Troubled Masculinity in Washington Irving’s “Rip van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in the Historical Context of Antebellum America

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Main Ideals of Manhood 3

Subordinated Masculinities: Disorderly Men 6

in “Sleepy Hollow”

Subordinated Masculinities: Disorderly Men 13

in “Rip Van Winkle”

The Bachelor and the Fear of Immortality in 21

“Rip Van Winkle” and “Sleepy Hollow”

Conclusion 22

Works Cited 25
Introduction

In the light of gender studies, “the sex-gender system” is defined as a conceptual structure designated by feminist social scientists, a symbolic system of meanings which is constituted by cultural conceptions of male and female, “complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed” (De Lauretis 5). This system “correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies” (5). According to Teresa De Lauretis, gender does not originally exist in, or belong to, the human body. Instead, “Gender is (a) representation,” which is not to say that it has no social and subjective concrete or real implications for the individuals’ material life (3). On the contrary, the representation of a gender is its construction. De Lauretis defines gender construction as nothing but different arrangements “of sexual-discursive positionalities,” which are “‘not known in advance’” (Rivkin and Ryan 717). Besides, she suggests a more accurate definition of gender construction as “both the product and the process of its representation” (De Lauretis 5). Accordingly, De Lauretis considers the sex-gender system as “a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus,” which gives meaning, “identity, value, [. . .], status in the social hierarchy, etc.,” to people in the society (Rivkin and Ryan 717).

As De Lauretis contends, considering gender as social positions with distinct meanings, it can be concluded that “for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects” (De Lauretis 5). De Lauretis concludes, although these meanings are different in each culture, “a sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors in each society” (Rivkin and Ryan 716). De Lauretis quotes Joan Kelly’s belief regarding a kind of interconnection
between the two orders, sexual and economic: “‘in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes (feudal, capitalist, socialist, etc.), a sex-gender system and a system of productive relations operates simultaneously . . . to reproduce the socioeconomic and male-dominant structures of that particular social order’” (De Lauretis 8). The construction of masculinity in the historical context of antebellum America, pre-Civil War America, is to be understood when analyzed in relation to the socioeconomic changes that occurred at that time. Mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century American fiction, which is deeply influenced by changes in economics, ideologies and gender arrangements, can be analyzed in this sense. This essay will examine the representation of masculinity in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” as the best-known stories in Washington Irving’s *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*, usually referred to as *The Sketch Book*. The book consists of Irving’s thirty-four essays and short stories, published through 1819-1820. Irving qualifies the source of these two fictions, stating that “Rip Van Winkle” is a “posthumous writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker,” and “Sleepy Hollow” is found among papers left by Diedrich Knickerbocker, “an old gentleman of New York, who was very curious in Dutch history of the province, and the manners of the descendants from its primitive settlers” (Rubin-Dorsky 393). Both stories take place near the Hudson River in a small Dutch village called Sleepy Hollow. In this essay, first, a relevant historical and theoretical background will be provided; then, masculinity in both tales will be discussed in the light of alternative models of manhood developed in antebellum America.
Main Ideal of Manhood

The main ideal of manhood in early America was traditional patriarch. As Mark E. Kann reports, after the American Revolution, there were no formal titles or special legal ranks for men anymore, instead men relied on family name, talent, education, wealth or social dignity. Moreover, during this time, there was a “shift from a ‘gold standard’ to an economy resting on unstable and often illusory foundation of credits, [. . .] and paper money” (Anthony 112). As a result, America was experiencing its “first widespread financial crisis” known as the “financial Panic of 1819” (112).

