



# Imitation in Irving's "Dolph Heyliger" and "The Storm-ship"

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# *Initiation*

## *in Irving's "Dolph Heyliger"*

### *and "The Storm-ship"*

As a seminal source of many Romantic legends, the Hudson River has inspired generations of artists, from writers to painters. Born in Europe in the nineteenth century, Romanticism soon spread to the "young America" and the term was used by American artists themselves, who, in those years of strong nationalism, claimed their own "artistic identity" (Minks 7). In that context, the Hudson River appeared as an inexhaustible source of inspiration, in particular for the Hudson River School (1825-1875) whose genius was based on new artistic techniques. The American landscape painters were then keen on representing nature, precisely "the dramatic American wilderness," as "nature is noble, and a refuge, both spiritual and physical" (Minks 10). Although not a painter himself, Washington Irving was an ardent admirer of the Hudson River and its artists. As he was familiar with most American landscape painters, in particular Washington Allston, Irving observed nature with a painter's eye, which gives his descriptions a particular pictorial note. *The Sketch Book* and the pen name of Geoffrey Crayon seem to call for this implicit vocation. Among the long series of the Hudson River stories, *The Sketch Book* presents at least two famous narratives: "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" staged in Tarry Town — a valley near the Hudson — and the extraordinary day-dream of "Rip Van Winkle." As for "Dolph Heyliger" and "The Storm-Ship," they both appeared in *Bracebridge Hall*, a collection that in fact was a limited success compared to *The Sketch Book*'s greater audience.

For a long time, these stories were studied separately but a scrupulous study of them clearly shows that they closely follow one

another; not only are their narratives strongly linked, but ignoring key elements in both plots would possibly lead to misunderstanding the whole story. Undeniably, "The Storm-Ship" completes "Dolph Heyliger," cleverly clears up many things about the hero himself, and gives precious pieces of information about the general historical context.

Born in the little town of Manhattoes,<sup>1</sup> young Dolph Heyliger embarked on a ship under mysterious circumstances and took up a voyage during which he discovered the grandeur of the Hudson River. He experienced "nature's magnificence" (DH 328), both the sleepy quietness of the river as well as its occasional wrath when a storm made him fall overboard. Having reached the shore safely, he thought that he was lost in that deserted place — this was at least what he believed until he met a party of roving hunters led by a jocular man: Anthony Vander Heyden. As they all sat around a fire, the latter started telling weird tales about the Hudson and the surrounding mountains — all well known among Dutch navigators — such as "the old legend of the Storm-ship, which haunted Point-no-point." Dolph was so amazed at hearing them that the old teller "wondered where he had passed his life, to be uninformed on so important a point of history" (DH 338). Dolph felt he had to inform his host about his own peregrinations: how he felt rejected by his community, his experience as Doctor Knipperhausen's disciple — a bachelor ruled by his "all-seeing eyes and all-telling tongues" housekeeper (DH 311) — and how, in order to escape his sad lot, he offered to keep the doctor's haunted country house. As he was "fond of adventures," he would rather brave the ghosts of a haunted house than bear the assaults of the doctor and his housekeeper any longer. He told his new friend how a strange prophetic dream led him to board an unknown ship on the river and how strong winds threw him overboard. And there he was, in the middle of wild mountains, warmed by a good fire and cheered by a hearty meal, enjoying the company of friendly people. Old Vander Heyden was seduced by the boy's narrative and felt like undertaking his education. Consequently, he asked Dolph to follow him home to Albany. Dolph could have spent peaceful days in his new family but he had a revelation in a dream the very night of his arrival, which unveiled him the truth about his ancestors as well as the place where his heritage was buried. The next

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<sup>1</sup> A fictional name for Manhattan.

morning, he discovered that Vander Heyden and himself were distant cousins. Despite his host's disapproval, he decided to leave his host and his nice-looking daughter to follow his destiny. He went back home, found the treasure, married Vander Heyden's daughter and ended a well-accomplished and respectable man.

