

## “Pioneers for the Mind”: Embodiment, Disability and the De-hallucination of American Empire

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This essay charts the discursive dependency between the ideology of US expansionism during its most aggressive period (1803-1845) and the social construction of disability. My case study is Washington Irving’s ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’. Ichabod Crane —the tale’s agent of national expansion— oscillates between embodied and disembodied states of being. His absent/present body illustrates the larger tension between a nascent US imperialism and the egalitarian republicanism of the national creed. Using Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage, I theorize Ichabod’s disabled body as an important visual cue of imperial formations: an incomplete body politic to be rehabilitated through the creation of empire. When citizens of the early republic stared into the collective mirror of their national literature, they discerned a fragmented and shapeless body politic. This traumatic exposure produced a compensatory reverie in which onlookers hallucinated nation and empire as complete, cohesive entities. Undoing this assemblage, Ichabod’s anomalous, ever-changing body symbolizes the incongruous US body politic and invites readers to de-hallucinate American empire, exposing the artificial wholeness of body and nation.

Keywords: US expansionism; disability; Washington Irving; Lacan; body politic; imperialism; national allegory

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## “Pioneros del espíritu”: personificación, discapacidad y la des-alucinación del imperio americano

Este artículo examina la dependencia entre el discurso expansionista de EE. UU. en su apogeo histórico (1803-1845) y la construcción social de la discapacidad. Mi análisis se centra en ‘La Leyenda de Sleepy Hollow’, de Washington Irving. Ichabod Crane, el protagonista y agente expansionista del relato, alterna estadios corpóreos e incorpóreos. Su cuerpo discapacitado recrea el conflicto entre el imperialismo estadounidense en su fase embrionaria y los valores igualitarios y republicanos del credo nacional. A modo de marco teórico, la fase del espejo de Lacan nos permite redefinir el cuerpo discapacitado de Ichabod como una referencia visual clave

en el imaginario imperialista: un cuerpo incompleto cuya satisfactoria rehabilitación conlleva la creación y agrandamiento de un imperio. Cuando los ciudadanos estadounidenses empezaron a producir y asimilar imágenes del colectivo nacional, se encontraron con un ‘cuerpo político’ informe y fragmentado. Esta revelación traumática empujó a una alucinación compensatoria en la que imperio y nación aparecían como entidades bien definidas. Entendido como la antítesis de dicho ensamblaje, Ichabod materializa un cuerpo político estadounidense deshilvanado e inconexo. Mediante este cuerpo discapacitado, Irving invita a sus lectores a ‘des-alucinar’ el imperio americano y desenmascarar la supuesta totalidad de cuerpo y nación.

Palabras clave: expansionismo de EE. UU.; discapacidad; Washington Irving; Lacan; cuerpo político; imperialismo; alegoría de la nación

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Washington Irving’s ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ (1996b: 291-318) ends in sheer contradiction. After local bully Brom Bones disguises himself as the Headless Horseman and scares Ichabod Crane away from Tarry Town, Irving bifurcates the plot somewhat disconcertingly: on the one hand, a local farmer claims that Ichabod, the unbecoming pedagogue and “singing-master”, had relocated “to a distant part of the country; had kept school and studied law at the same time, had been admitted to the bar, turned politician, electioneered, written for the newspapers, and finally had been made a justice of the Ten Pound Court”; on the other, though, the town’s “old country wives” insist that “Ichabod was spirited away by supernatural means” and that “the tranquil solitudes of Sleepy Hollow” still resound with his “melancholy psalms” (Irving 1996b: 317-18). Haunting and civilizing the American wilderness at once, Ichabod is put to a strange, antithetical task by the author. Through this impossible assignment, this essay argues, Irving taps into a generalized anxiety about the geopolitical expansion of the United States.

When this tale appeared in the definite edition of *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1820), Irving’s audiences encountered important questions. What narrative of the national future was there to uphold: the institutional or the supernatural, the material or the spectral, the one in which citizens occupy new frontiers or that other one in which a disembodied voice finds itself sempiternally tied to the point of departure? In short, was American expansion a ghostly or a practical enterprise? Why did Irving imbricate the two? Ichabod’s complex personification of the US body politic opens up some of these questions. Examining Ichabod Crane as an anxious political allegory allows us to unearth the text’s deep concern with national futurity and to overcome, as a result, those interpretations that simplify it as Irving’s compensatory gesture for a non-existent American past (Hoffman 1993: 86-87; Fiedler 2003: 25-26). More significantly, this approach reveals a reciprocity between figurative embodiment and the imperialist discourse of US expansion. This reciprocity explains the centrality of the present/absent body in this and other narratives of nation-building, as the collective task of consolidating the territorial and identitarian US boundaries hinges on anomalous bodies like Ichabod’s, bodies that appear, disappear, stretch and break apart with ostensible facility.

Inquiring into the motives, unfolding and implications of Irving’s unresolved ending, this article reads ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ as a tale of disembodied pioneering that dramatizes the identification mechanisms through which US citizens embraced an embryonic national identity. A critical paradigm for these instances of identification emerges in every scene in which Ichabod assumes an image of himself: from broken-mirror reflections to sustained analogies with African Americans to the final *vis-à-vis* with the Headless Horseman, these images are never consistent. The author drives Ichabod into specular associations that increase readers’ awareness of the US body politic as a disabled —mostly fragmented— construct. Thus, Irving’s allegory —via Ichabod— of the expansionist US offers an interesting case study that pushes scholars toward new directions. Approaching the body politic through the lenses of disability theory suggests

the critical road less travelled, one that leads to allegorical embodiments in which empire is not materialized through an athletic colossus but a cripple. Unmasking the fiction of disability paves the road for our understanding of the fictions of American empire, its racialized taxonomies, its dynamics of exclusion and the failures of its democratic pledge.