Besides, in this period, the weakness of fathers’ economic power resulted in lessening of parental control over children. Meanwhile, population growth resulted in “land scarcities” in some areas (Tyler and Kierner 7), leaving fathers unable to promise the gift of a farm to their adult children for their future life. As a result, young men who could not be financially supported by their fathers left home, and started seeking new economic opportunities elsewhere. In short, as Royal Tyler and Cynthia A. Kierner report, post-revolutionary Americans witnessed “political uncertainty,” “social conflict” and “economic dislocation” (Tyler and Kierner 2). Dynamic economic change, along with the gap between “American patriarch ideals and actual gender relations, contributed to weakening of traditional patriarch as the dominant ideal of manhood” (Kann, Republic 8). Consequently, the old ideal of manhood was not eliminated, but several alternatives to the traditional patriarch developed. The antebellum era consisted of multiple masculinities, and it was not clear which of these masculinities was predominant. This uncertainty was dangerous for the “republic’s birth, health, and longevity” (Kann, Republic 1) since the “survival of republic depended on the virtue and public spirit of their citizens” (Tyler and Kierner 2). Accordingly, liberals expanded the grammar of manhood consisting of
hegemonic norms and rules. Those who failed to meet hegemonic norms were regarded as “disorderly men” (Kann, Republic 26). By employing hegemonic norms, republicans tried to bring disorderly men into line. According to Kann, in fact, hegemonic norms were a modern form of patriarchy insisting on three consensual norms of manhood.

One consensual norm, sometimes referred as “manly freedom,” was that manhood demanded economic and political independence (Kann, Republic 15). This norm insisted on sociability, friendly relationship with neighbors, and participating in public activities. Generally, it encouraged republican manhood which found its fulfillment in “companionable family organized by ‘the united efforts of male and female’” (Kann, Republic 14). The second consensual norm was a mature man who was necessarily a family man who was helped by his wife to govern the family estate. He sired legitimate male heirs in order to perpetuate his family dynasty. This “‘aristocratic manhood’ of ‘the genteel patriarch’” could be achieved by establishing a respectable family (Kann, Republic 12). The third consensual norm defined manhood against womanhood. This norm defined manhood by using a “‘system of negative reference’” (16): “an independent man was someone who was not a dependant woman or the slave of “‘effeminacy’” (16). This independent man could control women and was regarded as a mature man.

Generally, achieving hegemonic norms meant achieving social respect, manly independence, family status, and governance of women. Republicans’ main message was that a man could measure up to hegemonic norms by “fixing a settle place for himself and his heirs, fitting into fraternal society,” and by “fulfilling intergenerational obligations” (Kann, Republic 50). “This message was steeped in blood. Manhood was a matter of blood, […] the innocent blood that linked ancestral sacrifice to future happiness” (50). The grammar of manhood was completed by the Heroic Man: “a national father figure” who “sacrifices his personal pleasure, family
prosperity, and social respectability to protect liberty and secure order against ‘the flux, wildness and frenzy of fortune’” (Kann, Republic 133). The Heroic Man was in fact, a modern patriarch; “a patriarch who exacted obedience without resorting to brutality or tyranny” (Kann, Punishment 67). As Kann explains, these hegemonic norms became criteria of masculinity which resulted in hierarchies and rankings among men: “‘men creat[ed] hierarchies and rankings among themselves according to criteria of masculinity’ and then ‘compete[ed] with each other . . . for the differential payoffs that patriarchy allow[ed] men’” (Kann, Republic 157). Kann asserts, the more a man was engaged in hegemonic norms, the better he could improve his position in society as well as among other men. In this regard, the rare Heroic Man achieved the highest rank among all men.