One of the key notions structuring the narrative is that of space. Indeed, it provides structural and symbolic landmarks to the story and can be best studied in a double inside-outside opposition in connection both with the hero's movements in space and the evolution of his degree of awareness; the *outside* — referring both to the geographical setting and to the family or social environment — greatly determines the hero's inner thoughts and desires — the *inside*. This is no fortuitous connection. In fact, Dolph ignores of his past and origins: although he is Dutch he does not seem to know anything of Dutch traditions or history, which makes it difficult for him to build an identity. To assert himself as a man, he has first to learn about his own self, which becomes effective, step by step, during his journey. The process evokes the traditional initiation, in which the applicant has to undertake a long voyage (going from the interior of his group to the exterior world) punctuated with all kinds of hardships, to reach a higher degree of knowledge or a more prestigious status (his mental world then includes collective representations). As there can be no initiation process without a voyage — real or symbolic — we suggest here that Dolph's whereabouts represent the different stages of his interior quest.

#### **DOLPH HEYLIGER: "A HERO ON A SMALL SCALE" OR "A HERO IN A SMALL TOWN"? (DH 313)**

Twenty-one-year-old Dolph has always lived in Manhattoes with his mother. His father died when he was still a child, and the only thing he can rely on as far as his origins are concerned is the painted frame of the family arms hung on the wall in his mother's humble dwelling. Dolph is a disinherited young orphan — his father died when he was young — who besides, because of a rather extrovert personality, is disliked by almost everyone in town. His mother, on the contrary, keeps loving him dearly despite her friends' recurrent complaints, and the more everyone rejects

him the more she loves him. Manhattoes is described as a little "mercantile town" (DH 305) with a harbour nestled in the Hudson bank. Nevertheless, the greatest part of the commerce is made by the inhabitants themselves as there were hardly any ships coming in those days, and the arrival of one "was an event of vast importance" (SS 339). In that perspective, not unlike Tarry Town in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Manhattoes represents enclosure.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the town is surrounded by mountains that "had bounded [Dolph's] horizon since childhood" (DH 327). However, the true symbolic meaning of that enclosure reveals itself once the reader is acquainted with the inhabitants.

The context of the story is worth reminding here, a context that Irving cleverly evoked by including the history of the Dutch settlement within his narrative; the mixing up of history and fiction suggests that he is rewriting history, staging the small Dutch community in a somewhat derisory Garden of Eden:

In the early time of the province of New York, while it groaned under the tyranny of the English Governor, Lord Cornbury, who carried his cruelties towards the Dutch inhabitants so far as to allow no dominie, or schoolmaster, to officiate in their language, without his special licence; about this time, there lived in the jolly old city of the Manhattoes a kind of motherly Dame, known by the name of Dame Heyliger. (DH 304).

The people of Manhattoes are thus authentic descendants of Dutch settlers who, with the arrival of the English,<sup>3</sup> had to cope with a new way of life. They live in a time before the spread of colonization, in a nook — one of Irving's favorite words — nestled in time, far from the turmoil of progress and the frontier spirit. Their attitude follows the particular geographical setting in which they live: the mountains around them seem to block their view as well as their minds. Irving mischievously depicts a society conditioned by its geographic situation and taking its roots in its very ignorance of the outside world. Its motionless life centred on tradition, family pride and gossip-like relevantly reflects its spatial and

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<sup>2</sup> "un coin perdu, un trou, dans un monde dynamique et bientôt expansionniste; un settlement hollandais à l'abri de l'agitation yankee" (Bernard Terramorsi, 108).

<sup>3</sup> A true fact in history: in 1664 the English took the city and renamed it New York. It used to be called New Amsterdam during the time when the Dutch ruled the city.



mental imprisonment. The humorous description of Dame Heyliger's arrogant and "hoity-toity" cat is more explicit than any other further comment:

At the door of the house sat the good old dame's cat, a decent demure-looking personage, that seemed to scan every body that passed, to criticise their dress, and now and then to stretch her neck, and look out with sudden curiosity, to see what was going on at the other end of the street; but if by chance any idle vagabond dog came by, and offered to be uncivil — hoity-toity! — how she would bristle up, and growl, and spit, and strike out her paws! she was as indignant as ever was an ancient and ugly spinster on the approach of some graceless profligate. (DH 305)

Apparently, the inhabitants of Manhattoes do not suffer from claustrophobia, but Dolph certainly does, though he is probably not aware of it for he still ignores what the exterior world looks like. His vagabond-like, "uncivil" (DH 305) and adventurous temper contrasts with the community's standards and he is logically seen as a troublemaker who brings movement and agitation to their immovable lives:

There is nothing so troublesome as a hero on a small scale or rather, a hero in a small town. Dolph soon became the abhorrence of all drowsy, housekeeping, old citizens, who hated noise, and had no relish for waggery . . . He was, for instance, a sure marksman, and won all the geese and turkeys at Christmas-holidays. He was a bold rider; he was famous for leaping and wrestling; he played tolerably on the fiddle; could swim like a fish; and was the best hand in the whole place at five ninepins (DH 313-15)

It is no real surprise if Dolph felt imprisoned, or rather *held back*, in different ways. His mother, to whom "he was strongly attached" (DH 306) considered that her "child was all that was left to love her in this world," and she "could not think of letting Dolph go out of her sight" (DH 307). Her love and over-protecting attitude severs him from the outside world and consequently contributes to both confining and casting him out; significantly, her embrace is echoed by the mountain's, both forming a crib around him that stifles his personality. In other words it is both urgent and vital for Dolph to leave his home so that he would not literally wither in this out-of-time "stronghold" (Petillon 61).

He found himself near the water's edge, in a throng of people, hurrying to a pier, where there was a vessel ready to make sail. He was unconsciously carried along by the impulse of the crowd, and found that it was a sloop, on the

point of sailing up the Hudson to Albany. . . The commander of the sloop was hurrying about, and giving a world of orders, which were not very strictly attended to; one man being busy in lighting his pipe, and another in sharpening his snicker-snee . . . the captain suddenly called to him in Dutch, "Step on board, young man, or you'll be left behind!" He was startled by the summons; he saw that the sloop was cast loose, and was actually moving from the pier; it seemed as if he was actuated by some irresistible impulse; he sprang upon the deck, and the next moment the sloop was hurried off by the wind and tide . . . he thought of the distress of his mother at his strange disappearance, and the idea gave him a sudden pang. He would have entreated to be put on shore; but he knew with such wind and tide the entreaty would have been in vain. Then the inspiring love of novelty and adventure came rushing in full tide through his bosom; he felt himself launched strangely and suddenly on the world, and under full way to explore the regions of wonder that lay up this mighty river, and beyond those blue mountains that had bounded his horizon since childhood. (DH 326-27)

## THE WORLD BEYOND: THE MOUNTAINS AND THE RIVER

Mountains and rivers are major elements in the story as they are highly symbolic. Their ambivalence seems to echo the hero's inner self: After he left the mountains surrounding Manhattoes (*enclosure*), Dolph discovers a much more impressing view of those which edge the river bed; their ample, bold slopes evoke for him the world's *boundlessness*. Similarly, the river oscillates between invitation and rejection, sometimes gentle and rocking, sometimes raging in the storm. The river quickly opens up Dolph's horizon, sets him free from the enclosure and seems to invite him to a magic voyage:

he felt himself launched strangely and suddenly on the world, and under full way to explore the regions of wonder that lay up this mighty river, and beyond those blue mountains that had bounded his horizon since childhood (DH 327).

The river is the symbol of mobility, carrying along everything which floats on its unstable surface, so that when "[Dolph] sprang upon the deck, the next moment the sloop was hurried off by the wind and tide." (DH 327) Pétillon insists on the river's *shifting* movement, mentioning that "le mot *shift*, ouvre à la fugue" (46). Dolph is aware that even if he wanted to stop the river's motion, it would not let him for "he knew with such wind and tide the entreaty would have been in vain." (DH 327) So he let himself be carried away into nature's immensity, thinking

confidently that "one way or other, all would turn out for the best." (DH, 327)

Nature's boundlessness is adequately rendered by Irving's picturesque style, in which images and colors follow each other like little so many little paintbrush strokes. He gives much rhythm to his descriptions, punctuating them with assonances and alliterations that produce the effect of a literary soundtrack. Such techniques confer a great sensuality to his narrative, suggesting a very lively scene or scenery, the whole text sounding like a worldwide symphony:

Dolph gazed about him in mute delight and wonder at these scenes of nature's magnificence. To the left the Dunderberg reared its woody precipices, height over height, forest over forest, away into the deep summer sky . . . In the midst of his admiration, Dolph remarked a pile of bright, snowy clouds peering above the western heights. It was succeeded by another and another, each seemingly pushing onwards its predecessor, and towering, with dazzling, brilliancy, in the deep blue atmosphere: and now muttering peals of thunder were faintly heard rolling behind the mountains. The river, hitherto still and glassy, reflecting pictures of the sky and land, now showed a dark ripple at a distance, as the breeze came creeping up it . . . The clouds now rolled in volumes over the mountain tops; their summits still bright and snowy, but the lower parts of an inky blackness. The rain began to patter down in broad and scattered drops; the wind freshened, and curled up the waves; at length it seemed as if the bellying clouds were torn open by the mountain tops, and complete torrents of rain came rattling down. The lightning leaped from cloud to cloud, and streamed quivering against the rocks, splitting and rending the stoutest forest trees. The thunder burst in tremendous explosions; the peals were echoed from mountain to mountain; they crashed upon Dunderberg, and rolled up the long defile of the highlands, each headland making a new echo, until old Bull-hill seemed to bellow back the storm. (DH 328-29)

The surface of the river is compared to a mirror: "under full way to explore the regions of wonder that lay up this mighty river . . . The river, hitherto still and glassy, [was] reflecting pictures of the sky and land" (327; 329). To put it in Bachelard's words, the river looks like a *universal* mirror (1942: 35) in which Nature is reflected. Thanks to the vision displayed by the river's surface, the hero, like Narcissus looking at his own reflection in the fountain, becomes aware of the world and of himself:

Mais Narcisse à la fontaine n'est pas seulement livré à la contemplation de soi-même. Sa propre image est le centre d'un monde. Avec Narcisse, pour



Narcisse, c'est toute la forêt qui se mire, tout le ciel qui vient de prendre conscience de sa grandiose image. (Bachelard: 1942 35)

Besides, the reflected images of the sky and land seem to merge with the river, as if there were no frontier between the elements. The river-mirror seems to conjure up some great *symbiosis* of images, becoming like a *universal homeland* which enhances the boundlessness and unity that prevails in Nature:

Ainsi l'eau devient une sorte de patrie universelle; elle peuple le ciel de ses poissons. Une symbiose des images donne l'oiseau à l'eau profonde et le poisson au firmament". (Bachelard: 1942 64)

Compared to the initial image of Manhattoes, the symbolism of the mountain is now inverted, and far from suggesting the idea of confinement, they inspire lightness and freedom in their bondless succession:

There was a feeling of quiet luxury in gazing at the broad, green bosoms here and there scooped out among the precipices; or at woodlands high in air, nodding over the edge of some beetling bluff, and their foliage all transparent in the yellow sunshine . . . To the right strutted forth the bold promontory of Anthony's Nose, with a solitary eagle wheeling about it; while beyond, mountain succeeded mountain, until they seemed to lock their arms together, and confine this mighty river in their embraces. (DH 328)

Personified, the mountains are tinged with a slight masculine tone and seem to have a kind of mystical power, so that it is suggested that they have an ascendancy over the rest of nature. In the storm, the thunder seemed to come from the mountain's side, as if the peals of thunder were just the furious mountains' roaring. The low-pitched sound of the thunder indeed reminds one of the tone of a masculine voice: "muttering peals of thunder were faintly heard rolling behind the mountains" (DH 329).

After his fall into the river, Dolph is lost in the middle of wild and hostile mountains — "Dolph rose, and sought about to see if any path led from the shore, but all was savage and trackless" (DH 330) — and when he tried to penetrate the place, the mountains seemed to resist his entering, pushing him back to the shore:

The rocks were piled upon each other; great trunks of trees lay shattered about, as they had been blown down by the strong winds which draw through these mountains, or had fallen through age. The rocks too, were overhung with wild vines and briars, which completely matted themselves together, and opposed a barrier to all ingress. (DH 331)

The more determinedly he attempted to penetrate the wilderness, the more he was exposed to mountains and forests' hidden dangers:

Often he was supported merely by crumbling projections of the rock, and sometimes he clung to roots and branches of trees, and hung almost suspended in the air . . . As he was thus clambering, he was on the point of seizing hold of a shrub to aid his ascent, when something rustled among the leaves, and he saw a snake quivering along like lightning, almost from under his hand. It coiled itself up immediately, in an attitude of defiance, with flattened head, distended jaws, and quickly vibrating tongue, that played like a little flame about its mouth. Dolph's heart turned faint within him, and he had well nigh let go his hold, and tumbled down the precipice . . . At length he succeeded in scrambling to the summit of a precipice; but it was covered by a dense forest. Wherever he could gain a look out between the trees, he saw that the coast rose in heights and cliffs, one rising beyond another, until huge mountains overtopped the whole . . . Every thing was wild and solitary. (DH 328)

However, the place was not as solitary as he would have thought; it was also the domain of roving hunters and Dolph nearly got shot by them like a hunted animal:

a ball came whistling over his head, cutting the twigs and leaves, and burying itself deep in the bark of a chestnut-tree. Dolph did not wait for a second shot, but made a precipitate retreat; fearing every moment to hear the enemy in pursuit. He succeeded, however, in returning unmolested to the shore, and determined to penetrate no further into a country so beset with savage perils. (DH 328)

Frightened and taken aback, he decided to go back to the shore, all the more so because the night had wrapped "everything in gloom" (DH 332), and he needed a safe place to rest. The mountains were indeniably not the best place to stay, as confirmed by old Vander Heyden:

"It is a lucky circumstance, young man," said Antony Vander Heyden, "that you happened to be knocked overboard to-day; . . . and you might then have looked in vain for a meal among these mountains (DH 335).

As Dolph eventually warmed himself up by the good fire and with the hearty meal, the jovial Vander Heyden started telling him extraordinary tales about the mountains, and in particular the legend of the Storm-ship:

The circumstance of Dolph's falling overboard being again discussed, led to the relation of diverse disasters and singular mishaps that had befallen voyagers on this great river, particularly in the earlier periods of colonial history; most of which the Heer deliberately attributed to supernatural causes. Dolph stared at this suggestion; but the old gentleman assured him that it was very currently believed by the settlers along the river, that these highlands were under the dominion of supernatural and mischievous beings, which seemed to have taken some pique against the Dutch colonists in the early time of the settlement . . . The greater part, however, Heer Anthony observed, accounted for all the extraordinary circumstances attending this river, and the perplexities of the skippers which navigated it, by the old legend of the Storm-ship which haunted Point-no-point. On finding Dolph ignorant of this tradition, the Heer . . . undertook the tale . . . in the very words of in which it had been written out by Mynheer Selyne, an early poet of the New Nederlandts. (DH 337-38)

However, the old legends evoked by Vander Heyden, together with the general setting — the wild mountains and the river —, bring more than a mere atmosphere of marvelous or local color. They contain symbolical elements contributing not only to educating young Dolph Heyliger, but to opening his mind to the exterior world that he discovers so late. The process sounds like a genuine initiation and Vander Heyden like a benevolent symbolic father.

## THE MOUNTAIN AND THE RIVER: INITIATION SYMBOLS

Dolph's symbolic initiation conveys various mythical connotations. First, the storm is well-known to be synonymous with chaos, devastation and destruction, which necessarily leads either to death or to a second birth. Water has besides a purifying virtue, especially in ritual ablutions. In terms of initiation, Dolph's jump into the water can be interpreted as a kind of baptism: "L'eau est symbole de régénération, l'eau baptismale conduit explicitement à une nouvelle naissance, elle est initiatrice" (Chevalier et Gheerbrant 297). Then all the elements in turn are brought into action: the lightning, the *fire* of heavens, is also a

purifying agent; it symbolises spirit and knowledge and is marked by the masculine sign. The *rain* that comes down from the sky fertilizes the earth and swells the river, and the wind sweeps off the *air*. The whole scene looks like an initiatory ritual in which the hero's immersion in a spring purified by the elements results in his renaissance. As if by magic, the moment when he reaches the shore, the storm ceases, as if it were no longer necessary.