The tale's duplicitous conclusion, alternating Ichabod's embodied and spectral manifestations, does not come unannounced. From the outset, Irving describes the newly-arrived pedagogue in terms of lack rather than endowment: "tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together" (1996b: 293). Based on Ichabod's abnormal physique as a mirror-image of the body politic, the following pages trace this discursive conjunction between imperialism and physical disability, eventually postulating that a disabled body often acts as an expansionist body: its ontological deformities and absences perpetuating the promise of prosthetic amendment and augmentation. Positing citizens' bodies as 'lacking' entities, US imperialists buoyed their project of endless completion. In 'Sleepy Hollow', Irving disarticulates this principle by conflating Ichabod's expansionist body —politic— with the no-body of a ghost. That is, Ichabod succeeds in enlarging the national territory only as long as his ghostly counterpart remains stuck in square one. If the rhetorical appropriation of disability by US imperialism suggests that tomorrow's incorporation depends on today's corporeal fragmentation, Irving introduces Ichabod's disembodied pioneering —the simultaneous dematerialization of the body and expansion of the body politic— as the *reductio ad absurdum* of such logic.

## 2. DISEMBODIED PIONEERING

Later sections will explore, via psychoanalytic and disability theory, Irving's precocious awareness of the discursive cross-fertilization between imperialism and physical disability, as he articulates it through Ichabod, whose insatiable appetite and endless consumption of resources narrows his frame instead of aggrandizing it. For now, it is useful to situate Ichabod, first and foremost, as one of US historiography's predilect subjects: the pioneer. His inland movement to Sleepy Hollow heralds the later displacements of the western frontier during the first half of the nineteenth century. Like 'Rip Van Winkle' (1996c: 33-49), the other most anthologized tale from *The Sketch-Book*, 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' dabbles in a chronology of profound political transformation. Both stories orchestrate abrupt jumps between the isolated colonial past preserved in the Hudson Valley's Dutch settlements and a narrative present in which the post-Revolution republic struggles to assert its identity. Irving's doppelgänger narrator, the antiquarian Diedrich Knickerbocker, voices a nostalgic lament that also rings a note of nervousness toward "the great torrent of emigration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country" (1996b: 293). By the time of the story's publication, this restlessness was far from abiding: between 1816 and 1821, James Monroe's government

had annexed as states a fair expanse of the territories gained in the Louisiana Purchase (1803), while the echoes of the Lewis and Clark expedition had already implanted in the minds of Americans a divinely ordained call to build their nation from sea to shining sea.

Ichabod Crane represents those who embraced this call wholeheartedly. Halfway through the story, the schoolmaster's unleashed fancy “presented to him the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a wagon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangling beneath; and he beheld himself bestriding a pacing mare, with a colt at her heels, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where” (1996b: 300). Constantly referred to as a “morsel”, Katrina does not originate desire herself as much as provide Ichabod with the means to enlarge both his biological body and the republican body politic (2000: 298-99). Irving de-eroticizes Ichabod's desire for Katrina Van Tassel, turning it into a national fantasy of expansion and social reproduction. Since the story is set c.1790, Irving orients Ichabod and his prospective offspring toward two territories about to enter the Union as states: Kentucky (1792) and Tennessee (1796). The third alternative, “the Lord knows where”, ironizes the providential call of Manifest Destiny, as God's own hand was believed to guide the expansion and occupation of the West (Stephanson 1996: 6-15).

Removed Native American nations and enslaved people of African descent remained on the losing end of this process. Historian Reginald Horsman has explained US expansion by means of its alliance with Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy and biological essentialism so that, even if “the Indian policy of Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe was based on ideas of improbability stemming from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment”, such notion of improbability soon receded and was supplanted by the scientific racism behind polygenesis—the assumption that different races do not share a traceable common ancestry—and phrenology (1981: 114). These theories justified removal, exploitation and genocide by offering “irrefutable” evidence of Africans' and Indians' innate inferiority. In the infamous words of slavery apologist Thomas R. Dew: “the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots” (qtd. in Horsman 1981: 123). In result, territorial expansion was not a by-product but the direct consequence of a pseudo-scientific determinism reified through physiognomic variations of skin, size, sex and complexion. Racialized hierarchies shaped Manifest Destiny into an imperial project of subjection deeply at odds with the democratic values that expansionists had promised to extend to the furthest continental corners and beyond. Official racism impelled US expansion while visibly debunking the egalitarian principles at the core of its sacrosanct mission. Even if the republic could only stretch through the movement, reproduction and physical toil of actual bodies populating the landscape, otherized African and Indian bodies foiled national growth or, at least, compromised its liberal agenda.

In ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’, Ichabod's ambivalent fate as both a thriving stalwart of the US body politic and a bodiless spirit plays out these appropriations of the human body by expansionist discourse. Scholars of US imperialism, like John Carlos Rowe, have outlined the process by which “peoples of color, women and workers consistently

colonized *within* the United States” mingled “with a variety of ‘foreign’ peoples successively colonized by the United States *outside* its territorial borders”. From the point of view of the colonized subject, this internal/external dimension proved almost irrelevant, as its rhetorical justification “could be deployed for new foreign ventures even as it was required to maintain the old systems of controlling familiar groups within the United States” (Rowe 2000: 8). Given the era’s aggressive expansionism, this process had no end in sight. The desire to aggrandize the borders of the republic overlapped with a Nativist apprehension toward the different alterities that successive incorporations presented to a male, ableist, Anglo-Saxon standard of citizenship. Even Walt Whitman’s extolment of American inclusiveness was not exempt from the anxiety of incorporation: “Is this then a touch? Quivering me to a new identity”, asked the poet (2002: 684). Like Whitman, many US citizens shuddered at the ‘new identities’ grafted onto the national body with every annexation. Against the nationalist emphasis on enclosure, expansionism and a nascent imperialism constantly re-opened and sutured their body politic around wider areas of influence.

This precarious equipoise between democratic aggrandizement and the domestic tyrannies of slavery and Indian removal culminated in two key episodes of US political history parallel to Irving’s literary production: the Missouri Compromise (1819-1821) —aiming to resolve the body politic’s internal imbalances— and the Monroe Doctrine (1823) —destined to present a homeostatic American body politic in the eyes of the world. The House of Representatives drafted the Missouri Compromise as a short-term solution to the crisis of slavery, stipulating that, for every annexed free state, a new slave state should follow. Although this intended harmony was believed to prevent dissenting parties from abandoning the Union, the political assemblage that ultimately emerged from the Compromise barely concealed the widening cracks between slave and free states, especially as the western territories awaited incorporation. With every annexation, it became more obvious that the republic was disintegrating. Looking back to the Missouri Compromise, Abraham Lincoln illustrated its true outcome through a cancer metaphor: “Thus, the thing [institutional slavery] is hid away, in the constitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death” (1922: 118). The powers behind the Missouri Compromise refrained from ‘cutting’ the national body politic and allowed the ‘cancer’ of slavery to metastasize instead. Ichabod’s expansive, fragmentary and ultimately ethereal anatomy proves indeed an apt correlate to this image: his limbs might reach out for miles, but his body would always be “loosely hung together” before vanishing into thin air.

James Monroe participated ardently in the Missouri debates (Brickhouse 2004: 15-32; Murphy 2005: 17-32). His efforts to eradicate slavery at home occurred almost simultaneously with his eponymous doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine cordoned off the American hemisphere against European intervention, yet its proto-imperialist maneuver also aimed to create a subtle tie of dependency between the US and newly independent American nations such as Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela and Chile. Like Irving did with

Ichabod, Monroe also assigned himself an impossible task, wanting to appease the internal schism around slavery by conflating the national territory with the entire American continent. In his 1823 State of the Union Address, the Doctrine’s official inception, Monroe alleged that “by enlarging the basis of our system and increasing the number of States the system itself has been greatly strengthened in both its branches” (2004: 290). Nonetheless, the escalating North-South hostility soon curbed the government’s belief that a bigger body politic would result in a healthier one.

The intellectual history behind the Missouri Compromise and the confrontations it aimed to resolve — at best only postponing them — paves the road for our understanding of the Monroe Doctrine. Seen as a corollary to the Missouri Compromise, the Monroe Doctrine facilitated a shield and a sword: a shield to defend the hemisphere from European imperialism and a sword for the US to instigate its own American empire. That shield also meant to cover up the dramatic schisms within the republic. Emerging from this atmosphere of dissent and separatism, ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’ suggests that maybe nobody was willing to show up and hold the shield and the sword, that nation-building constituted, after all, a project of disembodiment.

In fact, Irving’s sketch predates several explorations of disembodiment at pivotal moments in US literary and intellectual history. In ‘Nature’ (2007: 15-58), for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously conceptualized a transcendental relationship between the American man and his vast continent. For the Concord philosopher, individuals could “own the landscape” only after shedding the material burden of the flesh and transmogrifying themselves into a “transparent eye-ball” (2007: 18). An immaterial eye, not a hand, was to colonize America. Emerson’s volatilization of the body, like Irving’s, was not devoid of contradiction. Namely, Emerson also hesitated between the world of the flesh and those transparent states that transcend it. In his most ardent expansionist plea, Emerson reminded the “Young American” that “any relation to the land, the habit of tilling it, or mining it, or even hunting on it, generates the feeling of patriotism” (1983: 216). But transparent eyeballs do not dig wells nor do they plow the fields. Both Emerson and Irving wonder which is the best option for the US citizen at the dawn of an expansionist era: whether to make history or to haunt it from the margins, to remain an active body within a system that discriminates and brutalizes other ‘inferior’ bodies or to transcend the confines of his body and body politic into an immaterial state of contemplation and inaction.

Escaping the anatomical strictures of the body, jumping out of the epidermis into an alternative, more mobile and fluid existence no doubt invigorated the restless expansionist spirit, but it also enacted a democratic fantasy of absolute sameness. For Ichabod and Emerson, dislodging the self from the body constitutes a gesture of liberation and, simultaneously, of denunciation: an empowering move toward a life of the mind fraught with possibility and, occasionally, at last, desperate resort in the face of ostracism and violence. At once a successful pioneer body and a ghost haunting the pioneered locales left behind, Ichabod delivers an insightful comment on the antithetical crusade of US

expansion, a crusade that tried to augment the nation without jeopardizing its egalitarian foundation. Caught in disembodiment's discursive trap, Ichabod escapes neither his body nor the authority that a patriarchal, xenophobic community has inscribed on it.

