenous folklore, each demonstrates a sublimation and abstraction of daily life into landscape.

As another example of idyllic time, Irving professes a deep fondness for Sleepy Hollow, explaining that "it is in such little retired Dutch valleys...that population, manners, and customs remain fixed, while the great torrent of migration and improvement...sweeps by them unobserved," (Irving 2008). Here we can see a clear assertion of not only a geographic but a temporal "valley," where the landscape interrupts a linear-historic flow of time, leaving the village temporally marooned in the post-Revolutionary War era in which the story occurs. In this idyllic time, the landscape anchors and shelters the village of Sleepy Hollow and characters within from sequential, historic processes of social and economic change.

Even when we do meet Ichabod Crane, Irving offers the temporal marker of "a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since," (Irving 2008). This situates the reader outside of a "real" historic time, conspicuously refusing to date the story to a specific year, instead reinforcing a temporality of ahistorical distance dependent on landscape, in this case Crane's time in the village of Sleepy Hollow.

Within this idyllic time, Irving frequently has his characters, named and unnamed, tell ghost stories, especially of the Headless Horseman. Indeed, until the Horseman chases Ichabod through Sleepy Hollow at the end of the story, many of the encounters that the reader has with the ghostly Hessian are framed through a story-within-a-story narrative structure that is reflective of the characters' dependence on landscape. For example, at the autumn party, "The tale was told of old Brouwer...how he met the Horseman returning from his foray into Sleepy Hollow, and was obliged to get up behind him; how they galloped over bush and brake, over hill and swamp, until they reached the bridge; when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw old Brouwer into the brook, and sprang away over the tree-tops with a clap of thunder," (Irving 2008). Markers like "until" and "suddenly" and a narrative progression focused on encounters and actions function not only as a folkloresque imitation of a ghost story within the story, but an example of the idyllic chronotope. The story of Brouwer once again exemplifies how temporal progression and event experience for anyone in Sleepy Hollow is anchored to proximity to landscape features.

The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad

Disney's 1949 cartoon that adapts Irving's short story (often paired with a retelling of *The Wind in the Willows*) is another piece of folkloresque media, per Foster's specifications. In Foster's folkloresque typology, adaptation occurs when one text demonstrates a "recognizable

consistency" with another, or perhaps one "expresses allegiance" in some way to another (Foster 2015 44). Disney's cartoon mirrors Irving's narrative closely, in everything from characters to names to plot points; Bing Crosby even quotes from Irving's story multiple times as he narrates the events on screen for the viewer. Two of the most significant diversions from the plot of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* are: one, that the party Ichabod attends the night he disappears is a Halloween party, instead of Irving's "quilting frolic" or autumnal party; two, there is a love triangle between Ichabod, Katrina, and Brom that isn't really emphasized or present in Irving's telling. As an adaptation, the Disney cartoon depends on and perpetuates the chronotope of idyllic time found in The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. Walt Disney was known for stylizing and abstracting time and place, favoring a "treasured" and "idealized" notion of the past over depictions of "real" or "everyday" time or place (Francaviglia 1995 70-71). By examining the visual depiction of landscape in the Disney cartoon, as well as the visualization of events narrated in Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* it becomes clear that the viewer enters and temporarily partakes in a romanticized, supernatural, idyllic landscape. This landscape moves the characters of the story, as well as the viewer, out of an everyday time and into an idealized, idyllic, non-historic story-time.

Consider first how the viewer is introduced to the fictionalized Sleepy Hollow within the cartoon. The camera shows a map that gradually becomes a bird's-eye view of the landscape as Crosby points out what is today Tarrytown (35:10-36:55): "And just beyond, nestled deep in the low, rolling hills, a sequestered glen..." The camera again pans up and to the viewer's right to show several houses clustered together in a clearing, walled in on all sides by tall, red and yellow trees that stand out from the surrounding green landscape. Between these red and yellow, autumnal, living trees and the houses of Sleepy Hollow are clearly visible dead trees, emphasized

through a darker shadowy coloring. Even before Crosby (again around 35:10-36:55) emphasizes the "haunted spots, twilight tales, and old superstitions" of Sleepy Hollow, the viewer is transported to a settlement geographically and temporally isolated from the surrounding population and landscape. Bakhtin writes that the idyllic chronotope is contingent on an insular landscape that contains events; the coloration and placement of the trees in this sequence indicates a unique passage of time, with autumn colors and dead trees proliferating only in and around Sleepy Hollow. The rest of the surrounding landscape seen in this overhead shot is verdant. A single, winding road leading from Sleepy Hollow to Tarrytown (or Tarry Town) only adds to this visual sense of isolation.

Throughout the cartoon, the viewer is treated to myriad shots of rolling farmland, barns, winding dirt roads, Dutch doors, stone fences, and other hallmarks of an agricultural or pastoral community. These shots may feel surprising once the viewer remembers that from an outside perspective, the literal bird's-eye view discussed above, Sleepy Hollow appeared foreboding, dark, and isolated. Bakhtin evoked idyllic time as tying events to familiar landscapes - these shots reinforce that isolation by tying the livelihoods and interactions of characters within the narrative to that same place, continually reminding the viewer of where the characters are.

To highlight one more example, after Ichabod leaves the Halloween party, the landscape once again takes a darker and more foreboding turn (*The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* 54:40-68:00). In this case, Bakhtin's criterion of a merging between human and nature through experience. As Ichabod passes towards and back through Sleepy Hollow, on a walk that seems to last forever, the trees on the sides of the road are dead, with long branches that curve towards him like arms reaching out. He passes over a wood-plank bridge, and the camera zooms in on the reeds on the riverbank below, the wind rushing through them to create a haunting sound. The

frogs near the river, and the owls hooting above, combine to create a cacophony of noise that sounds a lot like his name. The viewer is trapped in the scene alongside Ichabod, experiencing the spooks through sound design or sudden camera cuts to create jump scares. Ichabod's fear grows and nearly overwhelms him as the landscape continues to encroach on his senses, encapsulating an idyllic time through which all other experiences are put aside in the face of the effects of interaction with landscape.

To return to Francaviglia's ideas of Disney "imagineering" history, beyond the examples discussed above, iconography is scattered throughout the cartoon that troubles a clear-cut association with any specific or historic time – a wink to the camera that also nods to the complicated temporalities found throughout the narrative. This same iconography would be explicitly or implicitly recognizable to an audience situated in dominant or popular culture in the United States around the time *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* premiered. During the Halloween party, both Brom Bones and Ichabod Crane can be seen eating sandwiches and using salt and pepper shakers, both popularized in and for the working classes in the United States in the early-to-mid 1900s (Mariani 1999 283, Workman 2012). The clothes Katrina van Tassel wears throughout the cartoon are a pink, lacy dress with a low-cut bodice and several petticoats, a far cry from the fashions popular during the post-Revolutionary War period in which the cartoon is implied to take place.[2] However, she does wear a white headpiece that resembles a Dutch cap – a nod to the Dutch settlers that Irving centers in his narrative. Both examples connect a sense of nostalgia, to Francaviglia's discussion of place-making and Disney's role in helping white, middle-class Americans visualize themselves in the past, to Bakhtin's conception of the idyllic chronotope as a manifestation of time and place that exists outside of "real" time.

[2] For more information on what those fashions were, check out the 1790-1799 section of the Fashion History compiled by Michele Majer. Full citation in bibliography.

The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad [3] builds on the cultural associations and storytelling motifs of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, adapting Irving's narrative almost 130 years later. Disney's narrative overlays the plot points and characters of Irving's with a strong sense of nostalgia, continuing to construct and exemplify an idyllic chronotope within the fictionalized space of Sleepy Hollow.

Sleepy Hollow

The 1999 film *Sleepy Hollow* once again exemplifies an idyllic chronotope, another alternative temporality within a narrative. This film was marketed as an adaptation of Irving's story, but according to Foster's folkloresque typology, *Sleepy Hollow* sits much closer to a precise allusion to both the Disney cartoon and Irving's short story. Precise allusion occurs when "theme, characters, plot, and other elements of a given folk narrative or belief system are used within an original storyline" (Foster 2015 44). *Sleepy Hollow* uses recognizable names and characters from Irving's story and the Disney cartoon, exploring themes of insider-outsider dynamics and interactions with the supernatural, but situates those characters and themes, as well as the viewer, in new plot points and new storylines. In this telling, Ichabod Crane is a police constable sent to the village of Sleepy Hollow to investigate a series of murders where the victims were found...but their heads were not.

The idyllic chronotope can once again be easily identified throughout *Sleepy Hollow*. Immediately, there's an instance in S*leepy Hollow* that immerses the viewer specifically in the idyllic chronotope of the fictionalized town of Sleepy Hollow. The opening credits (04:19-07:15), text shown on screen while Ichabod Crane is traveling to Sleepy Hollow, interact with the natural environment Ichabod is traveling through. When Ichabod's coach travels through a

[3] With sincerest apologies to Mr. Toad, for mentioning his name many times in this chapter without going into further detail on his adventures.

forest, the words move across the screen like dead leaves; when his coach is near water, the words shown reflect off the water's surface. Ichabod never demonstrates any awareness of these credits; he is contained within the chronotope...but the viewer notices. They are temporarily existing within the fictionalized time and space, and thus between the everyday, real time, and the idyllic time within the movie. The text of the credits, something usually existing outside of the plot and the narrative, interacting with Ichabod's environment formally demonstrates the plot's deep dependence on the landscape of Sleepy Hollow.

At one point relatively early in the movie, Ichabod Crane chases down the magistrate Samuel Phillips in a field to interview him about the recent death of a widow. No sooner has Phillips told Crane important information about his last contact with the widow than sheep begin bleating. Thunder rumbles overhead. Mist billows out of the nearby woods, and as both men reach with mixes of fear and disbelief, the Headless Horseman races out of the woods and beheads Phillips after a short chase (roughly 37:00-40:00). Crane passes out in fear (this being his first encounter with the Headless Horseman). Conceptually, the Headless Horseman's approach is indicated by several disturbances and changes in the surrounding environment. When intersected with Bakhtin's theory, this scene demonstrates once again the rootedness of experience within place in this narrative to move the plot forward.

Later in the movie (49:40-51:25), Ichabod, Katrina van Tassel, and young Masbath (the son of a murdered character who has become Ichabod's sworn servant) have just found the Headless Horseman's grave near a giant tree in the woods near Sleepy Hollow. As Ichabod stares into the Horseman's open grave at the skeleton within, the viewer follows Katrina and young Masbath's gaze to the tree's exposed roots. The severed heads of murdered characters are nestled within but are drawn inwards as the roots unfold themselves outward to reveal a sort of bloody

portal in the earth underneath the tree. The Headless Horseman springs from the earth, fully clothed, armed, on the back of his horse. As the characters look on in horror, the Horseman wheels his horse around and rides away from them, intent on his next target. Here, we can see a manifestation of the chronotope through the landscape as a literal portal to experience – the tree helping the Headless Horseman manifest in the material, fictionalized story-world. Additionally, the heads of the murdered characters being placed within the tree's roots also connects to Bakhtin's idea of a unity between human and nature through a common language. In this case, the heads of the murdered townspeople are being stored within, and possibly absorbed into, the landscape insulating Sleepy Hollow as part of the larger story-plot. Idyllic time as Bakhtin describes it seems to imply an escape or separation from the realities of everyday life; the murders that ground the plot of *Sleepy Hollow* subvert daily life within the fictionalized Sleepy Hollow and reinforce characters' understanding of the landscape as imbued with the power to influence (or end) their lives. Paul Manning's discussion of unsettlement in "No Ruins. No Ghosts." situates the term within a historical context, referring to the ways colonists in the post-Revolutionary War years viewed themselves and their own relationship to the environment with anxiety and fear. Burton's precise adaptation, then, of a storyline and alternate temporality that captures this fear through an environment that literally contains the narrative and forces characters to confront a supernatural terror further distances *Sleepy Hollow*'s temporal period from a present-day experience.

It's worth noting that this precise allusion, as I identify it here, was a conscious choice by Burton – he even recreates a scene that is unique to the Disney cartoon. At one point in the movie (39:46), Ichabod is walking across a bridge. Below the bridge runs a stream; frogs nearby are croaking and the sound is much like his name, just as happens in the Disney cartoon when

the animated Ichabod is traveling home from the Halloween party. In paying homage through this specific scene, not only does Burton borrow from Disney and perpetuate a cycle of folkloresque media reinforcing each other but perpetuates the reestablishment of the idyllic chronotope by recreating the scene from the Disney cartoon with a wink to anyone in the audience in the know, further complicating the temporal experience of the interrelated narratives.

Sleepy Hollow moves through the story with a sense of drama thanks to the murder-mystery themes and a deep sense of the power of the supernatural and of the landscape to influence characters within the narrative. The idyllic chronotope once again manifests as and in the fictionalized landscape in and around the village of Sleepy Hollow. The landscape as a spatial marker contains and suspends the temporal markers in the narrative and its characters through interactions with each other and the landscape that moves the plot forward.

The Folkloresque and its Impact on Folklore

As mentioned earlier, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is not folklore. Nor, by most widely known definitions, is *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* or *Sleepy Hollow*. Allow me to take a moment to address why these texts are included and analyzed in this thesis for chronotopes and their interrelationships. While discussing the theory of the folkloresque cycle, Foster argues in favor of a conception of a cyclicality between folklore and the folkloresque. This "circular movement" involves "authentic folklore" being broken down and reassembled in a mass media, easily commercialized form, retaining that same sense of cultural authenticity through the parts of which it is comprised (Foster 2015 56-57). This process is also termed "commercial assemblage," and Foster additionally argues this mediatized process closely resembles folkloric processes of amalgamation and change in storytelling (Foster 2015 53). Applying these ideas to the texts analyzed here, these narratives are not folk narratives. They are

each told in the style of folk narratives, specifically encounters with the supernatural, which lends them a sense of authenticity to the viewer. Each draws heavily from motifs, characters, and themes in folklore to establish and reinforce cultural associations; see relevant sections below. The alternate temporality of idyllic time within a fictionalized space and the processes of integration that move the same set of narratives and motifs between folklore and the folkloresque also moves chronotopes from folk narrative to the folkloresque and back again.