In addition to creating hierarchy among men, hegemonic norms distinguished manhood from boyhood. Americans usually defined manhood against boyhood. The “Boy,” the “libertine,” or the “bachelor of age” were considered to be lustful, self-centered, and socially destructive (Kann, Republic 20). They could not be matured into men unless they became self-supported men, defending liberty, being able to fulfill family responsibility, ruling a family and achieving social respect (Kann, Republic 20). In general, hegemonic norms separated “men from boys, high-status men from low-status men, and all males from all females” (Kann, Punishment 64). It restricted the behavior of “boys aspiring to be men, guided males seeking to secure or improve their status among men, and cautioned males against missteps that invited charges of effeminacy” (Kann, Punishment 64). Men who lived outside of the hegemonic frame were not worthy men, and they were not trusted by other men. Instead they were devalued as “mama’s boys” who had failed to overcome effeminacy (Kann, Republic 156).
Kann notes R.W. Connell’s three different rankings among men: “hegemonic masculinity, conservative masculinities, and subordinated masculinities” (Kann, Republic 157). According to Kann, Connell’s hegemonic masculinity is consistent with Kann’s Heroic Man, his conservative masculinities encompass Kann’s Family Man, and his subordinated masculinities include Kann’s marginal men personified by the Bachelor. The Family Man represented the main rank. He was a married man, although he could not be the Heroic Man, he was a worthy man in the social hierarchy. The Family Man was a man who “disciplined passion to fit into the role of responsible husband, father, and neighbor” (Kann, Republic 155). The lowest position of a man was symbolized by the Bachelor who was perceived to be the passionate man who was “isolated in time and space, distrusted by other men, and deemed a danger to social order and political stability” (155). Having defined these masculinities, Irving’s protagonists will be discussed in the light of subordinated masculinities and the figure of the Bachelor.

Subordinated Masculinities: Disorderly Men in “Sleepy Hollow”

“Sleepy Hollow,” “the most anxiety-laden text” (Anthony 112) within Irving’s The Sketch Book, depicts a kind of anxious masculinity, one which is the direct manifestation of the trauma caused by changes in nineteenth-century America. The story takes place in “a remote period of American history” (Irving, “Sleepy” 5) in a small valley called Sleepy Hollow, which is believed by inhabitants to be bewitched by “some witching power,” and “abound[ing] with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions” (Irving, “Sleepy” 3). In this bewitched society lives the protagonist of the story, a property-less teacher, who is called Ichabod Crane. He plans to marry one of his students, the wealthy heiress Katrina Van Tassel. Katrina is eighteen, and “universally
famed, not merely for her beauty, but her vast expectations” (Irving, “Sleepy” 12). Ichabod mirrors the post-war American man who, being impoverished, failed to achieve the autonomy claimed by hegemonic masculinity. In post-war America, poverty was not a crime but it was the main reason that would cause a poor man to be treated as a criminal and consequently be “isolated from the respectable society” (Kann, *Punishment* 31-32). During this time, disorderly men were mainly isolated in two ways. They were imprisoned, or exiled to distance places. Ichabod symbolizes these American men.

From the very beginning he is introduced to readers, his presence in the region, Sleepy Hollow, is described as a “sojourn” not a permanent company: “In this by-place of nature there abode, [. . .] Ichabod Crane who sojourned, or as he expressed it, ‘tarried,’ in Sleepy Hollow” (Irving, “Sleepy” 5). The theme of not belonging to society is reinforced when the story finishes by his disappearing from the land. One possible reason to see Ichabod as an exiled or isolated man, one who does not belong to respectable society, is his poverty. His poverty is stated as soon as his physical description is provided: “to see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day with his clothes bagging and fluttering around him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield” (6). Irving’s choice of words in this quotation implies some possible reasons that resulted in Ichabod’s exile and his unstable position in society: his poverty is suggested in his being a “genius of famine,” and the word, “elope,” implies what Ichabod may elope from, possibly marriage. Ichabod is a bachelor, one who does not even deserve to be described as a human but a “scarecrow” (Irving, “Sleepy” 6).

Ichabod’s appearance and his “cognomen of Crane” suggest a person who neither embodies a worthy man of the nineteenth century nor a human being (Irving, “Sleepy” 6): “He [is] tall, but
exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, [. . .], his whole frame most loosely [hangs] together. His head [is] small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it look[s] like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck to tell which way the window [blows]” (Irving, “Sleepy” 6). He is not a bourgeois man with the “ideal of independence, physical roughness, and sexual expressiveness” (Snyder 25). His description can even recommend the figure of an animal (a bird, a crane) to the reader’s mind. It can be concluded that both being a bachelor and being impoverished result in Ichabod’s failure to meet the hegemonic norms of the time.