This trapping gains relevance as Irving converts Ichabod into a proxy for the national corporation. Politicking his way into public office, Ichabod does not merely symbolize the national community; he becomes officially inscribed within it. The problem is that he also remains a ghost. Embodiment and disembodiment carry out different tasks, it seems. Stranded between corporeal and disembodied states of being, the American pioneers imagined by Irving and Emerson struggle to harmonize both in order to safeguard the national crusade: to occupy the continent and to lead the world into economic, technological and intellectual progress. Irving's choice of Ichabod as an agent of US ascendancy reveals the author's uncertainty about the national self, as seen, for example, when Irving ironizes Ichabod's roots in Connecticut, "a State which supplies the Union with pioneers for the mind as well as for the forest, and sends forth yearly its legions of frontier woodsmen and country schoolmasters" (1996b: 293). Here, Irving categorically separates those characters qualified to tame America's uncharted geographical spaces from those "pioneers for the mind" in charge of developing the national character. This divide recalls the Cartesian mind/body dualism, whose split between embodied and disembodied planes of existence hampers the expansionist project outlined in Ichabod's pioneering delusions and in the model of national growth assumed in the Missouri Compromise and the Monroe Doctrine. Irving's cast of characters substantiates this Cartesian divide: as I will discuss later, the weedy Ichabod is the tale's expansionist actor, whereas the hyper-embodied and muscular Brom Bones stands for a Jeffersonian ideal of yeomanry immobility that disdains the early nineteenth-century quest for unlimited expansion and centralized government.

Halfway between Ichabod's evanescent frame and Bones's blunt physicality, Irving introduces the fragmented, disabled body. Physical disability, understood as the social construction of impairment, lends Irving a useful primer.<sup>1</sup> Through it, he verbalizes the distress that befalls the American hero when he fails to harmonize his transcendent and material obligations, among them, to fulfill the imperial designs of Manifest Destiny without losing his innate innocence. Unlike impairment, "disability is a representation", claims Rosemarie Garland Thomson, meaning that the disabled body always arises from a specific referential context: legal, scientific, artistic, etc (1997: 6). To Thomson's list, I add Ichabod's catalogue of embodiments and disembodiments, which unveil disability as a fabrication buttressing the normative discourses of nationalism and imperialism. As already mentioned, Ichabod's disorganized body speaks to the political community he belongs to. His westward movement has inspired Donald Pease to interpret Ichabod as

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, *impairment* means the existence of a corporeal lack or anomaly (e.g. missing limb), whereas *disability* stands for a disadvantage imposed on the impaired individual by a social order desensitized to bodily difference (Siebers 2008: 65-68, Russell 2011: 72-74).



an agent of progress who fails to transform his community of arrival, being transformed—if not destroyed—by it in reverse (1987: 17). Revisiting Pease’s suggestive framing, I consider Ichabod a simultaneous agent and victim of US western expansion, a catalyst of national progress who does not hesitate to deploy violent methods in his mission and, at the same time, a victim whose non-normative body becomes heavily racialized through recurrent comparisons with African American bodies and who cannot endure the mirror vision of the Headless Horseman, a nightmarish reminder of Ichabod’s bodily disorders and of the fragmentary body politic of the post-Revolution state.

### 3. IMPERIAL ARMOR: THE BODY (POLITIC) IN THE MIRROR STAGE

What kind of anti-imperialist critique, then, drips from Irving’s tale of disembodied pioneering? I opened my argument characterizing Ichabod as a problematic mirror image of US imperial aspirations, a mirror image that resuscitates in the encounter with the Hessian Horseman. These specular associations recall Jacques Lacan’s theory of corporeality and self-identity known as the “mirror stage”. In order to elucidate the interrelationship between disability, embodiment and empire, the theory of the mirror stage renders a useful analysis of imperial epistemologies and their signifiers’ dependence on physical disability. This section and the close readings that follow show how Irving’s narrative of disembodiment reverses the constitutive process of the mirror stage and exposes the imperial body politic of the US as a fragmented, phantasmatic and impossible venture in its racial heterogeneity. The mirror stage provides a critical paradigm that unlocks the idealized figuration of a well-bounded and coherent nation-state in perpetual expansion, especially as this ideal animated specific resolutions like the Missouri Compromise and the Monroe Doctrine. On the contrary, Ichabod’s embodiment and disembodiment of the US unmasks this idealized construction precisely by undoing the mirror stage’s assemblage. Also, because this narrative exposure connects us with ulterior modes of signification and identification embedded in language itself, my argument concludes by labeling Irving’s reversal of the mirror stage a ‘de-hallucination’ process rather than a return to reality.

Briefly put, the mirror stage theorizes self-perception by examining the turning point in which a human baby stops seeing his or her own arm, leg or abdomen as ‘parts’ and re-organizes them into a differentiated whole after looking at his or her reflection in a mirror. What the mirror stage teaches us, then, is that the self can only be defined externally; that is, by means of an image of the self that lies *outside* the self. Fuelled by this unresolved paradox, the mirror stage gains explanatory weight throughout Lacan’s career: from a developmental phase (“historical value”, 1936) to a permanent model of subjectivity (“structural value”, 1950s). According to the latter model, the mirror stage explains the “formation of the ego through the identification with an image of the self” (Homer 2005: 18). Lacan stresses the dynamics of this “identification”, which he describes as “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (2002: 4).