Speaking more specifically to this text and its format and function as methodologically ethnographic, this chapter was written because one or more of these three texts was referenced in nearly every single ethnographic interview or encounter that I had in the course of this project, close to 30 (some included in this final text and some not). These three pieces of media have so permeated the mass or popular cultural landscape in the United States such that even though the original and continued focus of this work is local legends, it is nearly impossible to have a conversation about a local legend without a reference to *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad,* or *Sleepy Hollow*.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, and *Sleepy Hollow* have been financial successes and achieved a kind of cultural longevity, evident through widespread recognition of each piece of media. These three narratives were mentioned at least ten times during my fieldwork interviewing individuals about their knowledge and understanding of the Headless Horseman within their respective communities. Despite, or perhaps because of their folkloresque nature, each text can act as an associative memory touchstone grounding individuals' understandings of the Headless Horseman outside of the texts more generally – hence their centrality in this work. This understanding of the Headless Horseman, as we will see, is often predicated on an understanding and acceptance of the time and space the Headless

Horseman exists in in each of these pieces of media – the idyll outside of "real" time. Thus, an iconic relationship has been established between the Headless Horseman and idyllic time, a relationship we will explore further below.

The Headless Horseman and War

As established above, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is the earliest published folkloresque work discussed here and greatly influenced both the 1949 cartoon and the 1999 movie. For the sake of fleshing out and fully applying the theory of the folkloresque cycle, it's worth a moment to trace the inspirations and environments that Irving may have drawn from along the way.

The village of Sleepy Hollow and the town of Tarrytown are and were real places, then known as Slapershaven and Tarry Town, still only a few miles apart. Irving first visited Tarrytown in 1798 as a child to escape a yellow fever outbreak in his hometown of Manhattan (Historic Hudson Valley 2018). He returned to Tarrytown and the surrounding areas north of New York many times in the next few years. He also toured Europe from 1804-1806, visiting France, Italy, Switzerland, and Spain (Burstein 2007 43). By 1816 he lived in Europe. He returned to the United States in 1832 and bought a house in Tarrytown in 1835. He returned to Europe as ambassador to Spain from 1842-1846 and then lived at his estate Sunnyside in Tarrytown until his death in 1859 (Burstein 2007, Jones 2008).

Beyond just the names and locations of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow, landmarks still stand today that can be traced back to Irving's time and can be used to draw strong parallels to locations described in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*: the Old Dutch Church and its graveyard, for example, or the manor house of the van Tassels. Many people today attribute or associate the latter with Philipsburg Manor, or the Van Alen, a historical home in Kinderhook, New York (Columbia County Historical Society 2024). It's clear that Irving drew his fictionalized places

and place names from real-world places where he had lived. So too, did he draw inspiration for his characters: Ichabod Crane was the name of an army captain who Irving met in 1814, while schoolteachers named Jesse Merwin or Samuel Young who Irving met at other times may have provided the template for much of the fictionalized Crane's personality (Irving 1862 vol. 3 185-186, New York Times 1894, Denis 2015). The van Tassels were a prominent family in Tarrytown around the time of the Revolutionary War; many van Tassel names appear on gravestones in the Old Dutch Church graveyard, including one for Catriena Ecker Van Tassel, who died in 1793. The family farmed and owned taverns in Sleepy Hollow for much of the 1700s, meaning Irving very likely would have met and spent time with members of the family during his time in Sleepy Hollow. ("Stories Behind the Stones" 2018).

With such a strong mix of belief and historical evidence to ground much of the prominent pieces of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in a real, historical space and time, scholars have undertaken much research to try and determine where exactly Irving drew inspiration for his Headless Horseman. The Headless Horseman could arguably be considered the most "folkloric" element of the narrative. Per Dundes' definition, the figure has occurred in multiple cultural contexts from England to Japan, from the Green Knight of the Arthurian cycle to urban legends of headless motorcyclists. Additionally, within the frame of the narrative Irving assigns the Headless Horseman no specific author or creator of the tales, and his main character hears stories from several Sleepy Hollow residents – informal transmission. In terms of the folkloresque, the Headless Horseman is the element that best fits the theory of the folkloresque cycle. For the sake of fleshing out and fully applying the theory of the folkloresque cycle, specifically Foster's idea that mass media must draw from folklore to seem like folklore, I've included a discussion of

Irving's potential influences on his story, and on the character of the Headless Horseman in particular.

There is a general academic consensus that Irving's depiction of the Headless Horseman draws from Irving's fascination with European and early colonial American folklore; Irving wrote to a friend, Thomas Storrow, that he would "get the confidence of every old woman I meet in Germany and get from her, her budget of wonderful stories." (Historic Hudson Valley, n.d.) Irving wrote *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* while living in England in the late 1810s, having traveled through Scotland, Germany, Spain, and England a few years prior (Historic Hudson Valley 2018). Irving was deeply interested in the contemporary movement to preserve and revive folk traditions across the Western world, and, in his writing, participated in one of the first "folk revivals" by using existing folkloristic ideas, themes, and characters in new contexts (Savonius-Wroth 2020). Based on this history and drawing from various methods in research in folklore, modern languages, and other fields, many researchers have posited theories attempting to pin down a specific inspiration for Irving's Headless Horseman. Explanations can generally be placed into one of two camps.

One camp of scholars posits that Irving drew inspiration from European oral tradition(s) of headless horsemen to create his ghostly Hessian. One scholar, Henry Pochmann, writes without further substantiation that Irving "had borrowed from the Legenden von Riubezahl the climactic incident," wherein a large, hulking figure named Black Cloak who carries his head underneath his arm terrorizes a carriageful of people until he is killed (Pochmann 1930 1158). For context, The Legenden von Riubezahl (in English, The Legends of Rubezahl and Other Tales) were a collection of satirical German stories collected, edited, and published by Johann Karl August Musäus between 1782 and 1787. Irving would probably have known about Musäus'

writings, thanks to his interest in European literature and his friendships with European writers (Sinko 1988). Daniel Hoffman uses Pochmann's argument to assert that Irving's use of "native" folklore has often been overlooked by scholars; a thread also pursued by Savonius-Wroth as mentioned above (Hoffman 1961 84-85). Ray, on the other hand, writes of "cross-pollination" between oral traditions of the Headless Horseman in Europe instead of focusing in one tale that might have provided Irving's inspiration. Ray cites Irish legends of the dullahan described by Yeats and Croker, as well as a version collected, edited, and published by the Brothers Grimm, as similar examples of headless horsemen that blur the line between literature and folklore; generally, this camp argues Irving would have known of versions of headless horseman tales before he wrote The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (Ray 2010).

A different camp of academics, historians, and theorists propose theories that the Headless Horseman of Irving's short story was based on existing, circulating, local-to-New-York, colonial folklore. For example, research based on the journals of Major General William Heath has documented that a Hessian "artillery man" was decapitated by a cannonball at the Battle of White Plains during the U.S. Revolutionary War ("Halloween History" 2013). The Battle of White Plains took place on October 28th, 1776, and White Plains is less than ten miles from Sleepy Hollow. A storyteller who has worked in Sleepy Hollow and the Hudson Valley for decades wrote of a historical rumor that the headless body of a soldier was discovered after the Battle of White Plains and buried in the graveyard of the Old Dutch Church in Sleepy Hollow by a "prominent local family" (Kruk 2011 117-118). Adding to the theory of local-to-Sleepy-Hollow, colonial folklore as a source of Irving's inspiration, The Historical Society of Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown holds in its archives a copy of a report entitled "Folklore of the Tarrytowns" compiled by the "folklore classes" of 1977-78 and 1978-79 at Sleepy Hollow High

School. Within this report, students wrote that "Almost everyone knows something of the legend of Sleepy Hollow. Most know the tale made famous by Washington Irving. Irving got the basis of this tale from a local legend called "The Galloping Hessian,".[4] The students then recount five variants of the tale collected ostensibly through fieldwork with Sleepy Hollow residents that parallel or echo events from Irving's tale but vary based on the teller's association with specific Sleepy Hollow landmarks.

It's worth emphasizing that for all the evidence each camp presents, it's still unknown exactly where Washington Irving found inspiration for his ghostly Hessian – he never confirmed any inspiration one way or another. It's more important for the purposes of this thesis that both sets of evidence exemplify preexisting folkloristic narratives Irving could have engaged with and drawn from to craft his folkloresque Horseman. I propose that these pieces of evidence amalgamate to provide Irving's narrative, and the representation of the Headless Horseman therein, with a sense of authenticity through retrospective association. Irving could have been, per Foster's typology, fuzzily alluding to literally any of the folk narratives discussed above. Beyond simply establishing that yes, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* fits the theory of the folkloresque cycle, this thesis' emphasis on temporality engages with the folkloresque cycle by characterizing this and subsequent case studies as a struggle to place the motif of the Headless Horseman within and moving between points in historic time. The folkloresque cycle can stretch to help describe different points of time on a timeline interacting, versus simply a progressive kind of change.

Given that the Headless Horseman is a narrative motif, and a narrative motif with deep thematic weight in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad,* and

[4] Again with thanks to the staff of the Historical Society of Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown. This record lies in their collections.

Sleepy Hollow, briefly reviewing the ways Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Dylan Foster use motif in their respective arguments will help flesh out the definition I offered earlier. Bakhtin continually leans on the idea of motif to help frame his analysis of chronotope and markers within a text. Motifs are "elements" within a text that help comprise plots within a specific genre of "novel"; specifically, "individual novels differ from each other only in the number of such elements, their proportionate weight within the whole plot and the way they are combined" (Bakhtin 1981 87). Bakhtin's concept of motif is a standard or structural assumption that defines multiple genres of novels within his essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* and therefore can be understood as structural markers of chronotopes more generally versus as markers of one specific chronotope.

Additionally, when discussing the occurrence of chronotopes within a text, Bakhtin asserts that "in fact...any motif may have a special chronotope of its own" (Bakhtin 1981 252). This description of the layered possibilities of time-space manifestations within a text also evokes the importance of motifs as an analytical tool to discuss interactions between time and space. Throughout *Forms of Time and Chronotope within the Novel*, Bakhtin theorizes motifs as both containing chronotopes and reflective of or featuring in chronotopes as elements of narrative (Bakhtin 1981 87). This complicates a narrower analytical perception of the role of motifs within folk narratives, because motifs through Bakhtin's lens take on a role of communicating or interrupting set notions of time and space for the reader.

Foster also takes a broader view of what motif can be in narrative and media. Foster borrows the concept of motif as generally understood within the field, especially connected to Thompson's motif-index, but also describes motif interchangeably with patterns, themes, narrative structures...motif in Foster's eyes seems to encompass anything recognizable as coming

from another narrative, or shared across many narratives, enfolding the folkloristic definition underneath that umbrella.

These discussions of motif matter because they can give the nebulous term of "alternate temporalities" a qualifiable metric. Allow me to borrow once again from JoAnn Conrad to demonstrate. She analyzes Alan Dundes' concept of allomotifs, a foundational concept for many folklorists. According to her, Dundes' allomotifs were conceived as only substitutive, interchangeable symbols within an assumed narrative sequence (a definition it's hopefully clear by now I am not relying on). However, Conrad posits that when theorizing temporality, motifs can be understood to be interrupting the narrative's temporal flow and changing someone's experience of the narrative (Conrad 2014 339). This concept that Bakhtin and Conrad both suggest, and Foster (no pun intended) alludes to, of a motif as both an important part of and/or the "container" for non-real temporalities, is critical for the possibilities of alternative temporalities that this paper investigates. The text or folk narrative as a site of alternative temporalities suddenly has a qualifiable metric if motif can be used to measure how time moves and interacts with setting.

To once again quote Michael Dylan Foster, using motifs in analyses of the folkloresque "should push toward redefining what a motif is in the first place, and also understanding the processes by which popular culture producers draw on their cultural meanings," (Foster 2015 21). In other words, taking a broader view of motif as a function and signal of temporality within narrative means the Headless Horseman as he appears in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* and subsequently in *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* and *Sleepy Hollow*, becomes not just a feature within the narrative but an iconic and unique motif that interacts with, and even comes to symbolize, the idyllic chronotope present in each text.

Interpretation and Significance – Racialized Language and Ideas

Demonstrating that time and landscape in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and its adaptations can be conceptualized as manifesting this idyllic chronotope is useful in a theoretical sense, but it's also important to discuss the real-world impact that this chronotope can have and has had.

Idyllicizing the post-Revolutionary War period in the United States, through narratives like The Legend of Sleepy Hollow that romanticize an imagined past, plays into a hegemonic, colonial perception of the historical period that glorifies the founding of the United States by white settlers. After all, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is often called "America's First Ghost Story." This glorification justifies the Revolutionary War as necessary to create the idyllic, pastoral lives depicted in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and its adaptations while painting over the historically brutal and unequal realities of war, colonialism, and the resulting trauma that especially impacted indigenous peoples and peoples of color. Literacy and accessibility of media and spaces have been hallmarks of segregation in the history of the United States. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad,* and *Sleepy Hollow* center the idyllic chronotope around the experiences and perceptions of white Dutch settlers and their navigation of the landscape, taking for granted the colonial setting outside of the story to frame conditions within. However, those haunting historical realities interrupt this idyllic chronotope through the motif of the Headless Horseman chasing Ichabod through Sleepy Hollow on an autumn night.

In Irving's short story, he employs racializing language and stereotypes throughout to reinforce the coloniality of the fictionalized setting, further drawing another parallel with a dominant, privileged view of the social environment, the real people and places, on whom he based *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The only reference to the presence of Native and Indigenous

peoples in the Hudson River Valley is as follows: "…an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, held his powwows there before the country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson," (Irving 2008). Not only are indigenous social structures oversimplified and described in Eurocentric language but notice the second half of the sentence. The presence of indigenous peoples is simultaneously acknowledged and discarded in favor of European "discovery."