Those who failed to meet hegemonic norms were regarded as “disorderly men” (Kann, Republic 26). The American founders believed that disorderly men suffered a kind of immaturity; they suffered “a living death of emasculation, family separation, and social isolation” (Kann, Republic 74). Disorderly men were marginal men, “itinerants in time and space who fit nowhere and deserved to be distrusted everywhere” (78). One of these disorderly men was the Bachelor. The Bachelor “symbolized the dangers of democracy and the corruption of patriarchy,” refusing the family duties of the traditional patriarch as a requirement of republican manhood, failing to “invest liberty in responsibility,” encouraging disorder in the ranks of men, corrupting innocent women, and marrying “for money or lust” (Kann, Republic 75). As David Anthony contends, Ichabod’s sexual desire for Katrina can be seen with his fantasies about “dainty slapjacks, well-buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle,” while he is looking at “the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel” (Irving, “Sleepy” 25). Thus, it makes sense to see his “romantic desire inextricable from his economic desire” (Anthony 113):

as [Ichabod] rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, [. . .], which surrounded the warm tenement of Van Tassel, his heart
yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness. Nay, his busy fancy already realized his hopes, and presented to him the blooming Katrina [. . .]. (Irving, “Sleepy” 15)

The representation of Katrina suggests her as the key to become wealthy and propertied (Anthony 28). In this regard, Anthony believes that Ichabod can be seen as an emblem of many American men who lived during the nineteenth-century America, when the “Government and politics seemed to have been placed at mercy of passion, fantasy and appetite, and these forces were known to feed on themselves and to be without moral limit. . . . It was the hysteria, not the cold rationality, of economic man that dismayed the moralists” (Anthony 112). Besides, Ichabod’s economic desire to reach Katrina reinforces his figure of the Bachelor, who aimed to marry for money or lust.

Moreover, the scene where Ichabod is thinking about marrying Katrina, while looking out at the beauty of sunset, provides an image of weightlessness: “A sloop was loitering in the distance [. . .] it seemed as if the vessel was suspended in the air” (Irving, “Sleepy” 26). As Anthony believes, since Ichabod’s dream of marriage with Katrina conjoins with his economic prosperity, the image of weightlessness can be seen as an image which captures “magical quality of the credit-based U.S. economy” in antebellum America (Anthony 130).

Considering the above, it can be argued that Ichabod’s goal of residing in this region is enclosed in his economic fantasies. Besides, Ichabod’s sojourn in Sleepy Hollow can be interpreted as American young men’s departures during nineteen century, as was discussed
before in this essay, in order to find new economic opportunities and gain a stable place among other men. As the story suggests, Ichabod’s sojourn is “for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity” (Irving, “Sleepy” 5). It can be said that he comes to this village in order to gain a job as an instructor. In this regard, one can argue that Ichabod is exiled twice in his “half-itinerant life” (Irving, “Sleepy” 9). First, from his previous society, Connecticut, and second, from Sleepy Hollow, because in both communities a bachelor, especially a property-less bachelor, could not meet the main standards of citizenship, economic independence and being a Family Man. In addition, it can be suggested that Ichabod suffers like the other nineteenth-century subordinated males, since according to Kann, they were always anxious to be treated “as a boy and not a man” (Kann, Republic 157). He symbolizes those men who American founders believed suffered a kind of immaturity and “a living death of emasculation, family separation, and social isolation” (Kann, Republic 74).