No doubt, the body's materiality focalizes this assumption. Any instance of identification—understood in Lacanian terms—revolves around the body.

The mirror stage shifts our perception of the body from a collection of scattered parts, organs and functions, also called “*imagos*”, to a totalizing whole—or “*gestalt*”—larger than the sum of its parts (Lacan 2002: 6, 13). This *gestalt* reconfiguration creates an illusion of corporeal autonomy that compensates for and tries to minimize our myriad bonds of dependency with the external world—starting with the baby's dependency on the body of the mother. This fiction of corporeal self-reliance feeds the ableist discourse that pervades Western society since the eighteenth century. Whereas physical disability accentuates our dependency on the world outside the flesh (through prostheses, technological implements, monitored assistance), the *gestalt* form of the mirror stage induces a clear-cut division between itself and the surrounding environment. On the contrary, disabled persons—especially after amputation or disfigurement—have a harder time demarcating their own individuality, given their subordination to external agents.

It is at this point that disability and psychoanalytical theory cross paths. Lennard Davis has pioneered—somewhat timidly—a connection between disability and the mirror stage, a connection that I intend to fortify by triangulating it with psycho-historical representations of empire. Davis explains the social nervousness around the disabled body by means of a mirror stage gone astray. First, he invokes Lacan's notion of self-formation as a movement from the *corps morcelé*—a shapeless collection of scattered body parts or *imagos*—to the “enforced unifying of these fragments through the hallucination of a whole body”. After recreating the mirror stage's hallucinated wholeness, Davis introduces the variable of disability:

the disabled body is a direct *imago* of the repressed fragmented body. The disabled body causes a kind of hallucination of the mirror phase gone wrong. The subject looks at the disabled body and has a moment of cognitive dissonance, or should we say a moment of cognitive resonance with the earlier state of fragmentation. Rather than seeing the whole body in the mirror, the subject sees the repressed fragmented body . . . the true self of the fragmented body. (1995: 139)

For Lacan and Davis, the fragmented body does not derive from extraordinary circumstances (e.g. accidents, diseases). It rather represents humans' *a priori* condition. “True self” and “fragmented body” join the same equation, an equation too often overlooked, given that our embrace of the anatomic *gestalt* projected in the mirror represses this disjointed self. As a consequence of such repression, the triumphant ableist “ego” shuns those images of physical disability that connect us back with a pre-mirror stage, uncanny version of our bodies. Disability, therefore, interpellates an earlier vision of the self: dependent, abnormal and incomplete.

Is the mirror stage, then, a psychic mechanism to help us cope with our innate disability? In the following extract, Lacan comes close to an answer: “For the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of

the body to what I will call an ‘orthopedic’ form of its totality —and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development” (2002: 6). The totality of the body can only be “orthopedic”: its wholeness does not rest on its flesh and bones but on a symbolic “armor” that integrates anatomical fragments into a whole. Here Lacan rescues Sigmund Freud’s view of man as a “prosthetic God”, a vulnerable being whose survival depends on his body’s technological extensions (1962: 76). Freud’s tenet presupposes human civilization as a sustained endeavor to overcome our many disabilities. From our physiological dependence on oxygen, water and food to our bodies’ incapacity to fly on their own, disability might comprehend a wider catalogue of restrictions than the specific corporeal anomalies we tend to consider ‘disabled’. Above all, disability entails a complication of personal and political boundaries whose most dire consequence is a redefined notion of the ‘self’ as an artificial (‘orthopedic’) amalgamation. The individual is no longer a whole larger than the sum of its parts; it is just parts.

Bodies politic are also ‘orthopedic’. The mirror stage’s endless currency in cultural studies derives from the way in which texts build reflective surfaces where individuals and their larger political structures assume images of themselves —to paraphrase Lacan’s own take on “identification”. In these mirror images, self and community sublimate their fractures and inconsistencies into a solidified vision that replaces fragmentation with wholeness. But how exactly does a human community look in a mirror? What kind of gestalt arises from their collective instantiation? And what kind of cohesive “armor” is imposed on them within a specific imperialist context? Benedict Anderson famously defined the nation-state as an “imagined community”: a fiction that gains traction through the wheels of the print-capitalism machinery (2006: 6-7, 36). Popularized forms of communal representation lead to the corporeal metaphor of the body politic, which translates institutional hierarchies, foundational myths and supremacist ideologies into visible and tangible form. The national body politic, then, unfolds as a synchronized mirror stage of its citizens. Taking a shared cue from Anderson and Lacan, we can rethink nation and empire as “imagined communities” that build and enlarge their respective gestalts through cultural artifacts working as mirrors.

These collective instances of identification foster the analogy between disabled bodies and bodies politic. Like the body politic, the disabled body —not to be confused with the impaired one— is also a metaphorical body, one that is socially constructed through the mirror stage in accordance with dominant social values. Therefore, disabled bodies share with the figurative construct of the body politic a capacity to incarnate collective desires, phobias and tensions. Because they need urgent repair, disabled bodies contribute ready-made referents to national and imperial quests for consolidation and hegemony. Thus, disability acts as a cable ferry that bounces back and forth between the parallel shores of the colonized body and the imperial body politic. The fascinating paradox is how, when devoid of their signifying potential, disabled persons travel from the center of national identification to its abject margins. Amidst the constant reformulations of the US body politic, its members have traditionally sought stability by differentiating their own

corporeal form against its deviant variations. Re-establishing the centrality of disability in Lacan's thought, we realize that disability, like racial and sexual difference, adds to the negative space of the national mirror image. Against this no-zone, our psyche projects a normative 'armor' that converts the body from an *imago* into a gestalt. In this negative space of national identification, disability has traditionally performed a double task as both the marker of a discriminated minority —people with disabilities— and a pseudo-scientific vehicle to undermine the humanity of subaltern groups. US culture ostracized 'cripples' at the same time it used the social stigma of disability to 'cripple' women, African Americans and homosexuals (Thomson 1997: 5; Baynton 2001: 34).

