

“Wig Snatching” of Patriarchal Hypocrisy and Failure of Extreme Feminism: Cultural/Historical Aspects of Witch-hunting, Decapitation, and Hairstyles in Tim Burton’s *Sleepy Hollow*

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1. Introduction

Tim Burton’s film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), inspired by Washington Irving’s short story “The Legend of *Sleepy Hollow*” (1820), has frequently been studied within the framework of film adaptation theory, the interdisciplinary study of films that conceptualizes how a written work (or sometimes a film or other form of media) is transferred into the basis of a feature film. *Sleepy Hollow* features numerous deviations that denarrativize Irving’s original story, in keeping with Burton’s usual approach to adapting well-known texts.¹ The most notable difference between the original text and the film adaptation is the representation of three central characters. The Headless Horseman actually exists as a physical being in the film, with Brian Ray pointing out that “*Sleepy Hollow* makes the identity of the horseman a key question in a way that Irving did not” (210). Ichabod Crane, a schoolteacher in the original, is given a new role as a constable, investigating the serial murders and uncovering the identity of the true villain behind the whole scenario. Mary Lady Van Tassel, a newly added character in the film, summons the Headless Horseman for the purpose of familial revenge against the Van Garrets.

In “The Bloody Battle of the Sexes in Tim Burton’s *Sleepy Hollow*,” Susan M. Bernardo explores the “battle of the sexes” within the adaptation, arguing that the newly implemented roles of Ichabod as a constable and Mary as a vengeful witch underscore the themes of patriarchal property rights and female revenge against them (39). In Bernardo’s argument, the closing scene of the film, in which Ichabod and Katrina overcome the curse of the Headless Horseman and move away from the patriarchal community, represents the coming age

of gender equality. Bernardo's study is insightful in that it interprets the relationship between Ichabod and Katrina as a "new relationship between the sexes" (43). Her thesis, however, overlooks the importance of the visually incorporated elements that inform gender issues in the film; that is, the history of witch-hunting and the visual representations of the "head matters"—namely the series of visual head imageries such as headlessness, decapitation, and hairstyle. As this paper demonstrates, both witch-hunting and the head imageries uncover the historical formation of a patriarchal system in the eighteenth century, which, in the film, forces Mary's and Ichabod's mother to turn into a witch or an "anti-patriarchal force" (41) as well as traumatizing Ichabod in his childhood.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to explore *Sleepy Hollow* by drawing upon the connection among witch-hunting, decapitation, and hairstyles to argue that the connection works to reveal the hypocrisy of patriarchal society. In order to "wig-snatch"² that patriarchal mask, this paper first explores the history of witch-hunting in the transitional period from medieval to early modern society, showing the ways in which witch-hunting becomes the root of Mary's resentment. Situating witch-hunting as a historical byproduct of patriarchy, it will reveal that Mary represents an antipatriarchal feminist witch. Second, this paper attempts to connect the issues of (anti)patriarchy with the "head matters" with a view to exploring how the head imageries articulate the theme of (anti)patriarchy. Arguably, these imageries—especially Mary's incessant acts of decapitation—not only emphasize the power of Mary as a feminist witch but also foreground the problematic aspects of her extreme antipatriarchal impulses. In other words, reading Mary as a mythical Medusa-like figure and interpreting her act within the famous formula of "decapitation = castration" are not appropriate here, inasmuch as Mary does not just behead but obsessively collects the heads in "the Tree of the Dead." By employing Regina Janes' concept of *headlessness*, this paper will argue that the film dramatizes the difficult aspects of Mary's fight as a feminist witch against the patriarchal community and her ultimate topsy-turvy ideological failure.

In connection with the aforementioned "head matters," this paper will then

focus on the film’s visual portraits of its hairstyles. Before the nineteenth century, hairstyle, including wig use, was viewed as a symbolic means of identifying individuals within a particular group, as exemplified by the ways the male elders of *Sleepy Hollow* tend to their hair with too much care in public. However, a historical study shows that such a symbolic meaning disappeared in the last decades of the eighteenth century as the trends of hairstyle or wig use dynamically changed, which the film depicts in the final scene set in New York City. Thus, the consideration of changing trends of hairstyle would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of Burton’s imaginative scope.