Ichabod’s “formidable rival” to reach Katrina, or in fact, to reach his goals in Sleepy Hollow, is Brom Van Brunt (Irving, “Sleepy” 19). Brom is known as Brom Bones since he has a “Herculean frame and great powers of limb” (Irving, “Sleepy” 17). Irving’s description of Brom Bones suggests the Heroic Man of antebellum America. Brom, who finally marries Katrina, is portrayed as an intelligent man with “great knowledge and skill in horsemanship,” who is “always ready for either a fight or a frolic [. . .], with all his overbearing roughness, there is a strong dash of waggish good humor at the bottom” (Irving, “Sleepy” 17-18). He belongs to the respectable men of his society, and neighbors look upon him with “a mixture of awe, admiration, and good will” (18). In this sense, he can be regarded as the High-status man of the period, joined into hegemonic norms, who, according to Kann, took advantage of Low-status men’s “[fear] of being humiliated . . . by other men,” in order to manipulate them (Kann, Republic
Ichabod is humiliated by Brom and his gang. He is the “object of whimsical persecution to Bones and his gang of rough riders. They harried his hitherto peaceful domains, smoked out his singing-school by stopping up the chimney, broke into the schoolhouse at night [. . .], so that the poor schoolmaster began to think all the witches in the country led their meeting there” (Irving, “Sleepy” 21). Ichabod, in fact, battles against not only one man, but also against “all the witches in the country,” and a “gang of rough riders,” who, according to David Greven, may stand as the magical power of homosocial sphere of the nineteenth century. Ichabod, as the loser of this battle, is finally removed from the ranks of the homosocial sphere and Bones, along with his gang, are the vanquishers: “Brom Bones, too, who, shortly after his rival’s disappearance conducted the blooming Katrina in triumph to the altar, was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell” (Irving, “Sleepy” 42). Brom Bones defeats his rival and removes him from Sleepy Hollow.

One day Ichabod plans to go to one of Mr. Van Tassel’s sumptuous ceremonies. As the whole village including Ichabod, is invited to the ceremony, this ceremony can be seen as the only chance for Ichabod to participate in a society that he is, for the first time, invited to. As Kann notes, the safest policy for subordinate males was conforming to acceptable norms of manhood “to achieve at least modest respectability in the male pecking order” (Kann, Republic 158). Accordingly, he decides to go there like a knight or a Heroic Man to fit himself into standards of that community. He borrowed a farmer’s horse for his “knight-errant in quest of adventures” (Irving, “Sleepy” 23). In other words, Ichabod travels to Van tassel’s estate, riding the horse of manhood, “a broken-down, plow-horse, that had outlived almost everything but its viciousness.
He was gaunt and shagged, with a ewe neck [. . .]” (23). Irving sees the combination of Ichabod and the steed, or Ichabod and his failed masculinity, as a proper combination:

Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers; he carried his whip perpendicularly in his hand, like a sceptre, and as his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings. [. . .], and the skirts of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horses tail. (Irving, “Sleepy” 24)

The way Ichabod is described in this quotation suggests that he cannot ride the horse like a knight. The representation of Ichabod and his horse was “altogether such an apparition as is seldom to be met with in broad daylight” (Irving, “Sleepy” 24). This apparition may suggest the apparitional paper economy of nineteenth-century America, the time that “‘paper issued by an assembly as money . . . is like putting an apparition in the place of a man; it vanishes with looking at it, and nothing remains but the air’” (Anthony 113). Reflecting Thomas Paine’s idea, Anthony continues that the “self-possessed individual” was turning into a “substanceless and possibly ghostly being” (113). In this regard, Ichabod “represents the mindset of commerce” (Anthony 113) and his “prodigious appetite” which is repeated throughout the story “figures the surrogate nature of postwar capitalism” (Anthony 123). Ichabod is “a huge feeder, and, though lank, had the dilating powers of an Anaconda” (Irving, “Sleepy” 7). Anthony continues that Irving extends such ghostly images to make the new paper economy more horrific; “the apparition of a figure on horse-back, without a head,” known as the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow, is suggested as the “dominant spirit” of the region, and “commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air” (Irving, “Sleepy” 4). It is believed by some in the village that the ghost
belongs to a Hessian trooper, who is beheaded “in some nameless battle during the Revolution” (Irving, “Sleepy” 4). The encounter between Ichabod and the apparitional Headless Horseman, while coming back from the ceremony, is the climax of the story. Ichabod is chased by the specter, and cannot escape from it and he disappears forever.