When the storm is over, Dolph finds himself alone in an inhospitable place that is "savage and trackless." (DH 330) Still unaware of his origins but devoid of his former identity and unknown to himself, the hero somehow looks like the place, "desert" and "trackless" too. Although Dolph never suspected the reason for his being there, his voyage turns out to be a quest for self-discovery and his jump into the raging river his first step in some ontogenetic initiation which leads him to face the four unleashed elements composing the world:

Never had Dolph beheld such an absolute warring of the elements; it seemed as if the storm was tearing and rending its way through this mountain defile, and had brought all the artillery of heaven into action. (DH 329)

However, the elements themselves undergo radical transformations all along his initiatic journey. At first, the river, calm and serene, is strongly connoted with femininity, more precisely with the image of the mother. For Bachelard, the mother image comes from a reminiscence as the mother is a source of happiness in childhood. "La tiédeur de l'air, la douceur de la lumière, la paix de l'âme sont nécessaires à l'image" (1942 139), to which should be added the gentle rocking movement produced by the river:

it was a calm, sultry day that they floated gently with the tide between these stern mountains. There was that perfect quiet which prevails over nature in the languor of summer heat. (DH 328)

This sensation of well-being is subjectively linked to the soothing image of the mother's nourishing milk: "d'abord tout liquide est une eau; ensuite toute eau est un lait . . . L'eau est un lait dès qu'elle est chantée avec ferveur." (1942 135;136) This conception parallels that of the river-mirror as a universal homeland, for nature's reflection in the river shows the

trees, the mountains and the birds as if they were nourished from that very reflection — and so is Dolph to some extent. In the same way, after having escaped the wrath of the waters and reached the shore, soaked and disorientated, he finds shelter where the river forms "a deep bay" (DH 332). To carry on with Bachelard's symbolic system, the round curve of the river is reminiscent of the mother's breast swollen with milk. Although they sound unquestionably like so many sources of comfort, such images are ambiguous for they also refer to the hero's regressive, unconscious desire to go back to the uterine state. Nevertheless, it appears as no surprise since the protagonist's symbolic new birth is conditioned by such a regression. At any rate, even this symbolic milk is submitted to transformations : from maternal, it becomes paternal when the gratifying sensation it provides is materialised by the hero's drinking Anthony Vander Heyden's liquor:

The commander of the party poured him out a dram of cheering liquor, which he gave him with a merry leer, to warm his heart; . . . Dolph made a more delicious repast; and when he had washed it down by two or three draughts from the Heer Antony's flask, and felt the jolly liquor sending its warmth through his veins, and glowing round his very heart, he would not have changed his situation, no, not with the governor of the province. (DH 336)

During the storm — when the elements confront each other in a formidable struggle — and due to the power and energy displayed, the river seems to change sex and become masculine, as Bachelard explains: "L'eau violente est un des premiers schèmes de la colère universelle. Aussi pas d'épopée sans une scène de tempête." (1942 200) This dynamic image conveys a great amount of energy so that, when Dolph falls overboard, he is no longer passive and dreamy but he immediately starts swimming vigorously (Dolph sounds like "dolphin"). This new energy, following a serene period of feminine torpor, symbolizes his leap into the masculine world. Once again, things are inverted: in Manhattoes, Dolph's manifestation of manhood were condemned both by his mother hen's overprotection and by the stern conformism of his fellow citizens, whereas in the wilderness, the very male features which were disapproved and prevented him from adapting are now adequate qualities which are necessary to face that new ordeal.



Medieval literature fancies such places as mountains and forests for their great initiatory effect. They represent the "lieu privilégié de toutes les métamorphoses, physiques ou spirituelles . . . de tous ces changements profonds qui exigent un préalable retrait du monde . . . pour accéder à un état plus élevé de connaissance et de sagesse" (Ribard 95-96). Indeed, Dolph has to show some special skills to face the mountains' hostility. Though he is as awkward as a newborn baby — "every movement that he made shook down a shower from the dripping foliage" (DH 330) —, he never loses heart nor hope. The wilderness is unquestionably different from the narrow but secure world in which he used to live, but instinctively and skillfully, Dolph learns to cope with the worst situations, to improvise a solution when there appears to be none. In Pétillon's words, he must quickly become able "to make shift," *i.e.* "'trouver moyen,' savoir s'arranger, avoir de la ressource, improviser, hors des sentiers battus de la coutume, une solution inédite pour s'en sortir." (45) Even if Dolph has always had these special qualities — which were repressed in Manhattoes —, he can only develop them "officially" and without restraint in the wilderness, as they appear not only appropriate in terms of adaptation and survival, but they are praised by the group of men who now hold his destiny in their hands. By so doing, Dolph leaves the old (female) system of values and is introduced to a new (male) order.