2. A Vengeful Witch against Witch-Hunting and the Patriarchal Community

The Headless Horseman, a ghost that Irving weaved from various folktales and myths, reincarnates himself in *Sleepy Hollow*. As Baltus Van Tassel describes him for Ichabod’s initial investigation, the Horseman is the ghost of a German Hessian mercenary, notorious for his brutal killings and bloodlust (0:15:48–0:16:03). He is revived and starts to behead one citizen after another in *Sleepy Hollow*. As Ichabod investigates the cases, Mary Lady Van Tassel, the second wife of Baltus and stepmother of Katrina, controls the Horseman to take her familial revenge against the Van Garrets. To secure the land rights that had been possessed by Mary’s father, Baltus fabricated a false claim that her mother was a witch because she practiced witchcraft, and, despite a lack of credible proof, her family was evicted from *Sleepy Hollow*. Her subsequent deprived life in poverty transformed Mary into a vengeful witch who, in whichever way she could, would seize control of every property that she felt she deserved to have the rights to possess.

However, the root of Mary’s resentment against the Van Garrets and *Sleepy Hollow* should not be considered as merely personal. Instead, it should be viewed as a collective resentment against the moral corruption prevalent in the patriarchal community, which Mary struggles to condemn as the cause of the tragic history of witch-hunting. In this sense, incorporating the witches into the film exposes a part of the incredible but real history of collective madness that

actually existed in America as well as in most European countries.

According to the historian of witchcraft/witch-hunting Anne Llewellyn Barstow, witchcraft is thought to have been a crime that could not be verified by modern standards of scientific evidence. Nonetheless it was recognized as a sinful crime that involved serving Satan because the authorities—the Bible, the laws, the congress, and other such things—had dictated it to be so (*Witchcraze* 19–20). This shows that witch-hunting was not an actual search for “witches” or proof of witchcraft. In broad terms, it is defined as collective violence or madness in that it labeled people as witches without any verifiable evidence purely because of the persecutors’ simple-mindedness and superstitious beliefs in the existence of harmful magical powers. If an individual was accused of being a witch, because the punishments exacted by witch trials differed among periods and countries, he or she could be persecuted in various ways, such as being tortured or executed like Ichabod’s mother or being expelled from the community like Mary’s family. Both Mary’s and Ichabod’s mothers are, despite the absence of any proof of witchcraft, victimized by the witch craze arising from the malice of the handful of elite citizens and the religious blindness of the other accusers. In this sense, Mary’s retaliation against the eviction lifts the curtain over the untouchable past of the *Sleepy Hollow* community—what Van Garret, the master of *Sleepy Hollow*, had inflicted on her through witch-hunting propaganda and how he had confiscated the land rights of her family.

The refashioning of witchcraft/witch-hunting in the film also sheds light on the historical structure of witch-hunts and witch trials, both of which were entangled with traditional gender and sexual divides. Coincidentally or not, even the film treats the main female characters as witches: Mary, Ichabod’s mother, and even Katrina. For example, Ichabod unconsciously takes Katrina for an “evil witch,” saying: “It was an evil spirit possessed you. I pray it is satisfied, and that you find peace. The evil eye has done its work” (1:19:08–1:19:16). As Barstow claims, along with the other historians of the witch trials, women were accused and killed far more than men: On average, more than 80% of those victimized were female during the major period of witch hunts (1560–1760) (23–

25). Furthermore, women were, having been barred from the protection of the legal system, vulnerable and unable to give testimony in the courts. In the same period in which the church and the state/country developed their legal systems to the extent to which they could intervene in the daily lives of the people, women were suddenly becoming responsible for their behaviors and entering European legal history as accusees of witchcraft. Not knowing anything about legal proceedings, they were defenseless against the alleged charges of witchcraft that they had nothing to do with (ibid.).