After his disappearance, two possible fates can be considered for Ichabod. One is an old farmer’s view believing that Ichabod is still alive and he becomes a lawyer, politician, electioneer, newspaper man, and a judge. Second, the old country wives’ view believing that Ichabod is “spirited away by supernatural means” (Irving, “Sleepy” 42). Irving gives more credit to the old country wives as “the best judges of these matters” (42), so the second possibility of Ichabod’s fate is more trustable. Either Ichabod is murdered by Brome Bones or he is gone by supernatural means; the fact is that he is removed or exiled from Sleepy Hollow.

Subordinated Masculinities: Disorderly Men in “Rip Van Winkle”

Rip Van Winkle is the central character of Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” He is “a simple, good-natured” man who has inherited “little of martial character of his ancestors” (Irving, “Rip” 8). He is “a kind neighbor” whom everyone in the village is satisfied with, except his wife, Dame Van Winkle (Irving, “Rip” 8). One day, when the “thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle” sounds very scary for him (Irving, “Rip” 14), wandering on the Kaatskill (Catskill) mountains, Rip goes into a deep sleep after drinking some liquor and he wakes up after twenty years.

Examining “Rip Van Winkle” in the light of anti-domestic subcultures of the antebellum America, David Greven interprets Rip’s escape as the “male flight from the domestic
responsibilities of home and woman” (Greven 91). Leslie Fiedler’s suggests that Rip’s escape is “a escape from ‘‘civilization,’ which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility” (26). Besides, Fiedler believes, in this story, work, authority and ruling are symbolized by Dame Van Winkle, and the male’s will for flight is stated precisely against her; she is the one that Rip must escape from. Wandering outside the house is the best alternative that he finds to escape his “termagant wife” and in fact domesticity (Irving, “Rip” 3).

Rip’s escape can also interpreted as a compulsory exile which nineteenth-century disorderly men were deserving as punishment. The way Rip is described in the story makes it possible to place him in the category of American nineteenth-century disorderly men. In the antebellum era, with the hope of persuading most men to work assiduously, liberals made economic independence and family life crucial for citizenship, defining “the status of citizen ‘into that of successful male producer’” (Kann, Punishment 34). Male independence insisted upon patriarchy; an independent man demanded “individual rights, economic opportunity, and political participation” (Kann, Punishment 65). Independent man was defined as a patriarch who ruled over a wife, children, poor relatives, and other dependants. But individual autonomy was not sufficient to establish full manhood (65). As Kann expresses Toby Ditz’s belief, “a man who was not a master- that is, not the head of a household or ‘family’ of dependents- was not a full member of the civil community of adult men” (65). In this context, Rip cannot be considered as an adult man since he is not in a good economic situation and he is not a master of his matrimony. Instead, he is “an obedient,” and a “hen-pecked husband” (Irving, “Rip” 2) whose farm is “the worst-conditioned farm in the neighborhood” (Irving, “Rip” 10).
Moreover, antebellum America was informed by fears that America could not generate its future. As Snyder reports, there was a decline of the marriage rate and the marriage age as a result of the high cost of living (Snyder 24). Accordingly, while economic productivity was insisted upon, men productivity also became the large project of capitalist citizenship. Boys were expected to mature into men who were totally independent, “productive to settle down,” marry, rule a family, and gain social respect (Kann, *Punishment* 64). In addition, the government became an “instrument for defending property rights and extending economic opportunities” (Kann, *Punishment* 34). As a result of this instrumentalism, citizenship was limited in two ways. One, it considered economic activity as the main duty of citizens, yet political participation was not encouraged. Two, the political scope and discourse became limited: “a citizen could call on government to punish crimes against property but would receive little attention if he called on government to eliminate poverty as a source of crime” (34). Accordingly, it can be concluded that Rip cannot meet the crucial requirements of a citizen since he is not in a good economic situation and he does not have a successful family life.