Dolph's passage from the feminine to the masculine world is recurrently and variously evoked in the narrative. His jump into the river acts as a transition, the real nature of the change being symbolized by his passing from fluidity (river) to solidity (earth) and by the change of orientation from the horizontal (water) to the vertical (mountain). The new environment and the change of spatial orientation trigger off different attitudes so that the young hero is no longer passively contemplating the world around him, but he is led to wake up and react in an environment which has become rough and hostile:

The rocks were piled upon each other; great trunks of trees lay shattered about . . . The rocks too, were overhung with wild vines and briars, which completely matted themselves together, and opposed a barrier to all ingress. (DH 330)

The metaphors referring to the hardness of the materials ("rocks piled upon each other," "great trunks," "rocks . . . overhung with wild

vines," "matted themselves together," "barrier") appeal to images of strength and inertia, and show the resistance put up by the environment:

les images de la dureté sont très régulièrement des images de réveil . . . elle [la dureté] réclame notre activité. Il semble que le sommeil ne peut se poursuivre . . . sans une certaine . . . fluidité des images . . . Les matières dures c'est le monde résistant . . . Avec le monde résistant, la vie nerveuse en nous s'associe à la vie musculaire. (Bachelard: 1947 72-73)

Hardness is associated with masculinity, but more precisely with virility. Indeed the image of the "wild vines and briars . . . matted themselves together" suggests a vitality doubled with sexual implications, as it is echoed by the traditional symbolism of the snakes:

he saw a snake quivering along like lightning, almost from under his hand. It coiled itself up immediately . . . he saw at a glance that he was in the vicinity of a nest of adders, that lay knotted, and writhing, and hissing in the chasm. (DH 331)

Moreover, verticality is emblematic of masculinity and it is recurrently echoed in the narrative through various phallic symbols such as the hunter's guns and arrows or the "perpendicular heights" of the mountains and the very act of climbing them:<sup>4</sup> "[Dolph] attempted to scale one of those perpendicular heights; but though strong and agile, he found it a Herculean undertaking" (DH 330).

Dolph's ascent in the mountain (upward, vertical) is a dynamic and voluntary action which reveals his will, his strength and his craving for superiority. As Bachelard wrote: "la marche dans la montagne est sans doute l'exercice qui aide le mieux à vaincre le complexe d'infériorité" (1942 184); climbing is "le symbole de l'épreuve, au sens le plus fort du terme." (Ribard 101) According to Michèle Merzoug who studied the upward ascension in "Rip Van Winkle," "l'ascension de la montagne rapproche symboliquement le mortel des dieux." (Merzoug 379). Here the term "Herculean undertaking" indicates the hero's identifying with the mythological hero, which is no surprise since Hercules appears as the archetype of active masculinity in Greek mythology. In other words, if —

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<sup>4</sup> The phallic symbolism of climbing is a well-known element of the psychoanalytical interpretation.

as Merzoug points out — the ascent symbolises a communication with Heaven, the hero takes over Hercules' heroic qualities to assert his own strength by assuming the "symbole de la victoire (et de la difficulté de la victoire) de l'âme humaine sur ses faiblesses" (Chevalier et Gheerbrant 395).

## CONCLUSION

Dolph's initiatory experience is not without reminding Rip Van Winkle's as both of them are outcasts suffering from society's harassing attempts to civilise them and make them conform. In both cases, women tend to infantilize the protagonists by symbolically castrating them and depriving them of any sense of responsibility. Rip's "termagant, Squaw Spirit" wife (Merzoug 466) is not far from Doctor Knipperhausen's industrious, authoritative housekeeper. Both Rip and Dolph, after a supernatural experience doubled by a ride in the mountains, come back transformed and wise and both stories have happy endings, although not deprived of a good deal of humor. In the two narratives, the protagonists undergo a series of ordeals in the mountains and are initiated to the mysteries of the world. Rip, after his long sleep of twenty years, becomes a respected patriarch in the newly-born American society, embodying the history and the traditions of the "good old world." Not unlike Rip, Dolph becomes a most distinguished citizen in the very town, where, young and carefree, he was rejected and ill-treated. Their peregrinations carry them far from their respective communities and make them able to reintegrate them on a new basis and endowed with a new prestige, thus corresponding fully to the traditional function of initiation.

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