Barstow also claims that these charges against women were often “sex-connected crimes—that is, adultery, bearing illegitimate children, abortion, infanticide, and incest . . .” and that “[w]omen were more often and more severely punished than men for these crimes” (133). The reason for this is that, as another historian of witch-hunting, Christina Crawford, puts it, “The universal task of women, dating from ancient times, was that of healer. Whether she was an herbalist, diviner, prophetess, magic-maker, midwife or physician, she was always at the center point of the life and death cycle” (part 3).³ It is obvious from these healing roles that such works of women were closely associated with the authoritative power of controlling reproduction. However, this was precisely the power that the male-oriented church never allowed women to occupy, as Crawford explains:

The Church of Rome insisted that their priests were in sole possession of the power to heal. The universities demanded the sole privilege of licensing professionals, and the Reformation taught belief in the passages of the Bible which degraded the status of women. And then “as the Churches’ campaigns against folk healing (labeled ‘superstition’) progresses[sic] during the Reformation, this double gift (respect vs. fear) became more dangerous to possess, more likely to be identified with Satan’s power and the work of his demons.” (Part 3)

This conflation of women’s reproductive roles (“double gift”) with Satan’s

power caused men to become obsessed with the belief that “women were hyper-sexed, insatiable, weak willed, given to melancholy and lacking character” (ibid.). Such an obsession reflects the views of women as potential threats to men’s sexuality as well as their fears over their potency or lack thereof. These attitudes of men set the stage for the collective murders and trials of “alleged witch” women for the next two hundred years.

Understanding witchcraft/witch-hunting as a gender-biased phenomenon thus widens the scope of implications of Mary’s revenge against *Sleepy Hollow*. It is not only to reclaim her land rights that were forcibly taken from her; as a feminist, it is also to unravel the subterfuge of the patriarchal community that has long exploited the lower orders through conspiracy and vice. This manipulation on the part of the community is revealed at the climactic moment when Mary threatens Katrina’s life, saying, “No one in this God-fearing town would take us in, because my mother was suspected of witchcraft” (1:25:28–1:25:33). After this revelation, another truth behind the corruption emerges: “Lust delivered the Reverend Steenwyck into my power. Fear did the same for Hardenbrook and the drunkard Philipse. And the doctor’s silence I exchanged for my complicity in his fornications with the servant girl Sarah” (1:27:14–1:27:33). All this presents the obvious truth: It is not solely the Van Tassels but the *Sleepy Hollow* community that should be to blame for the past sins. What she castigates throughout is the moral corruption of the patriarchs of *Sleepy Hollow*, who succumb to their uncontrollable lusts and desires to satisfy their greed. Taking advantage of loopholes in their morality, Mary blackmails the town elders using their various corruptive truths that they never wanted to reveal. It is hardly a coincidence that most of the truths they hide are sex-related scandals. As a woman, she understands such an uncontrollable desire as the male elders internalize, using it to bewitch them into her power. In this context, considering Mary’s position as a vengeful witch does not suffice; simultaneously, she sets herself up as an angered feminist who fights against the hypocritical patriarchs by metonymically and metaphorically turning their *heads* into *headlessnesses*.

3. Release from the Head: Imageries of Head and Concept of *Headlessness*

In *Sleepy Hollow*, as flying severed heads and bodies without heads generate turbulence and unease in the community, the imagery of either a head or a lack thereof permeates the entire film. As Burton comments, there is a marked contrast between Ichabod, a character “inside of his own head” with a blinkered belief in “sense and reason, cause and consequence” and the Headless Horseman, a character “with no head.”⁴ Ichabod’s head, which embraces modernity and bisects such binaries—life and death, supernatural and science, and superstition and reason—is challenged and confronted by what he cannot observe through the lens of rationality and science: the supernatural and superstitious incarnation of the Headless Horseman. However, what Ichabod confronts is not only supernatural existence but the moral corruption and vice endemic in the small community, which he dismisses as irrational.