Black characters in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* also go unnamed, only described with the word "n---o," and are described using depersonalizing, stereotypical language. In one instance, a Black character implied to be enslaved to or working for Mynheer Van Tassel delivers Ichabod a party invitation with "an air of importance, and effort at fine language," while wearing a ragged hat and "tow-cloth" clothes (Irving 2008). This individual is condescended to, implied to be less intelligent than the white people in the same community, while described with clothes that emphasize both his poverty and his potential association with slavery – tow-cloth was a cheap fabric often used to make clothes for enslaved individuals. In another instance, said party's music is made by a Black musician, "old and battered" as his instrument (Irving 2008). This reductive language minimizes the musician to a single trait and exemplifies the cooptation of Black labor and music rooted in Black culture by wealthy white individuals in the United States. Also at this party, Black individuals who lived in both "the farm and the neighborhood" are barred from entry and instead stand at doors and windows "forming a pyramid of shining back faces" that gaze with "delight" at what they see (Irving 2008). In this case, not only is the segregation of Black individuals from white spaces normalized, and these characters lacking depth but seeming to rejoice in the exclusion, but the characters themselves become only tools to give Ichabod Crane, a white man, approbation and praise within the story.

Perhaps to reflect a sociohistorical change, and wider social awareness of the unacceptability of Irving's language and descriptions of peoples of color, characters as described above do not feature in *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* or in *Sleepy Hollow.* In fact, no people of color appear in either movie at all. All characters are white. These attempts to erase or avoid Irving's stereotypical depictions create a different kind of harm. Instead of highlighting only stereotypes of Black communities during the colonial period, the implication becomes that peoples of color were not present at all.

Although the narratives analyzed here are folkloresque, fictionalized, romanticized, imagined, they are also popular and well-known. If this chapter has demonstrated the many ties to real-life places and peoples that the three narratives invoke and perpetuate, then so too can these narratives impact how people who consume them perceive the historical realities of the peoples and places the narratives draw from. Foster writes that "…if nostalgia can be thought of as a commercial construct of history, then the folkloresque is to folklore what nostalgia is to history..." It's not enough to point out how these texts are folkloresque, or how they use time and folklore in different ways. Following Foster's suggestion of "…a critical folkloresque that can inspire meaningful social critique," these narratives use time and folklore in intentional ways, especially through description and descriptive language, that perpetuate and glorify colonial ideas and perceptions of events (Foster 2015 56).

This idyllic time represents a manufactured narrative nostalgia for a past uncomplicated by the everyday inequalities that characterized colonial social systems during the post-Revolutionary War period that The Legend of Sleepy Hollow alludes to through temporal and spatial markers. This idyllic time as represented in The Legend of Sleepy Hollow erases the complicated, everyday experiences of people, especially marginalized people, during the post-

Revolutionary War period, in favor of a simpler narrative for a predominantly white audience that is driven by relation to and interaction with landscape that contains and anchors time.

Conclusion

It's important to note that motifs of the Headless Horseman, both folkloric and folkloresque, exist aplenty in addition to the folkloresque representations discussed here.[5] Additionally, the Headless Horseman as a motif is comprised of motifs that make the character recognizable, remixed and recontextualized in individual representations to create new meanings based off recognition and association. The motifs discussed here by no means define what the Headless Horseman can be, and the narratives discussed here by no means define how the Headless Horseman can function as a narrative motif. However, an analytical dive into three well-known representations presents a continuity of the idyllic chronotope across narratives and offers a window into how temporality can be theorized within folklore and the folkloresque. To summarize, the Headless Horseman is a well-known folkloric motif, that has become iconic within a chronotope of idyllic time and the fictionalized space of Sleepy Hollow thanks in large part to *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, and *Sleepy Hollow.* In the following chapters, the folkloresque narratives analyzed here serve as a point of comparison as we dive into (perhaps chase through the woods?) two folkloristic renderings of similar tales in other spaces and places.

[5] For further reading, I suggest Steve Wiggins' book *Sleepy Hollow as American Myth: Irving's Story Retold, Adapted and Cemented in Popular Culture.* Wiggins explores the relationships between adaptation of Irving's tale specifically, offering a different perspective on the motif of the Headless Horseman.

III. CONTEMPORARY LEGEND AND THE WAR-BASED, ROAD-TYPE CHRONOTOPE

Introduction

Chapter one introduced the Headless Horseman as a narrative motif in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad,* and *Sleepy Hollow.* These folkloresque mass-media narratives establish and reinforce a set of themes, post-Revolutionary War idyllic chronotopes, and even narrative elements like character names; additionally, the three retain broad cultural influence into the present day through circulation and discourse. As a result, the Headless Horseman has become iconic of and deeply associated with the idyllic time and the chronotopes of forest and town that the three collectively present, creating a homogenizing discursive effect within Foster's folkloresque cycle and effecting a temporal and spatial distancing from the events within and history behind the narratives.

Continuing to build on Conrad's discussion of alternate temporalities in folk narratives, this chapter is dedicated to exploring the themes, chronotopes, and motifs of a different kind of narrative: contemporary legend. A folk narrative of the Headless Horseman of McLean County, Kentucky exemplifies a chronotope that move time forward through encounter in a particular space: on the road. These road-type chronotopes make time visible through a being that the folk encounter within a unique, contained space. In contrast to the folkloresque narratives explored earlier, road chronotopes interrupt and collapse temporal and spatial distance instead of perpetuating it. The interruption or collapse can happen through interpersonal performance, through ostension, or through textualization. This analysis speaks not only to the importance of centering temporality when analyzing narrative, but explores how a multiplicity of narratives,

exploring similar themes, can have different discursive impacts based on form, process, and experience.

I will begin this chapter with background on Bakhtin's road-type chronotope. I will then offer some geohistorical context and background for McLean County, as well as the Civil War in Kentucky. After contextualizing the folk narrative, I will relate the historical and textualized aspects of the legend and analyze the Headless Horseman motif featured within. From there, I will relate and analyze my experiences from fieldwork in McLean County as a road-type chronotope. I will close out the chapter by foreshadowing the analysis in chapter three and comparing the temporality and effects of chronotopes of the folk narratives versus of the folkloresque narratives.

The Road-Type Chronotope

In *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel*, Bakhtin characterizes encounter as a physical meeting or new memory-causing experience in the context of "adventure-time": adventure-time "depicts only the exceptional, utterly unusual moments[…]" of someone's life, events that often happen by chance that "manifest themselves" in encounters (Bakhtin 1981 116). Since adventure-time often does not include descriptions of time progressing outside of the event, or the routines of daily life that progress or age the focal character, it could be easy to assume that adventure-time does not demonstrate impactful events. However, Bakhtin addresses this assumption, conclusively stating that the moments depicted within adventure-time are "moments that are very short compared to the whole length of a human life. But these moments shape the definitive image of the man, his essence, as well as the nature of his entire subsequent life…" (Bakhtin 1981 116). The temporal marker of encounter with another being is how time

takes on a material form within a narrative.[6] Bakhtin also uses language invoking initiation and liminality to describe the ways that encounter and adventure-time suspends the flow of everyday or "real" time, which hearkens once again back to Conrad's arguments that folk narratives (as we will see) are prime locations for theorizing alternate temporalities.[7]

The road chronotope is also significant for the spatial markers it materializes. Bakhtin writes that the road (any road, really) is "profoundly, intensely etched by the flow of historical time, by the traces and signs of time's passage, by markers of the era," and as such especially useful for situating an encounter between two beings within an era or multiple historical eras (Bakhtin 1981 244). The road is a place where the folk spend time, a known place. When analytically moved outside of "real" or progressive time and into the realm of adventure-time, encounters on the road, with, say, a Headless Horseman, are moments that fundamentally shape the folk who share in the encounter. This moves the experience and impact of the chronotope into the present day, invoking a road-based, adventure-time chronotope through sensory experiences in addition to textual consumption. In this chapter, I will argue that through the narrative genre of a contemporary legend or a ghost story the spatial markers in narratives of the Headless Horseman of McLean County are localized and contained to a recognizable, findable geographic area, leaving the folk to negotiate the materialization of adventure-time through encounter with the figure of the Horseman. The folk can experience the chronotope not only by reading the text of the narrative but by visiting the space that the narrative describes.

Historical and Textual Records of the Headless Horseman of McLean County

[6] To reiterate, Bakhtin often uses chronotope and motif interchangeably while discussing the road, and many of his other chronotopes...which I do not do here. See introduction and chapter 1.
[7] Bakhtin's discussions of liminality invoke Edith and Victor Turner's work on liminality and the stages of experience - a fascinating area of further research.

The earliest recorded mention of the legend can be found on the front page of the *McLean County News,* the county newspaper, dated October 30th, 1986. Some excerpts from the article, written by Stephen Vest:

> *High upon the hill just past New Cypress Church when headed south from Rumsey is an old, abandoned house that is known today as the old Payne place. While it is uncertain whether the occurrences began*[sic] *when the Payne family lived in the house, their family name lives on associated with the ghost that once made his presence known around the Semiway community homestead...*
>
> *Mr*[sic] *Vickers*[sic] *family reportedly was the last family to live in the house that he claimed was haunted by a man that was first a chained prisoner in the house and later was murdered. Vickers claimed that every night the chains could be heard moving throughout the upstairs of the house and noises could be heard on the stairs where he was later decapitated.*
>
> *Mrs. Ernest West of Sacramento, who now owns the house with her sister, Mrs. Helen Shanks, claims that the headless victim was reported to gallop up next to passersby on his legless mount...*
>
> *Another story stated that he was a captured Confederate prisoner whom they were holding prisoner. He attempted to escape one night and the Union guard caught him on the steps and cut off his head with a sword. The noises heard coming down the starirs*[sic] *were supposedly made by his head rolling after the fatal blow. It was also said that as recent*[sic] *as the 1920's*[sic] *the headless Confederate soldier would ride up next to buggies passing the house on his mount. He would then vanish.*

A few years later, on November 4th, 1999, the *McLean County News* ran an article written by Ken Ward, a "local historian," that included this story:

> *...in July and August 1951, a ghost seems to have been residing in the New Salem Church vicinity. A large number of people had reportedly seen the manifestation. One woman had allegedly even spoken with in*[sic]*. The ghost, witnesses agreed, had a head and a body but 'definitely' no feet.*[8]

Right away, there are several landmarks that can be directly identified on a present-day map of McLean County. Rumsey is just south of Calhoun near the Green River. Semiway, if you'll recall, is an unincorporated community set roughly halfway between Calhoun and Sacramento. The New Salem Church is located near Wyman, which is roughly ten miles north of Calhoun on Routes 81 and 136. The New Cypress Church is in Semiway, between Calhoun and Sacramento. However, unless you live in or are familiar with the areas described in the two articles, it can be a bit of work to track each place down on a map, which alludes to a primary audience, or folk, of McLean County residents. Neither article gives directions or descriptions of the places they name – meaning whoever the audience is, they're already expected by the writers to have that knowledge.

Notably, both articles include stories of the Headless Horseman or a headless ghost as part of a recounting of several ghost stories of McLean County, if we assume that the missing limb can be legs in addition to a head. Vest's article offers more detail than Ward's. Both articles also use churches as geographic or location markers. Interestingly, earlier in the 1999 article (not quoted here), Ward specifically wrote that McLean County has no Headless Horseman legend of its own, so one conclusion is that Ward, or his informants, was unaware of the legend that Vest

[8] Again, many thanks to the McLean County News and Paxton Media Group for agreeing to the use of both articles in this work.

recounts. Another conclusion is that the legend described in the 1999/Ward article is a migratory variant of the 1986/Vest legend: the latter circulating up until the 1920s in the region south of Calhoun, the former in a contained time in summer 1951 and north of Calhoun.

Much of my research, and time spent in McLean County, was focused on the legend related in the 1986/Vest article.[9] There are two chronotopes in this textualized telling of the legend. Both chronotopes involve adventure-time and the motif of encounter inextricably bound up with the motif of the ghostly Headless Horseman. One chronotope is the road near the Payne House, where the Headless Horseman was encountered while chasing cars; the other is within the Payne House itself, where other haunting encounters would occur, like rattling sounds of chains, or the head bouncing down the stairs. In the Vest article, the Headless Horseman is described as a "chained prisoner," and later in the same article as a "captured Confederate prisoner." This chained prisoner was killed, "murdered" in one version and beheaded by guards after an escape attempt in another. The identification of the ghost as a prisoner or soldier speaks to the Headless Horseman as a manifestation of memories of the Civil War in McLean County. The sudden death of the prisoner speaks to a more general cultural understanding of haunting as caused by a sudden, painful, or otherwise "bad" death.[10]

A Modern Folkloresque Narrative

In 2023, Allen Sircy, an author from Tennessee, published *Ghost Stories and Graveyard Tales: Kentucky*.[11] The book includes a story entitled "The Headless Horseman of McLean County," a story that was directly inspired by the oral tradition Vest relates in the 1986 article.

[9] As for the legless mount variation, it remains a tantalizing, elusive thread that I could find no more information on…
[10] See for example Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas 2007; Iwasaka and Toelken 1994; Ellis 1989; Hamilton 1996.
[11] Many thanks to Allen Sircy for his permission to both quote from his book and mention our correspondence in this work.