Lacan's theory offers a toolkit to interpret the relays between material bodies and allegorical bodies politic. In such relays, the body no longer functions as a fleshly reality but a metaphorical vehicle that signifies a given community. The mirror stage can explain, first, the individual self as a gestalt agglutination of scattered *imagos* and, second, the body politic as a gestalt agglutination of individual selves apt for citizenship. As I am about to show, Irving unveils, via Ichabod's body and body politic, the totalizing fictions supporting such constructs.

#### 4. ICHABOD'S HUNGER

If the mirror stage enables our grasp of a whole body/body politic, Irving upends this sequence, moving from corporeal wholeness into scattered *imagos* and eventually into a disembodied form, tapping into widespread fears about the deficient enclosures of ableism, nationalism and imperialism. In a brief scene charged with Lacanian overtones, Ichabod gets ready for an evening gathering at the Van Tassels' farm by "arranging his looks by a bit of broken looking-glass" (Irving 1996b: 305). Arranging one's looks denotes a more complicated process than just looking at one's self in the mirror. The fractured image that Ichabod beholds also stands for the different impressions he intends to awake in the community, arranging the way he looks but also anticipating —and responding to— his neighbors' gazes. The implications of this shattered self-image become painfully obvious in the dance sequence in which the schoolmaster aims to win Katrina's favor. Ichabod "fatally prided himself upon his dancing as much as upon his vocal powers" (1996b: 308). His fatal mistake is precisely to disregard the Cartesian split and freely interchange mind and body. This flawed judgment provides a common denominator to his overall frustrations; namely, his inability to materialize his grandiloquent imagination into physical form.

Ichabod's actual performance could well stand as a paradigmatic scene in Irving's catalogue of bodily disorganizations: "Not a limb, not a fiber about him was idle; and to have seen his loosely hung frame in full motion, and clattering about the room, you would have thought Saint Vitus himself . . . was figuring before you in person" (1996b: 309). Not only that, Ichabod's spasmodic hop also awakens "the admiration of all the negroes; who, having gathered, of all ages and sizes, from the farm and the neighborhood, stood forming a pyramid of shining black faces at every door and window, gazing with delight at the scene, rolling their white eyeballs and showing grinning rows of ivory from ear to ear"

(1996b: 309). Ironically enough, Ichabod’s body resonates with the corporeal eccentricities with which African Americans were perceived in US soil: “amusingly long or bowed legs, grotesquely big feet, bad posture” (Baynton 2001: 40). Irving depicts the dancing Ichabod through minstrel stereotypes traditionally imposed on African Americans, which explains the sympathy nexus arising in the dance scene.

Although it is not my goal to reconcile Irving’s politics into a sustained and coherent project, the marginal presence of African Americans in the story suggests that Irving’s skeptical anti-imperialism was not exempt from a racialist frame of mind. We first encounter the disturbing presence of blackness in the institutional space of the schoolhouse or, as the narrator calls it, Ichabod’s “little empire” (1996b: 295). In fact, the schoolmaster adheres to the axiom “[s]pare the rod and spoil the child”, deploying physical punishment and combining violence and paternalism in the formation of new citizen subjects (1996b: 294). One afternoon, Ichabod’s lesson is “suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a negro, in tow-cloth jacket and trowsers, a round-crowned fragment of a hat, like the cap of Mercury, and mounted on the back of a ragged, wild, half-broken colt” (1996b: 304). Irving portrays the black messenger in parodical fashion. To his fake crown vaguely resembling “the cap of Mercury”, the writer adds the pompous air with which the anonymous visitor does his errand: “having delivered his message with that air of importance, and effort at fine language, which a negro is apt to display on petty embassies of this kind, he dashed over the brook . . . full of the importance and hurry of his mission” (1996b: 304). Irving’s mockery of the pretentious African American betrays the author’s embrace of the racist infantilization of African Americans. Through their stereotypical presentation, black characters in ‘Sleepy Hollow’ constitute marginal figures whose exclusion from public spaces of government and education contrasts with their menial service as messengers, connecting a community that has excluded them.

The story’s racial landscape accurately echoes the broader historical configuration of the Hudson Valley. Already by 1625, coffles of slaves brought to New Netherland by the Dutch West India Company operated as “municipal workers, building and repairing fortifications, roads, warehouses, and other structures of the corporate state” (Moore 2005: 37). The equation between Ichabod, a “Connecticut Yankee” paving the road for American progress, and the subaltern black audience that enjoys his dance anticipates the story’s dichotomous ending. Before activating the definite split between Ichabod’s corporeal presence and his spectral absence, Irving orchestrates the dance sequence at the Van Tassel’s in such a way that Ichabod resides both at the center of the respectable, white, land-owning community of Tarry Town and at the nearly invisible margins populated by African slaves —slavery remained legal in New York until 1827.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the

<sup>2</sup> Irving’s published and unpublished works lack any profound meditation on slavery. At most, he jotted down undeveloped portraits of slaves and free blacks in his travel journals across the South. Burstein comments that Irving “was not above making racist remarks” in his personal and public writings, but “neither was he interested in making excuses for slave owners” (2007: 80, 260-61). Neither an abolitionist, nor an apologist for the peculiar institution, Irving’s ambivalence toward the slave question is best felt through the marginal appearances of black characters in his

“broken glass”, Irving’s blackening of Ichabod provides another specular identification that shows the protagonist as a fragmentary entity and upends the mirror stage’s sequence of addition and completion.