The headless condition of the Horseman mirrors the inner characteristics of the *Sleepy Hollow* community. Per Bernardo’s statement that “[h]is headless state gestures toward the dangers of irrationality, while his physical strength and sharp sword point toward the evils of male” (40), the lack of a head indicates such inner qualities as moral corruption and brutality, a delineation of the male elders of *Sleepy Hollow*. As discussed previously, it is to the hypocritical nature or the “heartlessness of the *Sleepy Hollow* community” (Benton) that we attribute the tragic past of the witch hunt, because its virtue and order are superficial, only there to boost the elders’ egoistic desires. All this manifests itself in the brutal and chaotic fight in which the chief citizens get out of their heads and kill each other for fear of their moral disgrace being exposed. While the Headless Horseman is circling around the church, Dr. Thomas Lancaster’s suggestion, “Enough have died already. It’s time to confess our sins” (1:17:12), triggers a furious and absurd fight: Lancaster is first beaten and killed by a panicked Reverend Steenwyck; Steenwyck is then shot by Baltus Van Tassel; Van Tassel is eventually harpooned through a window from outside by the Headless Horseman.

It is worth noting that the headless condition of the Horseman has a figurative

link to the male elders' sexual greediness, based on the idea that the head is traditionally understood to symbolize the male sexual organ. Considering Mary's personal and collective vendetta against the patriarchal community, the dislocation of the elders' heads through decapitation by the Horseman can be read in both a physical and psychological sense; that is, castration. Consider Regina Janes' summation of Freud's formula of castration anxiety:

With Medusa's head in mind, Freud insisted that dreams, fantasies, and representations of decapitation symbolized the primordial masculine terror of castration, loss of the penis that defined the boy's (masculine) identity and differentiated him from castrated females, especially his mother. Castration anxiety, grounded in the body, was the terror men had to traverse to become men, while accepting the reality of her castration made a woman. (Chapter 4)

Through the lens of this idea of "decapitation = castration," Mary turns out to be an equivalent figure to Medusa, evoking in the male elders of *Sleepy Hollow* an intense fear of being castrated as well as threatening to decapitate them.

As mentioned earlier, what is highlighted as the moral corruption in *Sleepy Hollow* is the irrepressible sexual desires of the male elders. Because they are vulnerable to being exposed for both their lack of morality and their sexual greediness, Mary manipulates and blackmails them with threats of physical and psychological decapitation. Such vulnerability can induce the possibility of subverting the politics of the *Sleepy Hollow* community, as she has contrived for her revenge. Therefore, the headless appearance of the Horseman reflects and insinuates the dual anxiety of castration and decapitation in the minds of the male elders, which would shatter the patriarchal unity by unveiling its hypocrisies including the fact of witch-hunting.

Insofar as the head is understood as such, there must be a significance behind the (re)possession of a head in the film. Although Brian Ray points to the significance that "[t]he Hessian kills out of desire for his head; he wishes to be a

whole person. Ichabod tries to save lives through criminal investigation to fulfill a similar hunger for unity” (211), the Horseman’s repossession of his head replaces a recuperation of what Ichabod has lost as proof of masculinity. Ichabod has suffered psychological trauma since, as a child, he watched his mother being tortured to death by his fanatically religious father, “a bible-black tyrant behind a mask of righteousness” (1:01:03). Arguably, his father, who he associates with religion and spirituality, is the very cause of Ichabod’s trauma and excessive belief in rationality and science. It is obvious that his psychic problem disqualifies his masculinity, as exemplified by his weak knees and frequent fainting when overwhelmed with bloodshed and other horrible sights. In this regard, it is not difficult to view *Sleepy Hollow* as the story of how Ichabod explores the woods of the supernatural and retrieves his masculine identity by overcoming his traumatic past and cowardliness.

In the case of Mary, however, she must be analyzed from quite a different angle; otherwise, her failure at the end would be inexplicable. What she seeks through the beheadings is not just revenge but the possession of all the heads, which are the phallic symbols of the male identity and the patriarchal system. This juxtaposition of beheading and political cause reminds us of Michel Foucault’s analysis of the spectacle of the scaffold. Janes, referring to Foucault’s analysis of public execution, claims that “[t]he decollated head models the sovereign’s power over the living, warned, terrorized. Yet that head held up also gestures towards the realm ‘justice,’ a symbolic order shared by people and sovereign” (Ch. 1). Considering this, Mary, as a feminist executioner, demonstrates both political power and symbolic triumph over the male-oriented community.