In Sircy's telling, a Confederate cavalryman under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest is knocked unconscious during the Battle of Sacramento. He awakens "alone and disoriented," and begins searching the fields of McLean County for food. An "old farmer...a gruff and staunch Union supporter who despised the Confederate cause" takes the Confederate soldier prisoner using a revolver. The farmer "unceremoniously" chains the Confederate soldier to "the bed in a small room" on the second floor of his "weathered cabin." The next morning, the farmer orders the soldier to start chopping logs near the cabin. The soldier, "intent on striking his captor down," attempts an attack with the ax. The farmer shoots the prisoner to the ground, but the gun misfires a second time. "In a chilling and gruesome climax," the farmer beheads the injured Confederate soldier with the ax and "allowed the local wildlife...to pick his bones clean." Later residents at the cabin hear disembodied footsteps and rattling chains (one resident, Clint Nall, gets his bedcovers yanked off by a dark headless figure). Sircy ends his story as follows:

> *Oddly, others in the area began to share their own encounters with the headless soldier. Some claimed to have seen him riding his horse at night, galloping through the fields near the place where he met his untimely end. Today, the old cabin is long gone, yet the legend of the headless horseman of McLean County endures as a haunting reminder of a dark and tumultuous chapter in American history.*

Sircy also includes illustrations at corresponding points in the story: a soldier lying in the grass; an old man with hollow eyes brandishing a revolver, and later an ax; a shadowy figure standing in the darkened corner of a cabin with raised arms; and finally, a headless rider dressed in a Civil War-era soldier's uniform carrying an ax and riding a horse into the sunset.

Sircy has (further, depending on your understanding of a newspaper article as folklore) fictionalized Vest's article and firmly placed it in the historic time of the Civil War; more specifically, in the Battle of Sacramento. He fleshes out the legends related by Vest's informants, Mrs. Ernest West and the Vickers family, while at the same time excluding them as narrators in this fictionalized space, in addition to any subsequent individuals he might've spoken to, like Clint Nall. Sircy creates a folkloresque narrative that dwells in detail on the soldier's imprisonment and the circumstances of his death, the same symbolic qualities the folk would encounter in hearing the legend. Similarly, the same chronotopes identified in the newspaper telling are perpetuated in Sircy's fictionalized, folkloresque narrative. The reader spends time inside and outside this cabin in the woods, time suspended beyond the encounter between the soldier and the farmer, and later between the ghostly Headless Horseman and residents of the cabin or residents of McLean County.

However, before we further analyze the Headless Horseman of McLean County, it's worth it to contextualize not only his stomping grounds, but the historic time that narratives that feature him are situated in.

The Civil War in Kentucky and the Battle of Sacramento

The legend of the Headless Horseman of McLean County is often associated with the historic time of the Civil War. The Civil War (1861-1865) deeply impacted Kentucky, often identified as a border state in the conflict. The state legislature voted to declare neutrality early in the Civil War, unwilling to sever political or economic ties with either the Union or Confederacy. After an invasion by Confederate forces in late 1861 that lasted into 1862, that even resulted in the occupation of the state capital, the state legislature declared allegiance to the Union for the rest of the war (Smith 2014). Beyond this bare political recitation, the deep social

divisions that wracked Kentucky during the Civil War are evident: sources estimate 25–40,000 Kentuckians served as Confederate soldiers and 74–125,000 Kentuckians, including 24–25,000 Black Kentuckians, some free, some enslaved, served as Union soldiers (Quisenberry 1920 13-18, Rose and Matthews 2005). Beyond these stark enlistment numbers, there is other evidence to move past a simple delineation of Union or Confederate, pro- or anti-slavery in describing the social fabric in Kentucky during the Civil War. Many Kentuckians who identified or aligned with the Union took no moral issue with slavery (Harrison 1975 1). In addition to skirmishes or battles, Kentuckians had to contend with guerilla warfare, rationing and deprivations, and breakdown in relations between individuals within communities based on sociopolitical allegiances relating to the war (Mulligan 1998). The Kentucky Tourism board website mentions "the decisive Battle of Richmond, the bloody Battle of Perryville, and… one of the largest African-American recruitment and training centers in the nation, Camp Nelson," demonstrating the deep hold the Civil War still has on the collective memory of Kentuckians today, in part due to the deep impact the Civil War had on Kentuckians at the time ("Civil War History in Kentucky" 2023).

However, our Headless Horseman is from McLean County. In the census of 1860, McLean County counted 6,144 residents, including roughly 900 enslaved persons and roughly 20 persons of color listed as "Free" in the records ("McLean County, Kentucky Genealogy" 2026, "McLean County (KY) Enslaved, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1860-1880" 2024). 14 soldiers who served in the U.S. Colored Troops listed McLean County as their home or place of origin in the 1870 census ("McLean County (KY) Enslaved, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1860-1880" 2024). Roughly 2,000 white men enlisted into the Union Army from McLean County and the surrounding area early in the war, from late 1861 to early 1862, and hundreds

more were drafted throughout the war ("McLean County in the Civil War" 1996, Long n.d.). Other notable Civil War happenings in McLean County include the establishment of Camp Calhoun, a concentration of roughly 10 to 15,000 Union soldiers near the town of Calhoun, which at the time had a population of around 500 (Hilton et al 2018). And notably, the Battle of Sacramento did occur. It was a cavalry skirmish that took place near town on December 28th, 1861, on the land near where modern-day Route 85 and Route 81 intersect. Two to three hundred Confederate cavalrymen outflanked and routed roughly five hundred Union cavalry back towards Calhoun. The battle is reenacted in May of every year by Sacramento residents. The McLean County Tourism website lists several sites linked to the Civil War, including the Baptist Cemetery in the town of Island, Calhoun Cemetery, and a driving tour specifically linked to the Battle of Sacramento ("Battles/Civil War" n.d.).

McLean County is in the Western Coal Fields region of Kentucky, formed in 1854 from portions of Daviess, Muhlenberg, and Ohio Counties (NKAA Database). Today, the county population sits around 9,000 people, with much of that population concentrated in the of Island, Sacramento, Calhoun, and Livermore. The Green River bisects McLean County, running southeast to northwest towards the Ohio River. State highways, or Routes, 81, 85, and 138 run through the county and connect the towns. The primary economic pillars of McLean County are agriculture: corn, soybeans, tobacco, and poultry, as well as manufacturing ("McLean County, Kentucky" n.d.). Again, for the legend(s) that have been presented so far, and for the fieldwork I am about to share, it's important to know that Route 81 runs north through McLean County towards Calhoun from Sacramento. Remember the unincorporated community called Semiway that sits halfway between Calhoun and Sacramento.

Textualized Legend and Chronotope

Up to this point, I've described three narratives of the Headless Horseman of McLean County: two newspaper articles, and a book excerpt. These narratives fit Dundes's criteria of folklore as vernacular and expressive through their descriptive language and details of everyday life. The multiplicity of narrators, and various means of transmission, also fit into Dundes's definition (potentially with a bit of squinting – the book excerpt sits closer to the folkloresque, but I will again rely on some of the arguments from earlier chapters to make this claim). Multiple appearances or versions of the Headless Horseman are described – a head on the stairs, a rider on the road, and a shadowy figure in the upstairs of the cabin. The three narratives suggest a Headless Horseman from another past conflict, one specific to the place in which the figure appears. To draw a parallel, the Civil War was to Kentucky what the Revolutionary War was to New York – a conflict with deep roots in community divisions, the memory of which is still being (re)negotiated today.

In all three narratives, the road chronotope and adventure-time clearly manifest. All versions of the Headless Horseman of McLean County that I could find are contained within a particular space – the cabin, or the road nearby, like the forest and town in chapter one. The narratives can only progress within those spaces, like the folkloresque narratives analyzed earlier, but here that encounter is not distanced through romanticization. This chronotope is also war-based, but the narrative only moves forward for an individual when the Headless Horseman is encountered – otherwise, it is just a history. These encounters occur in real places, not places one step removed from real places. Additionally, as legends these stories are often told and set in a more recent time frame, referencing specific historical events, instead of set in a nonspecific past with vague historical references. The road-type chronotope matters so much in this

analytical space because the way the stories are told means the chronotope functions here to bring the past into the present, instead of containing the past within the past.

My Time in McLean County

I chose to visit McLean County, conducting fieldwork and ethnographic interviews, to try and get an understanding of how the legend is known within McLean County today. The textual experience of the chronotopes is a critical piece of understanding the wider impact of the narrative, and the importance of temporality within that narrative. Being able to visit the sites mentioned in the written narratives and get McLean County residents' perspectives on the narratives felt just as critical to truly get to the significance of the legend of the Headless Horseman of McLean County.

I had researched the narratives above, the newspaper articles and Sircy's book, as well as the Civil War history of McLean County, before setting off on my visit. My fieldwork was structured around landmarks from those same narratives. The plan was to start in Sacramento and drive north towards Calhoun, stopping in Semiway along the way. I began early on August 29th, 2025, driving east on Route 85, past fields of corn, silos, and groups of trees (and slowing down for the occasional chicken crossing the road) to Sacramento. State Highway Route 81 is also Main Street in Sacramento. My first stop was City Hall (which shared a building with the city waterworks department). I'd read on the county's government and tourism website that the Sacramento City Hall had a brochure called "Battle of Sacramento Driving Tour". As good a place to start as any – visit the place where Sircy, and Vest's interlocutors, situated their legends. The woman working the front desk was a bit surprised by my request and had to go look in a backroom to find the brochure. She mentioned that these were "in storage" and "not set out" anymore, which I took to mean no longer promoted or in frequent use for tourists.

I nosed through the brochure sitting in my car outside City Hall. The story of the battle is retold in ten stops, from Greenville to Sacramento up to Calhoun, using language that centers the Confederate experience during the battle. I drove south from City Hall to stop 5, the battlefield. It's high summer in Kentucky – humid, hot, and the cicadas are singing at top volume as I get out of the car. The battlefield site is a rolling grassy plain, spotted with knolls and carved wood fences. The gravel lot I'm standing in leads to a few pavilions and sets of bleachers facing away from Route 81 out towards the grassy plain. Signage on the parking lot gates confirms for me that this is where the reenactment takes place each year. After reading the markers in the adjacent memorial garden (that featured both Confederate and Union flags flying) and the signage on the multiple log cabins sitting off to one side of the parking lot, I walked past the battlefield area to a large, stylized sign with a Confederate and Union soldier staring each other down. The sign, emblazoned with the Confederate and Union flags, read "BATTLE OF SACRAMENTO" above the soldiers' heads, and below them "Forrest's First: May 16-17-18" (see figure 3.1 below).



Figure 3.1. The sign marking the Battle of Sacramento memorial park and reenactment site.

I drove north and pulled over at the New Cypress Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the community of Semiway. Again, Semiway is halfway between Sacramento and Calhoun (which is where the name came from, as I was told later that day). After my visit to the battlefield, to see how the land was used and the battle was memorialized on-site, stopping at the church felt like another way to immerse myself in the environment of the legends. The church was one of the few landmarks I could so far positively identify as having some sort of association with the narrative(s). The church had a long uphill driveway, winding into a curved lawn and circling the building. The first thing I noticed after parking is that the church was in shambles. Doors and windows were missing; the exterior was crumbling (see figure 3.2). Through the gap in the walls I could see that the interior was stripped of furniture and drywall had been knocked away in many places.



Figure 3.2. The exterior of the New Cypress Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

I walked around back of the church to find a small cemetery, neatly maintained – a far cry from the semi-demolished church. I noticed some workers preparing a grave near the far side of the cemetery and walked over to speak with them. Two of the four men continued to work without looking up, but the other two leaned on their tools and chatted with me. Both men were from "around McLean County," and had worked construction-type jobs "for years." I learned from them that the church was being demolished, hadn't been in use since the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and would probably be bare bones by the end of the year. I asked the men if any of them had ever heard any ghost stories from anywhere around the area, or near the church, and they all, even the ones who weren't conversating with me, shook their heads. When I explained that I was in town looking for traces of a ghost story, doing research for school, one of the workers perked up. He told me about a man who walked with a stoop and always ate breakfast at the Lighthouse, a restaurant in downtown Calhoun. At this point in the day, it was only about 9:30 in the morning, so he suggested to me that I should go to the Lighthouse, track down the man (whose name he couldn't remember) and ask him what he knew. I thanked them and left shortly after.

After my conversation with the workers wrapped up, I left New Cypress and drove into Calhoun, looking for the Lighthouse restaurant to find this man who knew so much local history. I parked across the street, walked in, sat at the bar, ordered a Fanta, and looked around. There were low tables scattered across two rooms. A few families sat having breakfast, and a group of men surrounded two tables in the far room. The TVs above the bar were playing various news channels. I asked the bartender about a man who knew ghost stories who ate at the Lighthouse a lot, but she shook her head and said she didn't know anyone who fit that description. A few minutes later, one of the men from the group in the far room stood up and came to sit at the bar. I

initiated a conversation, and it turned out he was the man I was looking for! E.B. was a self-professed local historian, who especially loved "grisly" history and "spooky tales." I asked him what he knew about the Headless Horseman of McLean County. He professed no knowledge and asked me to tell him what I knew instead. After a few more pleasantries and swapping some history trivia for nearby Owensboro (including a spooky story focused on hangings and the Owensboro jail), I left the Lighthouse.

After my conversation with E.B. at the Lighthouse wrapped up, my next stop was the McLean County History Museum and Family Research Center, just a few minutes' drive away on Main Street in Calhoun. Having no prior contacts in McLean County, I scheduled a visit there to use their archives and ask the staff what they knew about the legend.

The museum was a converted residence, with a large white painted sign out front (see figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3. Signage for the McLean County History Museum and Family Research Center.

Half the main room was full of display cases showcasing military medals, antique clothing, and photos of McLean County residents past and present. Bookshelves lined the walls, brimming over with phone directories, fire maps, census records, newspaper compilations, and other records. File cabinets and tall shelves with storage boxes lay at the far end of the room, and opposite the displays in the front half of the room were several desks with computer monitors, strewn with sticky notes, papers, and books (see figure 3.4). A researcher sat at a table near some of the displays with several binders and books in front of him.



Figure 3.4. The interior of the McLean County History Museum and Family Research Center.

I was greeted by a kind woman who introduced herself as Anitta, and when I explained what I was there to research she called her colleague, Jenny, over to hear what I had to say. Both were long-time or lifelong residents of McLean County. Truth be told, the visit lasted hours longer than it was meant to because the three of us were caught up in conversation.