Irving characterizes Ichabod’s bodily discontents and expansionist thrust through a triple front of hunger: physiological, sexual and cultural. Like a bag with a hole, Ichabod is never full. A “huge feeder” who, “though lank, had the dilating powers of an anaconda”, Ichabod’s elastic framework symbolizes a specific type of expansionist body politic, for Ichabod cannot stop eating and, yet, his body always deflates back to its original shape (1996b: 295). Hunger also becomes a sexual trope. As already mentioned, Irving depicts Katrina Van Tassel through gastro-erotic metaphors: “She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge, ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father’s peaches” (1996b: 298). The fertile landscape of the Van Tassels farm awakens Ichabod’s culinary yearnings. While the protagonist contemplates “the fat meadowlands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat” (1996b: 299), Irving halts his narrative and captures Ichabod’s rapture in extended catalogues. Through these plethoric ecstasies, Irving depicts Ichabod as a believer in the quintessential American promise of opportunity and wealth. Therefore, the schoolmaster does not yearn only at the fruits of the land but the land itself, configuring a vision of domesticity — “pots and kettles” in his pioneer’s wagon— and endless natural resources, a vision guaranteed by westward movement and annexation.

Far from a mere physiological pulsion, Ichabod’s hunger visualizes future consolidation and growth. His desire to settle the land of “Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where” with his offspring overlaps with a nationwide impetus to territorialize America. Ichabod’s “devouring mind’s eye” contemplates “every roasting-pig running about with a pudding in his belly, and an apple in his mouth”. Beholding such prospect, “his imagination expanded with the idea” (1996b: 299). Like Emerson’s “transparent eyeball”, Ichabod’s insatiable “mind’s eye” also intends to comprehend the landscape. Of course, the underlying anxiety is that the encroaching moves of the mind’s eye/transparent eyeball take place only as figments of the imagination. Only imagination and vision expand. Ichabod remains a “pioneer for the mind”: his westbound movement can only be fulfilled as a possibility countered by his demise. Similarly, Emerson’s transparent eyeball has to compete in patriotic zeal with all those muscular bodies “tilling” and “mining” the soil. Ichabod’s anaconda-like body does not follow his mental powers of expansion. His unrestrained imagination —like Emerson’s unifying eye— is not followed by a subsequent growth of body and body politic. Like the US national contours mapped by the Missouri Compromise, Ichabod’s “whole frame [was] most loosely hung together”. His anti-normative body is not obviously fragmented, like the Headless Horseman’s; it rather constitutes an effeminate body that also defies the gender norms of its time —best

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fiction. As Judith Richardson puts it, Irving’s Hudson Valley resonates with “the obscuring of the African American past redoubling that of the Dutch” (2003: 54-55).

embodied by Brom Bones’s “great powers of limb”— and can correlate only to the three-fifths of humanity allowed to African Americans (1996b: 301).

In the same manner as images of disability and racial otherness upset the normative construction of individual and social bodies, Ichabod’s incapacity to govern his body connects him with African Americans, racial inferiors whose staple representations often endowed them with grotesque physiognomies and puerile minds. Ichabod’s distorted anatomy hinders his insatiable fantasies of aggrandizement and expansion. On the other end of the spectrum, Brom Bones’s “Herculean frame” counternarrates Ichabod’s frail constitution (1996b: 301). Irving confronts their personal politics through their antagonistic anatomies. Since both aspire to marry Katrina and inherit the Van Tassel property, their rivalry also symbolizes the broader debates about the future of the US. In stark opposition to Ichabod’s gluttony for land and progress, Bones does not want to go anywhere. Bones’ static and wholesome form concretizes the body politic intended by the signers of the Missouri Compromise; Ichabod’s unreliable shape and grotesque appetite parody the imperial hunger of the Monroe-Doctrine supporters.

We can use Irving’s tale to disarticulate the ideological platform behind the Monroe Doctrine and its arrogant hemispheric appropriation. Chased away by the Headless Horseman, Ichabod tastes his own medicine, for he is not facing the history of the Revolution in embodied form as much as a ghostly derivation, a projection rooted in his frustrated self-image as much as in his skewed understanding of the national past. This excised embodiment of the national body ushers Ichabod’s third kind of appetite: cultural demand for foundational myths of community. Ichabod’s manifestations of hunger—physiological, sexual—correlate with his gullibility for national mythos. Irving compares Ichabod’s culinary cravings with the “capacious swallow” with which he embraces tall-tales about the past: “His appetite for the marvelous, and his powers of digesting it were equally extraordinary; and both had been increased by his residence in this spell-bound region” (1996b: 296). But his search for foundational narratives is mythical, not historical. He supports state-sponsored amnesia through religious destinarianism and heavy-handed allusions to Cotton Mather. His appetite for the supernatural jeopardizes the national future by subjecting it to legend instead of history. Like Emerson, Ichabod embraces a mythical—and disembodied—version of history that seems far more exciting—and guilt-free—than the actual historical record.