Rip experiences three distinct lives. One before the American Revolution, “while the country was yet a province of Great Britain” (Irving, “Rip” 8). His second life is the life during his deep sleep, which is an illusionary and temporary life. His third life starts after his sleep, or in fact after the American Revolution. His first life takes place in Early America when the dominant ideal of manhood was the traditional patriarch whose life was devoted to “governing his family and serving his community” (Kann, *Republic* 5). The traditional patriarch’s main contribution to the community was his performance as a husband and a father. He was “‘a towering figure . . . the family’s unquestioned ruler,’” who was responsible for perpetuating his family line by supervising his wife’s fidelity and productivity, and by managing his children education and
marriages (5). In this way, he was expected to ensure “‘good order in the home’” and to guarantee social harmony (Kann, Republic 5). Rip’s second life is in a society in which, according to hegemonic norms, men were expected to be independent, achieve social respect, family status, and governance of women. Besides, during this time, independent men were expected to marry and to be obsessed about the cultural norms of a married man. In this regard, it can be argued that Rip does not belong to the respectable community of men in either of his three lives. He cannot measure up to the necessary expectations on a man in the society where family life is crucial to be a citizen. Rip cannot gain the expected benefits of marriage as a family man. As Kann argues, during this period, four benefits could generally be considered as the main motives for young men being obsessed with marriage.

First, marriage was perceived to bring love and happiness. It was believed that in a republican family which “was constituted by a husband and wife who fostered benevolence and friendship,” men’s fiery passion would be changed into feelings of friendship and kindness (Kann, Republic 81). Moreover, referring to John Milton’s quote, Kann asserts that “in the existence of a married man, there [was] no termination” (81). Kann believes that a sense of meaning and immortality was expected for married men by begetting legitimate heirs (81). Examining Rip in this regard, it can be argued that Rip cannot grasp this advantage of marriage. He is not happy in his life and “Time [grows] worse and worse with [him] as years of matrimony roll on” (Irving, “Rip” 11). Irving mocks the notion that marriage can bring love and happiness. He describes Rip as he is “reduced almost to despair” (Irving, “Rip” 13). In the case of Rip, marital life is a “long-suffering,” and his “termagant wife [. . .] is a tolerable blessing; and if so, Rip Van Winkle was thrice blessed” (Irving, “Rip” 8).
Second, marriage was seen as an opportunity for a young man to establish his manhood by governing women. A man was assumed to govern his family “firmly but lovingly” in order to keep his family strong and gain other men’s respect (Kann, Republic 81). A Family Man was expected to be “a wise husband,” who knows how to act as a master that his wife did not “feel the weight of it,” and in this way, “his authority was tempered by his kindness” (81). In other words, absolute patriarchal authority was replaced by modern republican manhood which encouraged hegemonic masculinity insisting on kindness, consideration and respect to the wife. In this way, marriage became a means to fortify male domination and female subordination. Rip has “an insuperable aversion of all kinds of profitable labor (Irving, “Rip” 9). He cannot fortify his family. On the contrary, he refuses to be the king of his household, and consequently, brings “the ruin [. . .] on his family” (Irving, “Rip” 10).

The third perceived benefit of marriage was that marriage was “the cause of all good order in the world and what alone preserves it from the utmost confusion,” Kann quoted Benjamin Franklin claim (Kann, Republic 82). The primary means that men could mature into adult responsibilities was marriage. But marriage cannot bring good order in Rip’s life: “everything, including his farm, [goes] wrong, and would go wrong in spite of him,” [. . .], so his “patrimonial estate [has] dwindled a way under his management, acre by acre” (Irving, “Rip” 10). His wife nags all the time about his “idleness” and Rip’s refusing of the duties of domesticity. During this time “Civil manhood meant mastery” (Kann, Punishment 65). In this regard, Rip’s resistance can be seen not as laziness, but as a kind of rejection of the role of master which was defined as the main source of manhood.