To begin with, both Anitta and Jenny professed no knowledge of the Headless Horseman. They asked me instead what I knew about it, and I recounted a narrative that encompassed

(mentioned and summarized) all three textual variants reviewed in this paper. However, we soon discovered that they knew the Payne Place under a different name, the Nall House. Once that connection had been made, Anitta in turn recounted a story of a beheaded prisoner whose head bounced down the stairs at the Nall House to Jenny and me. Throughout our conversations, Anitta and Jenny went back and forth to different shelves and cabinets around the room to try and find archival materials for me to use. When Anitta found copies of Stephen Vest's 1986 article in the museum's archives, she and Jenny sat down and read it, and the names and places located in the article drove much of what followed.

As they put it, Anitta and Jenny began "calling people up;" and not only calling people up but insisting on including me in the conversations with the recipients of the call. First, they called a local historian, who knew Ken Ward; then, Stephen Vest, the author of the 1986 article; then Vest's former editor at the McLean County News. During each of these conversations, the recipient of the call professed they didn't know or couldn't recall anything about the Headless Horseman, or know any members of the families, or anyone else who knew the story. At some point during each phone call, Anitta and Jenny would either tell a version of the story themselves, or motion to me to recount it to the person on the other end of the line.

In between these phone calls, Anitta and Jenny would regale me with stories of the Payne and Nall families in McLean County, as well as mentioning names of families and landmarks also connected with the Semiway area. Two other researchers passed in and out of the museum while I was visiting, each with family ties to McLean County, and each were drawn into the conversations between Anitta, Jenny, and me. Several times, one or the other mentioned *Sleepy Hollow* or *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

After I bade goodbye to Anitta and Jenny, I resolved to give myself one last try to find the Old Payne Place (or the Old Nall Place) that Mrs. Ernest West and her sister, Helen Shanks, used to own. The Old Nall House, and the road nearby, seemed critical to understand how the legend bridged past and present. After speaking with Anitta and Jenny, I knew I was close when I visited New Cypress. I also now knew that the cabin, or what remained of it, would be set back in the heavily wooded areas near the church, unmarked, and without a driveway or mailbox or any other way to spot it. A long shot, but worth a try.

I drove south from Calhoun, and when I reached Semiway I slowed down, switched my hazard lights on, and drove slowly down Route 81. I stared into the woods on either side of the road to look for anything resembling a cabin. Just south of New Cypress, in a thicket on a ridge above the road, I spotted a wall!

I drove another quarter mile down the road, found a pulloff, and locked the car. I jogged back down the side of the road to find a place to climb up into the woods, my heart beating out of my chest. I spotted the remnants of a driveway and followed it into the woods a couple hundred feet away from and above the road to a two-story wood cabin that was falling in on itself. From what was left of the walls I could see a front door facing the road, a staircase just inside the door, and several windows on both floors; all features described in Anitta's telling, the news article, and Sircy's story. I'd found the Nall House!

I excitedly circled the cabin in the woods, snapping photos and inspecting the cabin's exterior. The roof was caved in, and the walls of the cabin facing the road were sagging, so for safety reasons I didn't approach the ruin (although the thought of seeing whether there were stairs, like Mrs. West mentioned in her telling, was tempting). The sun was setting, and my car

was parked on the side of the road, so I only spent a few minutes at the Nall House before I left McLean County and headed home (see figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5. The ruins of the Nall House.

A Note on My Positionality

In my experience, if a Kentuckian meets another Kentuckian, a quick exchange of towns and counties will follow names – where your family's from, where you've lived. It's a sign of mutual recognition and respect, acknowledging your ties to your home state. I was born and raised in central Kentucky, about three hours east of McLean County. Both my parents were born and raised in Kentucky; my dad's family is from Owensboro, about twenty miles north of Calhoun. Being able to introduce myself not only as a Kentuckian, but as a Kentuckian with family connections near McLean County, meant that I was able to slide into familiar conversational and behavioral habits. The conversations I had throughout the day on August 29th

were informed just as much by residents' curiosity about me and my research as my curiosity about their knowledge and connections. I was able to introduce myself not only as a graduate student doing research, but as a Kentuckian attending graduate school out-of-state who wanted to center my home in my research, a constant personal negotiation of emic-etic dynamics that affects how I explain and analyze the folklore of my home state.

Meaning, Chronotope, and the Legend

To make meaning out of this visit to McLean County, it's first important to consider the meaning that someone unfamiliar with McLean County might make from the articles and book tellings. The textualized versions of the legend, combined with the historical time(s) the legend could be rooted in, suggest adventure-time and road-type chronotopes in each text. Within the texts, the folk (residents of McLean County as well as people who have had an encounter with the Headless Horseman) move through time contingent on an encounter within a particular space. The presumed audience of the texts varies; from reading the newspaper articles, the audience can be interpreted as residents of McLean County as well as people who have had an encounter with the Headless Horseman, either within the experiences related in the articles or by reading the articles. The newspaper articles are self-contained, meant for the same folk who may have the encounter with the Headless Horseman within the familiar space(s). When an outsider, someone not from McLean County, reads the articles, they may feel a different kind of time and space within the encounter due to that lack of familiarity, a chronotope closer to the idyllic time discoursed in chapter one. If there is no prior knowledge of the spaces and names mentioned in the articles, the reader's experience is likely to feel more distant, their perception of the time and space in and around the Old Payne Place farther away, with less recognition to fuel a sense of attachment in the encounter that may shift their own worldview or understanding.

In Allen Sircy's fictionalized telling, this mixture of adventure-time and idyllic time flows through spaces not as clearly identified as the spaces in the articles. The Headless Horseman is the focal point of the encounters described in these texts, encounters occurring inside or outside of a cabin in the woods, instead of the Old Payne Place as described in the articles. In both the articles and the book excerpt, the Headless Horseman embodies an encounter with the traumatic effects of the Civil War; however, in the article, another layer of familiarity with the community of Semiway and of McLean County at large is suggested, that can shift the focus away from the Headless Horseman as the only motif encountered within the narrative.

When visiting McLean County, it became clear that the legend of the Headless Horseman was no longer in circulation. My fieldwork was an exercise in ostension, with multiple visits to the spaces described in the articles, including to the Old Payne Place itself. Placing myself within the spaces changed my experience of the legend as an outsider. As detailed above, no residents, even the self-professed history buffs or museum workers, knew of the narrative. In fact, my fieldwork may have unintentionally reintroduced the legend into circulation in some form. Only time will tell.

However, even though the spaces that mark the chronotope in the textualized narratives are no longer in use in the everyday – meaning the chronotope is harder to experience in the everyday in the same way discussed in the articles – the chronotope is still a useful tool to consider how the legend is being interpreted in the present, especially when the spaces that the legend is situated in are accessible or familiar. When the legend, and therefore the chronotope, is experienced through oral transmission, what occurs is a sort of performance using the textualized narratives as a guide or script. In this performance, multiple layers of historic time are evoked

and experienced in the telling, and the folk become anyone who is familiar with the story, whether they are a McLean County resident or an outsider.

The historic times invoked in the textualized tellings are the Civil War, the 1920s, and the present day. A text-based experience of the chronotope describes the encounter between the Headless Horseman and the folk, and the reader, if not familiar with the spaces the encounter occurs in, experiences the time of the encounter (i.e. has their own road-type encounter) at a distance, without any personal associations to make meaning that invokes memories or prior experiences. However, a conversation- or performance-based experience of the chronotope means the audience becomes the folk. Person-to-person interaction within the bounds of McLean County offers an encounter not only with the Headless Horseman and the historic time of the Civil War, but with the interconnected lives of McLean County residents, and of their own memories of family connections through marriage or kinship, land ownership, and community connections from the 1920s into the present.

Multiple performances of the legend of the Headless Horseman of McLean County as an oral tradition happened during this visit according to Finnegan's criterion of actualization (1974) and Foley's idea of performance as referencing tradition (1996). Firstly, the one I gave on the spot when I first met Anitta and Jenny – an actualization of the recitations encoded in Vest's, Ward's, and Sircy's vernacularly textual versions of the oral tradition. In my performance, I referenced both those specific oral traditions and the textual forms they took, creating a narrative that amalgamated variants from each text while presenting them in the order the texts were recorded. Secondly, Anita's recitation of the bouncing-head variant referenced a specific tradition that was connected to, or triggered by, recognition of a specific place name and landmark. The Old Payne Place = the Old Nall House. Thirdly, the versions that the three of us

shared on the phone with various other people connected with McLean County – versions that transmitted and performed this story to others in a reproduceable way. Anitta and Jenny even told me near the end of the visit that they would tell the story to other people they knew. Those future performances would be referents to a tradition encoded vernacularly through the text of the articles and book, as well as referencing past performances by themselves or others, a key component in any oral tradition's actualization.

Without chronotope, it becomes harder to describe the ways time is conceptualized and experienced within the layers of this legend. When multiple texts, audiences, and historic times are invoked within the cycle of the same legend, vocabulary of temporality, like chronotope, becomes a critical means of describing how encounters with the Headless Horseman, although short and contained within the particular space, have the potential to shape the worldview of the folk who experience it.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this thesis studied the homogenizing discursive effects of three folkloresque narratives that featured the Headless Horseman, and the distancing effects of the idyllic time within the chronotopes evoked in each narrative. In this chapter, the narratives presented demonstrate that the homogenizing effect of those folkloresque narratives has not been universalizing. The Headless Horseman as a narrative motif is not experienced the same way across different contexts, especially in terms of temporality, although themes manifested by the motif have arguably remained constant. Here, I discussed a new kind of chronotope in conversation with the narrative genre of legend, using a localized legend from McLean County, Kentucky to discourse the idea of encounter as shaping experience of folk narrative. Adventure

time and the road-type chronotope, with encounter determining the pace of the narrative and the temporal experience for the folk.

The third chapter of this thesis will present tourist chronotopes in Sleepy Hollow, New York: the space that mass-media and popular culture have most often associated with the Headless Horseman. These tourist chronotopes will further develop ideas of alternative temporality in folk narrative through experience, as well as involving both the idyllic and adventure times that chapters one and two have analyzed.

IV. SLEEPY HOLLOW: THE TOURISM CHRONOTOPE

Introduction

In chapter one, I analyzed mass-media folkloresque narratives that featured the Headless Horseman through the temporal lens of the idyllic chronotope. In chapter two, I researched a textualized and experiential contemporary legend that featured the Headless Horseman through the temporal lens of the road-type chronotope. In this chapter, I'll explore the village of Sleepy Hollow, New York, through the temporal lens of the tourist chronotope. A series of ethnographic interviews and fieldwork observations from primarily business owners exemplify a tourist chronotope that frames perceptions of the Headless Horseman, and of perceptions of the effects of tourism on Sleepy Hollow as manufactured encounters inextricably linked to folklore and narrative. However, each interview reveals unique understandings of the Headless Horseman, especially how individuals connected with Sleepy Hollow continually negotiate said association. The tourist chronotope as it exists in Sleepy Hollow evokes both the homogenizing effects of the mass-media narratives and the negotiation of history present in the contemporary legend – another sign that the Headless Horseman as a motif and the chronotopes it exists in make meaning through a multiplicity of times existing within a single, constructed and inhabited space.

The Tourism Chronotope

The tourism chronotope, as defined by Antonio-Miguel Nogués-Pedregal, describes how "elements are dialogically produced and then politically arranged to provide people with a sense of the surrounding world as a concrete whole," (Nogués-Pedregal 2016).[12] The tourism chronotope manifests in "un mundo de sentido inteligible y concreto distintivo," "a world of

[12] Translations of Nogués-Pedregal's arguments, and any resulting errors, are entirely my own. I have included the original quotes followed by my translations, contrary to standard practice, entirely for interested comparison or clarity and to the detriment of the writing's flow.

intelligible, concrete, distinctive sense," (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 157). Critically, the tourism chronotope is "un producto de las condiciones históricas," "a product of the historical conditions," that is significant for "la manera en la que estos despositarios se relacionan unos con otros, haciendo que el conjunto resulte inteligible y teja esa densa red de significados en la que, de acuerdo con Weber, estamos inmersos," "the manners in which these deposits relate with one another, making the whole intelligible and weaving a web of meanings in which, according to Weber, we are immersed," (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 158). The tourism chronotope depends on the relationships between and perceptions of histories that have been discussed elsewhere in this thesis – a narrative, dependent on other narratives.

Tourism chronotopes can describe either the way that tourism institutions mediate production of objects and environments through processes of combination, or it can refer to the ways that interactions of time and space affect ideas of identity and social relations. In a tourism chronotope, time and space are "unas coordenadas…las que se privilegia la diversión y el entretenimiento," "coordinates…that privilege fun and entertainment," (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 151). The tourism chronotope is also notable for the ways that it can simultaneously encompass "presencia y ausencia…lo imaginado y lo real, los deseos y las frustraciones," by "romper la última frontera entre el aquí y el allí," "presence and absence…the imagined and the real, desires and frustrations" by "breaking the last frontier between here and there." Therefore, the tourism chronotope, by combining objects through specific methods of production that affect social relations and help make sense of daily life, collapses or merges temporal and spatial distance with an eye towards leisure and entertainment (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 157).

Ethnography in Sleepy Hollow

During the early stages of research for this thesis, while exploring various narratives featuring and depictions of the Headless Horseman, many narratives or depictions seemed to superficially or thematically reference Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, examined in chapter one. Research on Irving's inspirations led to literature describing the places from which he may have drawn inspiration, including the village of Sleepy Hollow itself. Further reading in turn on Sleepy Hollow quickly revealed a broad depth of material marketing the village as a tourist destination. An investigation into the relationship between the Headless Horseman and tourism using Sleepy Hollow as the case study complements the work with the Headless Horseman undertaken in earlier chapters of this work.