Nevertheless, her overarching strategy fails in the end because her personal and ideological revenge has completely altered throughout the story’s events, as elucidated by her confession of beheading her own twin sister, despite her sister also being a victim of the patriarchal vice. The moment when Mary threatens to kill Katrina by confessing “I get everything in the event of your death” (1:27:43–1:27:44) unveils her uncontrollable obsession with possessing every

single thing in *Sleepy Hollow*. This obsession is inscribed in “the Tree of the Dead,” in which decapitated heads are grotesquely embedded. These heads are the vestiges of how she makes the victims headless, but at the same time they are the proof that she has become unconsciously infatuated with the power of the head. As discussed earlier, if the head symbolizes the male sexual organ and the patriarchal system, her infatuation with the head is implied to be a token of her desire to become a man, not merely of spite against the male-dominated community.⁵ In her possession and collection of the decollated heads in the “Tree,” she is no longer simply a feminist who fights for women; in fact, she is only repeating the merciless tragedy, just like the men she hates.

In contrast to Mary, Ichabod eventually releases his head from setting too much store by the rational intellect by accepting a certain kind of emotion that Katrina arouses. In Benton’s view, *Sleepy Hollow* “offers a skeptical account of a particular brand of rationality, one that excludes emotion”; this kind of rationality has confined Ichabod to the “bird cage”—a paper disc toy that his mother gave to him, with which he shows Katrina an optical trick: While the disc is spinning, the image of a bird appears inside the cage. Unarguably, this bird symbolizes Ichabod himself, locked in exclusive rationality, relying too much on what he observes with his own eyes and head, not with his heart. Thus, an understanding and inclusion of emotion in his mode of rationality must be a prerequisite for his psychological development.

In the climactic battle, throwing the Horseman’s head elucidates Ichabod’s emotional development through his learning to understand the importance of the heart over the head. Knowing Katrina’s spell of protection for those she loves galvanizes him into a brave action against the Horseman and the villainous witch. This emotional growth symbolizes Ichabod’s liberation from his dependence on his head. The process of achieving independence from both his head and the traumatic past instills in him a recognition of the democratic values of *headlessness*, as Janes evaluates against the modern Western view of “head = penis”:

Headlessness is freedom, equality, democracy, release from the weight of reason, obedience, domination, conscious control. The processes of the body take over, linking one body with other bodies to generate new, unforeseen forms of culture. . . . Headlessness affirms the vitality moving the hierarchical structures of institutions and endorses the indefinite potential of the body, its power, energy, life, longing for release, demanding release, breaking through, breaking away. (Epilogue)

This recognition of such values of headlessness, unlike Mary making a fetish of heads despite her ideology, releases Ichabod from the gravity of uneven rationality and his past, realizing in him a reconciliation between rationality and emotion. With this understanding of headlessness in mind, the next section will explore another way of portraying heads by focusing on hairstyles.

4. Hair That Matters: Changing Cultural Meanings of Wig Use and Hairstyles

While dispensing a prescription for Ichabod’s cowardliness caused by his traumatic past, *Sleepy Hollow* provides a clearer picture of the deterioration of the patriarchal community through effectively utilizing imageries of the head. Nevertheless, the film presents another aspect of the head: the disguise of one’s appearance through wig wearing and exaggerated hairstyles. Indeed, even when the town meeting at the church is convened to prevent further casualties, the surviving chief citizens—except Baltus, who becomes frightened at the sight of his wife’s “death”—appear to care too much about their hairstyles: for example, the painstakingly curled hair of Dr. Lancaster, which still does not cover all of his bald parts, and the curled white periwig worn by Reverend Steenwyck despite his thick and youthful hair. Considering the ways in which they care about their hair, wig wearing and controlling of the hair can be defined as a symbolic act that denotes an assertion of authority or rank in the society. According to Emma Markiewicz, a specialist in the history of wig use and hairstyles in the eighteenth century:

If the wearer could “consciously” construct their hair to fashion the appearance of status, wealth or power, so conversely hair could be “unconsciously” controlled to establish group identity. Control of hair by cutting, shaving or by using it to create a uniform, indicated an individual’s participation in social structures within publicly defined roles. When worn at formal occasions, or as part of a social role, wearing wigs of the same style created the sense of homogeneity amongst groups of certain professionals, politicians or tradesmen. This had the advantage of identifying them with a particular group, and enabling the group to present an image of strength and unity. (188)

From this historical perspective of hair control, the ways the male elders of *Sleepy Hollow* control their hair in the public sphere are not only about disguising of their appearance—for example, baldness caused by aging—with hair being “seen in its ability to display youth and beauty, or to cover baldness” (Markiewicz 263). In addition, they offer evidence of the elders’ patriarchal unity and social status within the community.

In parallel to the disciplining of their hair as part of their patriarchal solidarity, the disguise of hair is also analogous to their habit of masking and suppressing any scandal of their own. The town notary, James Hardenbrook, gives a clue to this analogous reading. At the moment when he is imparting the secret deuterogamy of Peter Van Garret and Emily Winship, he is not wearing his wig, with his thin but unclean hair apparently undone. The meeting with Ichabod is supposed to be not so much an official as a confidential or private one, but the notary’s carelessness with his hair is presumably not a coincidence. The wig wearing of the elders in *Sleepy Hollow* is not only a symbolic denotation in the public space; it is also an act of masking the scandals of corruption to keep their privileges secured. Yet, the scandals hidden inside their wigs, which would be, if revealed, intolerable and unacceptable, inevitably lead to the delegitimization

of their respectability and destruction of the community.

The final remark by Ichabod, “Just in time for a new century” (1:38:56), accompanying the images of the urbanizing New York City, indicates an optimistic suggestion of progress. Nonetheless, this suggestion dynamically interconnects a shift of cultural meanings of having control over hair. Markiewicz points out, by adopting Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s formula of the “state of nature,” that by the end of the eighteenth century, “when wigs had fallen out of use almost completely, and certainly as an overarching fashion, hats were used as a marker of social respectability and signifier of inclusion within a particular group” (277).⁶

As is evidenced by the preceding statement, the social or cultural significance of wig-use was on the decline throughout the last decades of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the degree to which people cared for their own hair almost completely changed. As a representative of these nuanced changes in hair matters, George Washington can be nominated because he was famous for not wearing a periwig. According to *The Papers of George Washington*, whether he sensed the trend or not, the patriot legend and father of democracy “wore his own hair which was light brown in color, tied in a queue and powdered” (*The Washington Papers*).

The historical fact that Washington undid his hair at his own discretion permeates the last cuts of the film: Everywhere in New York City at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, almost every promenader had his or her hat on, chosen from a variety that perhaps they could have had at their disposal. This image of a sea of hats in the cityscape confirms the new trend of hat-wearing at the dawn of the nineteenth century, but at the same time it reassures the viewer that these people do not care overly about their own heads. The devaluation of both wig use and head-consciousness at the turn of the eighteenth century, as affirmed by historical study and the cinematic imagery, further accentuates the patriarchal nature of *Sleepy Hollow*. Such a regime did not allow both the men and the women to make individual choices, resulting in its eventual self-destruction. The closing scene of the metropolis of the new century, stand-

ing in contrast to the old, head-oriented town of hypocrisy, points to a suggestive and democratic view of the means of demonstrating the gender identity and social status of any individual, the haunted past having vanished with the Headless Horseman, taking the head-obsessed witch into “the Tree of the Dead.”