In this sense, it should not surprise us that, of all the mirror images encountered by the schoolmaster, the Headless Horseman proves the most terrifying and the one that propels the plot toward its ambiguous denouement. Adopting the disguise of the beheaded Hessian soldier, Bones deliberately disrupts his muscular, symmetrical physique and confronts Ichabod with a repressed mirror image of the schoolmaster’s self. Through the figure of the Headless Horseman, deployed as Ichabod’s mirror image, Irving explores the crisis of national identity at the core of this simultaneous celebration and ejection of the pre-national past. The Headless Horseman conforms to an image of anxious independence, a political symbol whose head was lost with the excision of the ties between the United

States and the British motherland. Gaping at the Headless Horseman, Ichabod undergoes a reversal process of the mirror stage and contemplates the dissolution of the national self. Such a fatal vision engenders Irving's ambiguous ending, in which we cannot tell if Ichabod survives this incident as a body or as a spirit.

By undoing his body, Bones reflects Ichabod's corporeal frustration. As I have indicated, the schoolmaster's frustration derives from being unable to materialize his dreams of personal and political expansion into actual form. His body's resilience to growth goes hand in hand with the trivial impact he has on the community. Ichabod first perceives the Horseman as "something huge, misshapen, black and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom, like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveler" (1996b: 314-15). For starters, it seems impossible for the frightened schoolmaster to distinguish this monstrous figure from its background. The rider's difficult demarcation, which temporarily hides his headless condition, parallels the challenges the disabled body faces in front of the mirror as well as the body politic of empire with every new incorporation and redefinition of its frontiers.

##### 5. CONCLUSION: DE-HALLUCINATING AMERICAN EMPIRE

Somewhat naysaying gothic fiction's typical cycles of doom and haunting, 'Sleepy Hollow' ends with its protagonist transmuted both into a ghost who haunts the Tarry Town wilderness and a successful legislator in "a distant part of the country". The town rumors so have it. For that reason, Irving portrays Sleepy Hollow less as a haunted place and more as a hallucinated empire. The author highlights historical distortion as an endemic feature of Sleepy Hollow. Ever since the place was discovered by Hendrick Hudson, this Dutch settlement "still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie" (1996b: 292). The town's hallucinogenic vapors preserve Sleepy Hollow in an ahistorical limbo in which "population, manners, and customs, remain fixed" (1996b: 295). Honoring its name, Sleepy Hollow makes its citizens sleepy and "subject to trances and visions" (1996b: 292). Yet, the racial hierarchy operative in Sleepy Hollow also makes it concurrent to the national scuffles over slavery and the ethics of annexation unfolding during the time of the story's publication. The sporadic but determinant contributions of African Americans to the plot confirm that the inhabitants of Tarry Town have failed to hallucinate their way entirely out of history. This incomplete detachment from reality echoes Lacan's and Davis's thesis that the hallucination of corporeal wholeness is meant to compensate for the subject's realization that such wholeness is an *ignis fatuus*, that he or she remains dependent on the outside world. The etymology of the term *hallucination* remits to the Latin verb *alucinari*, which originally stood for "to wander in mind" (*OED*). This emphasis on motion permeates Irving's moments of border crossing, in which the mind, like the body, accesses an unprecedented plane; but, more significantly, it confirms the despondent Ichabod's status as a "pioneer for the mind".



Even if the term *hallucination* crops up in the works of important psychoanalytic theorists, they tend to use it lightly without any definitional gesture. Such is the case of Freud and Lacan, at least. Otherwise, the closest one can get to a working definition of hallucination in this context appears in the *Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis* as “sensations or perceptions attributed to the sense organs which are erroneously experienced as if they were caused by external objects” (Eidelberg 1968: 172). Like the critical paradigm of the mirror stage, hallucination also prompts a traumatic confusion of subject-object boundaries. Mirror images, as theorized by Lacan and some critics of disability, catalyzed Irving’s reversal between reality and illusion. Transitioning from one to the other, Irving’s characters fall prey to hallucinations that unleash a chaotic upending of cultural norms. Unlike the hallucination of the mirror stage, Irving’s delusions are retroactive, mobilizing the hallucinating characters into a pre-mirror stage scenario in which they confront their monolithic understandings of the able body and body politic. Like the broken mirror that fails to return a coherent self-image, Irving’s prose underscores those moments in which Ichabod’s body revolts against himself.

The resultant confusion bears important political consequences. Whereas a ‘haunted’ place directs attention toward a legendary past reenacted in the present; a ‘hallucinated’ site emerges as a present fiction and highlights its unreliable foundation for any futurity. This shift in temporality —from ‘haunted’ past to ‘hallucinated’ present— is best seen in the tale’s narrative shift from the spellbinding legends of the Headless Horseman and Major André’s tree toward the future itself as quintessentially spectral —Ichabod’s ghostly pioneering. The ultimate effect of this shift is for us to de-hallucinate the national future. To de-hallucinate does not mean to return to reality after a temporary flight of our imagination. De-hallucination places us one inch further than the reality from which we originally departed. If reality sustains our fictional configuration of the body as a whole and the nation as a coherent entity, then the de-hallucination of that reality undoes the mirror stage operations out of which these fictions emerge and are consolidated. In this process of de-hallucination, body and nation come out as faulty containers.

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