The ethnographic interviews below took place on September 3rd, 4th, and 5th, 2025, in the businesses or institutions where each individual worked in or around Sleepy Hollow.[13] The interviews had a conversational bent, mostly focusing on the following topics or themes:

- Where are you from? How did you end up in Sleepy Hollow?
- How do you know or how did you learn the legend or story of the Headless Horseman?
- How does the Headless Horseman affect your life and work here in or near Sleepy Hollow?
- What about (other) people from Sleepy Hollow? Does the legend matter to them, or affect them?
- What kinds of conversations do people have about the Headless Horseman, residents or tourists or otherwise?
- What sorts of questions do you get about the Headless Horseman from tourists?

[13] Excepting the interview with the director of the Chamber of Commerce, conducted over the phone due to time constraints on September 5th, 2025, with both parties present in Sleepy Hollow.

- Are there other researchers you've met? What do they ask about?
- What stands out the most from the legend or story for you? Why?

As evidenced by the themes and topics above, each interview was structured to be open-ended, intended to be shaped around the interlocutors' thoughts and experiences. Not every question was broached in every interview; since the interview was usually the first encounter between me and the interlocutor, an informal, conversational approach seemed the most ethical, comfortable, and effective for both parties. The connections between time, space, tourism, encounter, and narrative became clear as the interviews progressed, as I spent time in and around Sleepy Hollow, and as research continued after interviews were completed. See for yourself.

The Purple Ostrich

The Purple Ostrich is a souvenir store at the corner of South Broadway and Main St in Tarrytown, less than a mile south of downtown Sleepy Hollow, that also offers party supplies and printing services. The store's website, purpleostrich.com, proudly writes, "The Purple Ostrich is rated the Headless Horseman's Top Pick for Gifting (Because Even Without a Head, He Has Great Taste!)". Tommy, the owner, a white man, moved to Sleepy Hollow from Colorado; at the time of our interview he was living in Irvington, three miles south of the Purple Ostrich. Tommy was in the process of redecorating to show off new Halloween merchandise, including a new display in the shop window that featured the Headless Horseman riding a purple ostrich (see figure 4.1). When asked about any design inspiration, he responded that many business owners change their window displays after September 1st – "we're all let off the leash" to go Halloween-themed.



Figure 4.1. The front window of the Purple Ostrich, featuring a Headless Horseman riding a purple ostrich through a skeleton rave.

The displays set out featured a mix of products – some featured the Headless Horseman, and some didn't. There were several Headless Horseman-themed items that were low in inventory or already sold out – mugs, candles, stickers. Tommy, a longtime informal graphic designer, created the graphics for all Headless Horseman-themed items in the Purple Ostrich "cause it makes money." He expressed a desire to be a "unique gift shop" that he balanced with a need to "go with what the community wants" and "sell what stays afloat." Tommy also mentioned several times: "everyone kept warning me to 'have Sleepy Hollow stuff'." The vast majority of "Sleepy Hollow stuff" in the Purple Ostrich appeared to be Headless Horseman-themed.

Tommy had started preparing for the fall season during the summer. When asked why, he responded that he thinks Sleepy Hollow is probably one of the biggest fall-seasonal and Halloween tourist spots in the world, after Salem, Massachusetts.

Tommy leaned into this theme; when asked why people visit Sleepy Hollow, he answered that "it goes outside the Headless Horseman, people that come here are the kind of people who celebrate Halloween year round." However, he also described multiple public events in both Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow that take place during the fall each year, especially a street fair and block party that in "the last few years [post-COVID] have gone to another level." In 2024, both events had "out of control" attendance, with shoulder-to-shoulder foot traffic. From there, the conversation progressed to how foot traffic shifts and changes during the year. Tommy estimated he had a mix of customers most of the year, maybe 5 individuals in a day, but mid-September through the end of October the Purple Ostrich might see groups of ten people at a time and can total above thirty customers in a day.

As for who the visitors tend to be, Tommy answered mostly tourists, and locals within walking distance, but emphasized that there's "not a lot of great parking," and that for many there are also economic and logistical barriers, like parking fees.

When our conversation returned to the fall and the height of the tourist season, Tommy said that some of the locals hate the "gridlock traffic" that blocks off much of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow. However, "locals get that businesses don't make enough year round," so what develops is a discourse within the Sleepy Hollow community, two groups of locals where "one side's like don't complain, the other is like can't we do something to make it better?...It sucks for everybody, tourists and locals just trying to get to the doctor."

Speaking to the dynamics of tourism in Sleepy Hollow, Tommy also pointed out that "there's a lot of social media people that promote the heck outta this area, which is great for businesses." This theme of both institutional and individual marketing of Sleepy Hollow tourism also cropped up again when he mentioned that the Purple Ostrich's website, as well as the website visitsleepyhollow.com were both ways for locals and tourists alike to find out about the shop.

When I asked Tommy to describe his personal feelings about tourism, the Headless Horseman, or anything that came to mind, he responded with a shrug and remarked that the situation was "nice from a retailer's perspective" because "it gives you something to work with."

Cozy Coven

Cozy Coven sits at the corner of Beekman and Lawrence Avenues in downtown Sleepy Hollow. The shop opened in December 2024. The owner, Alyse, a white woman, moved from Connecticut to White Plains. She opened and operated Cozy Coven there for several years before she moved the business to the new location.

The Cozy Coven displays featured an eclectic mix of witchcraft- supernatural-, or magic-themed items, like books, T-shirts, and other souvenirs (see figures 4.2 and 4.3).

Alyse mentioned during our conversation that the first thing she bought when moving to White Plains was a Headless Horseman statue from HomeGoods – evoking a theme of material attachment and appreciation that showed through in our interview and in the store at large. Cozy Coven has Headless Horseman-themed items set out all year round. According to Alyse, people come into the shop specifically looking for Headless Horseman items, which she identified as her highest-selling category of items: "If you put a horseman on it, it's gonna sell."



Figure 4.2. Headless Horseman-themed magnets for sale at Cozy Coven.



Figure 4.3. Tote bags for sale at Cozy Coven.

When the interview turned to tourism in Sleepy Hollow, Alyse referenced her prior comment, stating that "The Horseman drives the economy," before forcefully iterating her belief that tourism "one hundred percent feeds the local economy." Cozy Coven "makes its year," meaning breaks even financially, during the span of October to November. The shop sees a mix of tourists and locals year-round, but the proportion swings heavily towards tourists during the fall starting after Labor Day. Alyse also dwelled on the sheer numbers of tourists that visit Sleepy Hollow in the fall: she recounted how over 40,000 people visited the street fair last Halloween (2024), and that vendors sold out "right away".

According to Alyse, town events, like parades, lantern-lit tours, and festivals, feature the Headless Horseman year-round. The Headless Horseman, dressed in costume and riding a horse, will even visit the shop during those events: "I think…for Easter, he had bunny ears on the stump." There's also an event called Halfway to Halloween, which Alyse used to describe how many businesses will take "any excuse to Halloween it up and horseman it up." Alyse pointed out how "all" the local businesses put Headless Horseman stuff visibly inside, outside, or on display, and explained that "everybody jumps on that bandwagon" to try and stay afloat.

In terms of the broader effects tourism might have on downtown Sleepy Hollow, Alyse mentioned that "this corner was empty last Halloween…we brought the retail," and when another small business owner from across the street came in during the interview, the conversation he shared with Alyse partially focused on how much downtown had changed after the COVID-19 pandemic (partially because of my presence). Alyse also mentioned that the Headless Horseman designs on a lot of the items in the shop came from local artists, followed by "I think everybody loves it…local people for the most part are really happy that we're here." She

identified as a proud Chamber of Commerce member and said she thinks they have a difficult job mediating between "people".

At one point, I asked Alyse why she thought tourists were drawn to the Headless Horseman and Sleepy Hollow, she offered, "if people get a glimpse…*gasping noise* even though they know it's not real." According to her, Sleepy Hollow is the most beautiful in the fall, and that could have become intertwined with "the stories" and a want to spend time in the village.

When asked about her feelings relating to the Headless Horseman and tourism in Sleepy Hollow, Alyse laughed and responded, "I've taken the express course in Headless Horseman lore!" She opened the Cozy Coven because "I love all of this stuff," indicating the magical, spiritual, literary-themed items on the shelves around her with a wave of the hand. The Headless Horseman seemed to be part and parcel of that love; Alyse even made a felt Headless Horseman to display in Cozy Coven for St. Patrick's Day.

After interviewing Alyse, I also spoke with Angelie Wallace, a Black woman who had started working at Cozy Coven about a month before. She was born and raised in nearby Pleasantville, and as of the interview was working on a college degree in English literature.

Angelie first heard about the Headless Horseman from "short stories, or a short story in middle school at one point." She also laughingly referenced Alyse's crash course comment as another source of her own knowledge as well. She mentioned that she is "curious to learn more" about the Headless Horseman because "being here in this type of job setting is the type of place where I'm just learning as I go," and she sees the Headless Horseman as part of that learning process.

Angelie's college background includes classes on Black literature and literary criticism, and she brought that experience to bear during the interview, explaining that she perceives the Headless Horseman, and folklore or literature that uses folklore more generally, as 'things not taught in school," or taught in schools out of context. The lack of context contributes to a marginalization of belief. Since starting work at Cozy Coven, Angelie had become more attuned to the Headless Horseman "symbolism" in Sleepy Hollow, and "fixation" from customers of Cozy Coven; she used the village's orange-and-black fire trucks as an example.

When asked about residents' perceptions of the Headless Horseman and tourism, Angelie answered that "from what I've noticed…people in this town…they seem to be pretty desensitized to it," and for her personally, "Sleepy Hollow is just a place I come to get coffee and spend time by the river." She emphasized that "I think that the people who are talking about it the most are people who are studying it or people who come here to tour and to visit."

However, her time at Cozy Coven was beginning to shape how she experienced Sleepy Hollow and the Headless Horseman: "I think seeing the customers from all across the country come in and ask questions and show their interest in it and just seeing all of the symbolism throughout the town that I never really noticed until now…"

When asked about the effects of tourism on Sleepy Hollow, Angelie responded a few different ways. Firstly, from a personal perspective: "even though I haven't been as in tune with the history here, I strangely find myself resonating with living here the most during the fall seasons and spooky season. Maybe that's me getting in tune with all…the cool shit that goes on here." She also mentioned that since summer was ending, she was "gonna have to start getting to work 30 minutes early just to find parking in a couple weeks." Then, she brought up the demographics of Sleepy Hollow:

> I talked to my boss about demographics a lot when it comes to just the people that visit our shop…Sleepy Hollow has a very large Latin community, and I would say Latinx people and Black people are probably the biggest demographic of people that live here…I've noticed that the people who have questions about these things and who are most in touch…aren't those demographics of people that live here.

Sleepy Coffee Too

Another business I visited was Sleepy Coffee Too, located at the corner of Cortlandt Street and Beekman Avenue in downtown Sleepy Hollow. While there, I spoke with the owner, Kim Caczmarek. Kim is a white woman, from nearby Briarcliff Manor, who moved to Tarrytown in 2004. She taught special education at Sleepy Hollow High School for thirty-five years. Kim started Sleepy Coffee, Too after the COVID-19 pandemic because there were no job opportunities for her students who had graduated: "there hasn't been a coffee shop in town; I mean, there's just not a real coffee shop where you can hang out," (see figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4. Signage displayed by the register in Sleepy Coffee, Too, reflecting the shop's social and casual feel.

When I asked Kim how she first heard about the Headless Horseman, she responded: “It's very interesting that you asked me that, because when my family moved to Briarcliff…the first night we were in our house, my father read the story to us,” (us in this case meaning Kim and her siblings).

When asked who visits the coffee shop, Kim explained that “We have a lot of regulars, but we also have a lot of tourists, and we've had some (I guess) pretty famous influencers come in here and put us on TikTok…and then like last Halloween, because of that…we got slammed. Every day we were packed, we had lines down the block every day, all day, for a month.” In fact, Kim and I paused our conversation several times to check in with her employees or talk to regulars or other visitors.

Kim leaned into describing how the shop is slammed around Halloween, and how the people who visit interpret and support the shop’s mission: “These velvet ropes were outside for crowd control, and I would sit at the door and just tell our story over and over again, because people would be like, ‘Why do we have to wait in line to get a cup of coffee?’ and I tell them like our story, and then they would be like, “Ohh we're waiting.’” Since the shop primarily employs Kim’s former students, she works with her staff to limit the amount of people who can be in the shop at one time, to make sure nobody was or becomes overwhelmed.

Although the fall season is packed, Sleepy Coffee, Too participates in community events year-round, like the St. Patrick’s Day parade or the yearly mermaid festival. Relating to that, Kim emphasized that she “originally” thought the Headless Horseman would be seasonal, but, “it really is all year round, and it’s why we have a big, you know, statue of the Headless Horseman” in the front window of the shop (see figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5. A statue of the Headless Horseman that sits in the front window of Sleepy Coffee, Too. Kim mentioned that staff decorate the statue for other holidays throughout the year.

When I asked Kim about any frustrations connected to the seasonal tourism, she responded, “Our local customers say ‘I'll see you in November,’…They don't even come in because they can't get in, first of all, so you know, it's not frustration towards us…it's frustration just towards the amount of people that come here.”

When the conversation turned to the near-inescapable imagery of the Headless Horseman around town, Kim laughed and said, “I love it!...You know, up until 1996 I think, this was North Tarrytown, and then they changed the name… Once they changed the name, it's like, people started…noticing this area and wanting to be around, you know, anything that had to do with the

legend…. I think it makes it special…I don't feel like it's too much, or I don't get tired of it, it's just part of what you are."

I hadn't heard any other respondents discuss this, so I asked Kim why the village's name was changed. She thought for a second, and replied, "Well I think that there was a, like a movement of some of the residents that…our claim to fame is the legend of Sleepy Hollow, why aren't we calling ourselves that?...But there's some longtime residents that will only call it North Tarrytown…I don't know if you've been down to the other end by the river, but that used to be the General Motors plant, and now it's million-dollar condos."