5. Conclusion

The suggested end of Mary, who is taken away by the restored Horseman—her bruised hand uncannily caught on the exposed roots of “the Tree of the Dead”—would tell us one bloody history of a feminist witch against a patriarchal community and its hypocrisy. Yet, it cannot be overstating the matter to say that *Sleepy Hollow* only manifests a feminist struggle against a male-centric power structure because, as Bernardo puts it, Mary is “an anti-patriarchal force, but does not become a defender of women” (41). All her vengeance against the *Sleepy Hollow* community is, despite once being ideological, submerged in her egocentricity. How many women does she kill, despite their innocence? The number includes her own twin sister, the widow Winship, Mrs. Killian, the servant Sarah, and Katrina’s mother. These casualties offer evidence to show that Mary herself is so “witchcrazed” as to repeat the tragic history of witch-hunting, just as her family was once accused with nothing to answer for. Unarguably, the present she has survived through miserable poverty never offers any reference to her reality, for she remains psychologically stuck in the past, only hunting one head after another.

Regarding head matters, the head imagery in the film—flying heads after decapitation, the Horseman’s missing head, wig and hat use—are closely related to both the constitution of the patriarchal community and the structure of the witch hunt. Mary fights as an anti-patriarchal feminist witch and “wig-snatches” the patriarchal hypocrisy by means of decapitation and dispossession of heads, the phallic symbol. Nonetheless, as has been explored so far, she is bewitched and enchanted with the power of the head. Her ideological intention immerses itself in, and replaces an obsession for, collecting as many heads as possible, as if heads were enshrined as fetishized objects in “the Tree of the Dead.” This

implicitly denotes Mary’s unspeakable subconscious behind her extremism, namely a longing to become a man. This is because the loss of her father, the overture to all her familial tragedy, has implanted in her mind a seed that could have subverted her ideological zeal and stimulated her reckless desire for a substitution of the loss. No matter how many heads she collects, it will never offer a remedy to assuage her psychological pain, nor a reality to compensate for what she has lost. By never finding release from the allure of the head—unlike Ichabod, who vanquishes the trauma by realizing the liberated value of headlessness—she simply reprises the same undemocratic violence as the patriarchy had committed against her family. Only through these understandings of head-based or headless matters can we realize her ideologically inverted failure, exemplified in her reiteration of the tragedies of witch-hunting through her continual pursuit of heads.

Notes

1. In fact, Burton’s inspiration comes from a 1949 Disney animation, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, rather than Irving’s short story. As he comments, “I hadn’t seen the TV version. I guess I know it better for the Disney cartoon more than anything else; I remember always liking that. I remember getting excited by the chase sequence—I still get excited by it.” (“Sleepy Hollow” *Burton on Burton*)
2. According to [urbandictionary.com](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Wig%20Snatching), “wig snatching” means “[t]he act or practice of exposing someone or their information to others without their knowledge.” <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Wig%20Snatching>
3. Crawford subsequently gives specific examples of healer’s tasks:

Through healing by both spells and potions, by delivering babies, giving the means of family planning to other women, by predicting the future, advising the lovelorn, cursing (those who had done wrong) and also by removing curses, by making peace between neighbors covered what is today called both magic and medicine. Both were

traditions of long standing among those known by their people as wise women, cunning women and blessing women. She was gynecologist, blood-letter, bone-setter, diagnostician and apothecary. (part 3)

4. “Reading the script, what I liked about Ichabod, which is different from the cartoon, is that he was written very much as somebody who’s just living too much up here—inside of his own head—and not relating to what’s happening in the rest of the world. And that, juxtaposed against a character with no head, was a really good dynamic.” (Burton and Salisbury “Sleepy Hollow”)
5. Bernardo points to the relationship between color and gender in the film. Black is a color for men of power, like Ichabod’s father, a “bible-black tyrant.” Yet, in a late scene of the film, Mary wears a white and black dress, illustrating how she wrestles power from men, not from the same gender. (42)
6. Markiewicz notes:

His [Rousseau] formulation of a “state of nature” philosophy considered the notion that people had the freedom to do as they wished without the constraints of society, could only discover true happiness by being in close contact with nature, and by adopting simple manners and modesty in dress. . . . This manifested itself in the growing simplicity seen in mid-to-late eighteenth-century aesthetics, which appeared in the clothing of the fashionable classes. Looking to what was “natural” in dress equated with giving the appearance of reality, so that hair could no longer look deliberately exaggerated and man-made. (268)

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