The Shop

Another fascinating conversation I had was with a shop owner who identified herself as being from Yonkers, but mentioned her family immigrated from Oaxaca, Mexico. Her father owns a shop in the Bronx. She moved to Sleepy Hollow, and opened her store, roughly seven months before the interview took place; she cited motivations including the proximity to the river, the history, and the "local, family-oriented" community with kind people.

She first heard about the Headless Horseman from her dad, based on a local legend in Oaxaca. Her dad worked in a warehouse, and had an encounter with the Headless Horseman, or "saw It once while he was working at night." Later in the interview, the shop owner laughed and referred to her knowledge of her dad's experience: "I wouldn't imagine I'd come here and then see it everywhere!"

When the conversation turned to who visits the shop, she answered that her shop gets a mix of tourists and locals, but there's a lot more tourists starting from mid-August. The yearly schedule and opening hours are partially determined by the shop's main product: there's not enough traffic to keep the shop going during the year, so it's open Thursday to Saturday during

the year, except in the fall. June and July are especially slow because sun and heat are bad for flowers.

When I asked about the racks of Headless Horseman T-shirts sitting in the center of the shop and set next to the window, she answered that often the shirts bring visitors in, but that's not always what they buy. The owner followed this with a description of the spooky bouquets she was planning to make and display for the street fair that would happen in a few weeks.

When I asked how she felt about the Headless Horseman, she responded that, "I like traditions, my parents teach us to keep always our traditions," and that the traditional aspect or association of the Headless Horseman is "why so many tourists come." She elaborated on this idea: "Latinos, for us it is something taught to us, at something like a reunion, and I think that's really important."

Critically, the owner requested personal anonymity as part of the conversation we had, meaning no use of her name and no photos of her or the shop. I've also nebulized some details of the shop and used a pseudonym instead of the shop's real name. She also advised me it might be hard to speak with other Latinx business owners in Sleepy Hollow, which did turn out to be the case, seemingly due to the political climate around immigration and fears of (mis)identification by immigration enforcement agencies.

The Historical Society, Inc. of Sleepy Hollow & Tarrytown

The Historical Society, Inc., of Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown sits at the corner of Neparan Road and Grove Street in Tarrytown (see figure 4.6). When I visited, I spoke with Sara, a white woman and the director, who identified as having lived "here" her "whole life." Sara gave me a walkthrough of the museum and a rundown of the history (the latter of which is described in detail below). The conversation turned to the interview after the tour.



Figure 4.6. A sign for the Historical Society that lay against the wall on a porch on one side of the building.

Sara began by stating “Growing up for me, this was always something here in town…we cherished… it's a little overblown now.” When asked to explain what “overblown” meant in terms of tourism, she responded that “Initially it's a good thing, it helps the village… but the whole downtown's changed.” Bars and antique stores, places meant for locals, became restaurants and boutiques, places that represent how in her eyes Sleepy Hollow is becoming a little more “gentrified” towards tourism. When I mentioned the other businesses I had, Sarah (re)confirmed them as relatively new to the area.

Since the Headless Horseman and tourism seemed to be intertwined in her responses, I asked why she thought the Headless Horseman was such a draw for tourists: “People want it to be a ghost, want it to be real, to be scary.” She also described the Headless Horseman in terms of both Irving’s short story and the Disney cartoon: she called Irving’s Ichabod Crane a

"freeloader," and said that Disney made him a more sympathetic character. When I asked why that change mattered, she referenced the costumes from the Tim Burton movie displayed in the Dicicco & Sons down by the river and explained that some stories were more "faithful" to Irving and to the village of Sleepy Hollow than others, and therefore more palatable to her.

The conversation focused for a while on Washington Irving's history with Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown, and the ways that history may have influenced both his writing and the village today. Sara said that Washington Irving "translated" places and people in his writing, and that "people think it's real because he made those references." When I asked about the realness of the Headless Horseman for residents, Sara described an insistence by tourists and sometimes locals on that realness, but was immediately emphatic that stories are manufactured, created, an idea emphasized in the exhibits as well (see figure 4.7).

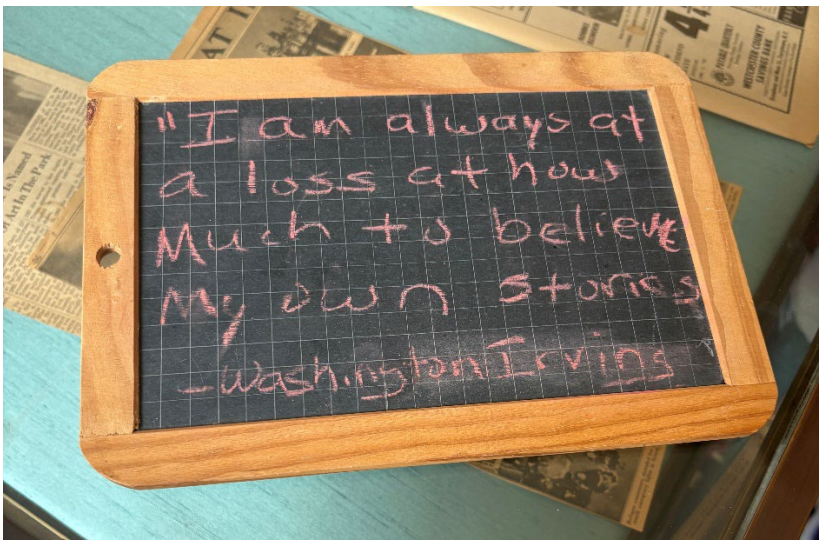

Figure 4.7. A sign displayed in one of the Historical Society's exhibits. The text reads "I am always at a loss at how much to believe my own stories – Washington Irving".

When I started asking questions about the impacts of tourism on Sleepy Hollow, Sara began by stating that the facades of buildings downtown can't change because the village is a

historical district – meaning the village's aesthetic appearance is often outside of individual residents' control. Many of her other comments moved back towards situating the folkloresque narratives in a historical and social context; to her, the Headless Horseman is a means for residents past and present to "process trauma by telling stories." To contemporary residents, "Hessians were like the boogeyman." "Think about the big traumas around here," she urged me, and mentioned her understanding that no specific known Headless Horseman legend circulated before Irving's story was published. As the interview ended, Sara described hearing sentences like "Be careful tonight or the Headless Horseman may come get you," as a child.

Sleepy Hollow Tarrytown Chamber of Commerce

The last interview I undertook in Sleepy Hollow was with Lucia Ballas-Traynor, the executive director of the Sleepy Hollow Tarrytown Chamber of Commerce. Lucia self-identified during our conversation as a bilingual Latina. She lives in Tarrytown, having moved there nine years ago. She has a background working in corporate media. 2025 was her second year in the job as the executive director, but Lucia had been a member of and worked in the Chamber of Commerce for years beforehand.

Lucia launched into the conversation by telling me that pretty much every business she works with was planning something for the "craze" around the Headless Horseman, even the pet store: owners are "really leveraging the legend of Sleepy Hollow to market themselves" in and out of the fall season. She also brought up how the fire department vends at the street fair and did "so well" selling merch that they're expanding this year.

When asked about locals' or residents' experience of the tourism and of the Headless Horseman, Lucia mentioned some of the tours that take place in Sleepy Hollow cemetery: "even

my best friend, a lot of the locals...haven't been on any of the tours...it's mostly visitors from out of town…New Yorkers don't go to your typical tourist places."

The conversation also turned to how residents of Sleepy Hollow are impacted by the tourism economy. Lucia explained that the Hispanic population of Sleepy Hollow is well over 50% of total residents. However, Latino-owned businesses primarily serve Latinos and locals. This means they don't have offerings for tourists, who are primarily white, or aren't interested in broadening their customer base. Some food-based Latino chamber members try to integrate into seasonal events, and some other businesses indirectly benefit because they hire more staff during the fall and keep them on after the tourist season has passed. Lucia also explained that Tarrytown doesn't have as big of a Latino population, around 5%, meaning the businesses in each place have to use different strategies to reach their respective audiences.

Lucia continued, focusing on the yearly street fair, which the Chamber of Commerce manages. According to her, the chamber has set requirements to vend at the street fair. Those requirements include handcrafted products and a social media presence, and the chamber's policy is not to renegotiate criteria for any reason, including for Latino-owned businesses. This results in an overarching challenge to balance inclusivity with integration and event success. Lucia also stressed the importance of monolingual versus bilingual marketing, the latter of which can be "jarring" to tourists, once again leading to her belief that "self-siloed" businesses can't integrate as smoothly into the tourist economy. She also mentioned that not all businesses benefit equally from the busy fall season - the service industry especially takes a hit, because local patrons have a hard time negotiating traffic.

The interview shifted to the context of tourism, and how tourism has shifted over time. Lucia remembered that "in the 1970s, people in North Tarrytown tried to change the name," but

weren't successful until the 1990s, even though tourism and Sleepy Hollow have been "intertwined for a long time." Speaking more recently, Lucia attributed a boost in tourist numbers to the "political climate and a surge in domestic travel." Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the street fair would average 6,000 visitors, for a town of roughly 10,000 residents. However, attendance has risen exponentially: "12,000 two years ago to over 20,000 last year."

Because of this exponential rise in tourist numbers, she called Sleepy Hollow the "Salem of Westchester County." Along with that boost comes issues with logistics, specifically, the struggle with infrastructure. Lucia described how when "infrastructure is the issue, of course the residents are gonna be against" proposals that prioritize tourism. Route 9, the main road through town, is not built for the bumper-to-bumper traffic during the fall season – meaning the Chamber continually has to work to "strike a balance" between the fluctuating needs of businesses and business owners, and the needs of other locals. For Lucia, her work has even caused issues with residents who blame her and the Chamber for problems with parking or daily routines.

Lucia also explained how "tourism is an expense" for village officials: "If you look at any local government, revenue is tied to population, sales tax, parking, [and] property taxes. Tourists aren't residents, and the village has to hire extra personnel…[and] negotiate issues like porta-potties, vandalism, [and] overtime.

In terms of the chamber's role in helping manage the tourism economy, Lucia also named popular seasonal events hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, the Historic Hudson Valley nonprofit, the Historical Society, and Lyndhurst as "all separate events from understaffed nonprofits." There is no tourism office or central coordinating space in Sleepy Hollow, so she sees herself as having a "tourist concierge" role. Although the Chamber of Commerce does take a large role in helping businesses, and businesses "make their year" in the

fall, Sleepy Hollow was "never supposed to be a tourism center." In Lucia's eyes, this means everyone, every resident, business owner, or vendor, takes on the tourist concierge role in some way. As part of this, one of her major projects at the Chamber of Commerce has been a redesign of a map of businesses and sites that the Chamber circulates. Lucia said that the new map "combines tourists and businesses" and was needed to "adjust to a new audience."

Finally, when asked how she personally feels about the Headless Horseman, Lucia described a connection that has grown since she moved to Tarrytown: "I like the history…what a great way to spread the word and immerse yourself in the local history!" She even joked that she wants to be a Sleepy Hollow cemetery guide one day.

History of Sleepy Hollow

There have been a number of books, websites, and publications that chronicle various aspects of the history of Sleepy Hollow, New York. To present the village's history in an abridged form, I will turn again to Sara, the director of the Historical Society. Below is a brief, incomplete history of the village as she recounted to me.[14]

Sleepy Hollow was created in 1776 through arbitrary lines and divisions of settlements that already existed. The Revolutionary War gave more power to tenant farmers, so loyalists in the area moved down to New York City. Sara called the area in and around Sleepy Hollow "sort of the hub of families." By the 19th century, the Hudson River valley was exploding in population, in large part thanks to the river, the railroad, and the post road that ran from New York City through Sleepy Hollow (what remains today is known as Broadway). In 1870, the area was formally named the Terrytown Village, and, in 1874, the area known today as Sleepy

[14] For further reading, see *Legends and Lore of Sleepy Hollow and the Hudson Valley* (2011) by Jonathan Kruk, the "History of the Village" section of the sleepyhollowny.gov website written by Henry Steiner, *G. Washington Slept Here: A Sleepy Hollow Local History* (2021) by Notary Sojak, or *Possessions: the History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (2005) by Judith Richardson.

Hollow split from Tarrytown to become North Tarrytown. In the 1950s, the two villages merged their school system, and Sleepy Hollow High School has always had the Headless Horseman as a mascot partially because of that merger. From the 1800s to 1900s, Sleepy Hollow had a huge manufacturing economy, including a General Motors plant that employed hundreds that closed in 1996. After a complicated and divisive referendum, also in 1996, the village voted to change its name to Sleepy Hollow.

Since the name change in 1996, the area in and around Sleepy Hollow has become increasingly diverse; today, more than 50% Sleepy Hollow residents identify as non-white, Hispanic, or Latinx (Ashford 2023, "Sleepy Hollow, NY Population" 2023, "Mid-Hudson Downtown Revitalization Initiative Template" 2016, "Sleepy Hollow NY Demographics" 2024). "Despite tourbook images of the region as sleepy and timeless, the history of the Hudson Valley has largely been one of unrest, colored by territorial conflicts, social diversity and dissensus, and multiple, contending colonizations…" (Richardson 2005 17). Sleepy Hollow has been the site of displacement, conflict, colonization, war, and sometimes-sudden social and economic change for hundreds of years. The village economy is structured around not only tourism, but manufacturing, service, education, and government job sectors. The folkloresque narratives discussed in chapter one that homogenize the idyllic time of a fictionalized Sleepy Hollow do not acknowledge or center social conflict, marginalization, or inequality, and thus the tourist chronotope of Sleepy Hollow becomes a place where romanticized idyllic time, marginalized historical time, and daily present time are all continually negotiated within a single space. The tourist activities and narratives do not exemplify the modern multicultural nuances of the village – instead they reach back to an imagined past that especially references the folkloresque narratives addressed in chapter one.

The Headless Horseman…He's Everywhere

I traveled to Sleepy Hollow after I visited McLean County. Coming from one fieldwork location where the legend I was seeking had gone out of circulation, I wasn't sure what I would find when I got to the village. Below are a few more photos, taken in and around Sleepy Hollow, to succinctly demonstrate the prevalence of iconography of the Headless Horseman (figures 4.8 to 4.13).



Figure 4.8. The sign in front of Sleepy Hollow High School. The text reads "SLEEPY HOLLOW HIGH SCHOOL | HOME OF THE HORSEMEN | CLASS OF 1986". Before home football games, someone dressed as the Headless Horseman will ride down the field.



Figure 4.9. A patch on the uniform sleeve of a member of the Sleepy Hollow Ambulance Corps.



Figure 4.10. A vinyl sign hung on the fence of a park in downtown Sleepy Hollow. The text reads “OCT. 25 | Sleepy Hollow 10K | RUN MILES OF SCARY FUN | Register at rivertownrunners.org”.



Figure 4.11. The aptly named "Headless Horseman Sculpture" that sits in the median of the road near the "Headless Horseman Bridge" just south of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.



Figure 4.12. Framed concept art for *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* hung in the upper level of DeCicco & Sons Grocery. Also on this level were costumes from Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow,* and one of the grocery's exterior windows featured a large, hand-drawn mural of a Headless Horseman, among other themed décor.



Figure 4.13. A street sign for Legend Drive. Note the Headless Horseman riding along the top of the sign.

Per the definition discussed at the beginning of the chapter, one criterion of the construction and manifestation of a tourist chronotope is the combination of motifs or structures to create the space for the tourist encounters to occur. Here is visual evidence of a constant and cohesive, recognizably related iconography that reinforces the tourism chronotope. This iconography is by-and-large created and prominently placed by residents, like business owners, to take advantage of and perpetuate the tourist chronotope because of the material impact tourists have on the village economy.

Economic Impact of Tourism

The interviews above make evident there's a widespread perception of Sleepy Hollow as a tourist destination and economy among people who live in Sleepy Hollow or work in that economy. The economic impact of tourism on Sleepy Hollow is more complicated than a net positive or negative, since the village does not directly track tourism revenue. As the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce explained, privately owned businesses directly benefit the

most from the tourism economy, along with institutions and historical attractions. However, the village receives no sales tax revenue, since New York state law directs sales tax to the county and state levels. Westchester County generates billions of dollars in tourism revenue each year, and Sleepy Hollow is widely acknowledged as an anchor or linchpin within that structure ("The Latest Economic Data on Westchester's Travel and Tourism Sector" 2025). However, as pointed out by Lucia and Angelie in the interviews above, those dollars from businesses do not trickle down, and are not spread or shared equally: Hispanic- or Latinx-owned businesses often miss out on a direct profit due to the demographics of predominantly English-speaking, white tourists.

Interviewees' Perceptions of Headless Horseman Tourism

Multiple perceptions and interpretations of the seasonal tourism in Sleepy Hollow, and the overlaps between tourism, the village, and the Headless Horseman more generally, emerge from examining the interviews above. Some residents identify positively with the constant presence of the Headless Horseman and understand the effects of the village's somewhat-seasonal tourism as a side effect or a cost worth paying to negotiate. Other residents seem to differentiate between emic identification with the Headless Horseman, and etic perception of the Headless Horseman, especially in terms of "correctness" or historicity of specific narratives or representations of the Headless Horseman, like stories, movies, or legends. Still other residents see the Headless Horseman and the seasonal tourism as a means of an economic or material end, without a personal identification or emotional stake in either. Still other, other residents see the Headless Horseman and seasonal tourism as representative of the social and financial inequalities baked into the economic structure of Sleepy Hollow. Other interpretations could also be presented and argued for. For the purposes of this thesis the possibility and reality of multiple perceptions of the tourist chronotope as it manifests in the combination of seasonal tourism, the

constructed spaces and events, and the iconography of the Headless Horseman complicates the homogenization of narrative and association described in chapter one.

Tourism and Chronotope

To begin to unpack the myriad ideas and patterns evident in the ethnographic conversations above, let's begin by returning to the assumption that the tourist chronotope helps make meaning out of a particular experience, in a particular time and space. Using chronotope to discuss meaning-making through interactions in Sleepy Hollow, New York, evokes both ideas of combination and of identity that were defined in the section at the beginning of this chapter that introduced the concept. This intersection of combination and of social identity is exemplified through the ethnographies described above. The tourist economy is not possible without the tourist chronotope.

Tourism structures that convert a place of residence, or living, of everyday time, into a destination require a "consumption of space by modern tourism…shaping social and physical space to match its ideals and requirements," (Spode 2010 235). This is what has occurred in Sleepy Hollow since the publication of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. His use of local landmarks, and his mentions of local history and families, drives an etic perception of authenticity and has created a fictionalized, tourist chronotope in Sleepy Hollow. Spode writes again that a "tourist concept of authenticity [creates]…a conscious effort to differentiate between spaces," where tourist locales become "places of popular memory" that help develop "local, regional…and national identities," (Spode 2010 245). Sleepy Hollow, the folkloresque narratives associated with and iconic of it, and the tourist chronotope present in the village, continually negotiate the memories and associations related to the motif of the Headless Horseman.

This outside perception of Sleepy Hollow as a tourist destination, which effects a temporal distancing from the everyday time to idyllic time for tourists, requires an assumption that "los 'destinos' no *son* vividos porque son construidos para el disfrute individual de cada visitante…" i.e. "'destinations' are not lived, because they are constructed for the individual enjoyment of each visitor," (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 163). This perception of a destination, a place where experiences are limited, minimizes and potentially marginalizes the experiences of residents who live in Sleepy Hollow year-round. This perception also preferences the tourists' leisure time as described at the beginning of this chapter instead of the residents' everyday time.

The ethnographic encounters recounted in this chapter create a snapshot of resident discourse, discourse that "inflects the critique of the insular idyll while highlighting the possibility (and difficulty) of its transgressing," (Capello 2012 177). Whether overtly supportive of the tourist economy and the constant iconography of the Headless Horseman, residents within Sleepy Hollow consistently make choices that not only transgress and criticize the tourist chronotope but reinforce it. Another takeaway from the various ideas that interlocutors described here is a "despersonalización del visitante-turista que se produce cuando se le integra en un mismo grupo independientemente de los motivos originales que le llevaran allí," a "depersonalization of visitor-tourist that is produced when they are integrated into a single group regardless of the original motives that led them there…" (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 162). Beyond the continual homogenization and deindividualization of tourists, there are multiple two-group dynamics evident from the ethnographies: tourist versus resident, born-and-raised-in-the-area versus moved-to-the-area, immigrant versus non-immigrant, supportive-of-tourism versus dismissive-of-tourism. There is also a group described, of residents that seem to be ambivalent or "desensitized" to the iconography and tourism.

Generally speaking, “el turismo coadyuva a la consolidación de un nuevo régimen de la relación espacio-tiempo,” “tourism contributes to the consolidation of a new regime of the space-time relationship,” (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 158). In this case, the folkloric experience of the Headless Horseman motif in Sleepy Hollow collides with memories or associations from experiences with folkloresque or other mass-media narratives that feature the motif. Without chronotope, it becomes more difficult to describe how folkloric experiences of the motif depend on:

> …una visualización del tiempo en el espacio…por la subordinación del goce del tiempo de ocio —plasmado en un ritmo peculiar— a que se esté en un lugar distinto al habitual…un contexto donde se significan las ideas y se concretan los términos que fundamentan su propia expansión global.
>
> …a visualization of time within space…by the subordination of the enjoyment of leisure time – embodied in a peculiar rhythm – to the condition of being in a place other than one’s usual…a context where ideas are given meaning and the terms that underpin its global expansion are concretized. (Nogués-Pedregal 2012 167).

Nogués-Pedregal is applying the tourist chronotope concept to his fieldwork undertaken in multilingual, multicultural, globalized tourist spaces. Sleepy Hollow is an excellent case study.

Connection to Other Chapters

If chapter one drew the theoretical, textual connections between chronotope and narrative, and chapter two reinforced those textual connections and added an analytical experiential lens, this chapter three is the case study in how chronotopes are negotiated in the everyday. Sleepy Hollow exemplifies what happens when senses and expectations of space and time, occuring when the ideas of local legend, historic happenings, mass-media narratives, and

tourist economy become intertwined through community structure and narrative experience. The chronotope is the commonality across chapters for describing how time and space affect interpretation and experience across folk narratives and folkloresque narratives, with tourism sitting neatly in the grey area between the two.

Conclusion

To conclude, the tourist chronotope describes a manifestation of time and space in a specific place, that involves othering, temporal distancing, the homogenizing of tourists as an etic group, and the combination of motifs to construct a space where time can move between the idyllic, the adventure-encounter, and the everyday. In Sleepy Hollow, where many local businesses are dependent on a seasonal tourist economy to remain in business, individuals associated with those businesses, who identify with being in and sometimes from Sleepy Hollow, must continually negotiate the tourist chronotope. Their thoughts, feelings, and experiences demonstrate how folkloresque narratives in wide circulation, and widespread iconography of the Headless Horseman within Sleepy Hollow, combines with events and a calendar influenced by seasons, to create a tourist perception of Sleepy Hollow as an idyllic place, out of everyday time, a constructed place that distances the past but constructs a past using the Headless Horseman ripe for encountering. This tourist perception is complicated by the inequal impacts of tourism, and the demographic diversity that does not match up with the white-colonial-settler folkloresque narratives in wide circulation. Further analyzing these ethnographies, and conducting new ethnographies with populations underrepresented here, would further augment the evidence to show that Sleepy Hollow, New York, is a place of manufactured tourist chronotope. Further examination of tourism in the surrounding Westchester County, and how the tourist chronotope in Sleepy Hollow is understood on a macro or outsider level, would complicate and add nuance

to the ideas of combination and identity delved into here. The chronotope as a concept, a way of describing the constructed spaces and kinds of time that residents and tourists navigate, also raises larger questions of authenticity, knowledge production, and commoditization in folkloric or folkloresque spaces.

V. CONCLUSION

The temptation to wrap this all up with a low-hanging Headless Horseman pun is strong, but I'll try to keep my head on my shoulders. Joann Conrad's argument that temporality is undertheorized and generally taken for granted in folklore studies is the foundation from which this thesis sprang. But her argument is not where I started. Instead, I began with a question of "What legends of the Headless Horseman are there?" Subsequent research revealed the answer was too unwieldy for a master's thesis to address. Choosing specific narratives that I had a personal interest in and visiting the places associated with those Headless Horsemen soon revealed a figure with deep cultural impact that intertwined the folkloresque and the folkloristic. Temporality as a common thread between the chosen narratives became clear only after the site visits had taken place.

To return to the roller coaster example that began this thesis, the Legend is yet another example of how focusing on alternative kinds of time, in this case chronotopes, can give new depth to a folkloristic exploration of a narrative in context. Superficially, the Legend could be dismissed as a capitalistic construction, too far removed from folkloristic patterns of transmission to be truly folkloristic. Instead, I assumed the ride as folkloresque, with the ride experience a kind of folklore associated with that folkloresque representation. Using markers of ride experience, I argued that riding the Legend roller coaster created an alternate temporality, an interruption in what is often assumed as the "normal" linear-progressive flow of time as described by JoAnn Conrad.

Subsequent chapters of this thesis address alternate temporalities in other narratives of the Headless Horseman. From the introduction's exploration of the Legend roller coaster, chapter one explored *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, and *Sleepy Hollow* as manifesting a war-based idyllic chronotope that distances and romanticizes an

imagined past. From there, I moved to a contemporary legend, the Headless Horseman of McLean County Kentucky, and argued that narratives that featured the Horseman also featured a war-based adventure-time chronotope that forced negotiation of encounters with a historical past. In the third chapter, I explored a chronotope of tourism dependent on both idyllic and adventure time in the village of Sleepy Hollow, New York, and the gulfs between romanticization and history, past and present, distance and encounter, in the everyday. The chapters span media and genres, as well as both fictionalized and real-life places. Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotopes figure prominently in helping to characterize and describe how various alternate temporalities manifest in each narrative and thus affect an individual's experience of the Headless Horseman.

The Headless Horseman as a folkloristic motif represents encounter with and intrusion of the past into a present. I argued that in some cases that intrusion is insulated and contained within a fictionalized narrative, distanced from present-day, first-hand experience through romanticization from the present; in other instances, temporal and spatial markers in the narrative pointed to a chronotope that seemed less contained, chronotopes that could only be experienced first-hand.

It's important to note this thesis is only a beginning. The ideas and fieldwork contained here can be further refined and developed to better demonstrate how alternative temporalities can be (re)lived in narrative, and even how different kinds of time can occur in narratives that feature versions of the same figure. The alternative temporalities explored here are only a sampling of what Joann Conrad's term can encompass. Given that this project is only in the beginning stages, the natural next steps might include delving deeper into the interviews and experiences in the ethnographies explored here, or attempting to speak to populations not included in this first swing (for instance, tourists to Sleepy Hollow, or other residents of McLean County). Further

integration of temporal theory from other scholars besides Mikhail Bakhtin would also help deepen and clarify the connections this thesis makes. Ethnographic and archival-based-exploration of case studies rooted outside of the United States would add complicating dimensions to the discussions of alternate, non-capitalistic temporality begun here. Lastly, analysis of other intersections between temporal theory and folkloristic theory, like Alan Dundes' work on worldview or Michael Dylan Foster's theories of the mobius strip between folklore and the folkloresque, could strengthen and further contextualize each chapter's various arguments.

To bring this conclusion to a head (sorry), this thesis clearly demonstrates on a micro, case-specific level that the Headless Horseman is still a relevant cultural figure, and on a macro, theoretical level that focusing on temporality in analyzing narrative folklore can reveal new insights about how both folklore and the folkloresque are experienced. The Headless Horseman is a useful micro-to-macro way to explore theories of temporality in folklore, since he recurs in many genres, in many places, a consistent figure in shifting contexts.

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