The fourth benefit of marriage was that marriage “gave men a familial stake in community” (Kann, Republic 82). Since a married man had a family to support and protect, he had greater
familial interest to band together with neighbors in the projects that helped the family prosperity and welfare. Accordingly, marriage became “the basis for happiness, manhood, adulthood, and community membership” (83). Although Rip helps the neighbors, he is not considered a member among the male community, he just participates in the female community, and is “a great favorite [only] among all good wives of the village” (Irving, “Rip” 8). Thus, it can be concluded that since Rip cannot grasp the main benefits of marriage, he tries to flee himself from the yoke of marriage.

Considering all benefits of marriage for a man, it was believed that if marriage did not prevent young men from committing crimes it at least made it difficult, and consequently, it could help the Republic’s survival. Another reason why reformers encouraged marriage was that marriage was “the only legitimate outlet for sex, and sex resulted in procreation” (84). Procreation and the provision of posterity were the Family Man’s main duty. Kann reports John Demos’s observation that “All adult men [were] expected to become fathers” (Kann, Republic 84). Fatherhood was a proof of manhood whereas “Childlessness indicated a husband’s failings as a man” (84). Besides, men were believed to be immortalized through fatherhood. Seeking for this “symbolic immortality,” encouraged fathers to accumulate their properties for their children’s current and future life (84). Increasing the importance of marriage increased men’s anxiety as well; marriage became a real challenge for young men. On the one hand, it was difficult to fulfill all these expectations in an era of economic changes. On the other hand, there was a fear of being effeminate as a result of “‘too much’ contact with women” (Snyder 27). Accordingly, men who could not fit into with these expectations tried other ways to find their masculinity, and Rip is an example of such men.
Rip’s escape from his first life, can also be examined in regard to different subcultures of the time. As Katherine V. Snyder reports, in antebellum America there was no distinct ideal of manly behavior and the multiple models of manhood were changing, overlapping and competing with each other all the time. This resulted in more “pressures on men to find their identities and pleasures outside the marriage” (Snyder 27). In this way, some men rejected hegemonic norms and participated in different “counterhegemonic subcultures” (Kann, *Punishment* 70). These subcultures accept and reject hegemonic norms at the same time. For example, “the ‘unencumbered bachelor’ epitomized liberty, individualism, and self-reliance but also licentiousness, corruption, and social chaos” (Kann, *Punishment* 69). Some men found crime “a suitable resource for ‘doing gender,’ for separating them[elves] from all that is feminine” (Kann, *Punishment* 69). They participated in crime subcultures. This group of people were very dangerous for the society since they followed extreme individualism, rejected marital responsibilities and “created subcultures based on self-indulgence, promiscuity, idleness, [. . .], and crime” (Kann, *Punishment* 68). Moreover, they were considered lustful males who were characterized by “poor hygiene, ragged clothing, coarse manners, and ugly visages” (68). Sometimes they hid their true nature by following European fashions to pretend that they were gentlemen. Because they were obsessed with their appearances, they were regarded as effeminate (68).

In addition to crime subcultures, some men followed what Snyder refers to as the “bachelor subculture” which “offered men an alternative or complement to domestic culture” (Snyder 26). Since both married and unmarried men participated in this (at least were perceived to be) anti-domestic subculture, Snyder believes “‘sporting-male subculture,’” or “‘homosocial male subculture’” seem more suitable names for this subculture (Snyder 26). Sporting-male subculture
was based on self-indulgence and unregulated sex (Kann, *Punishment* 69). Homosociality, brotherly bonds among men, was the base of all-male activities and culture-structuring bonds. “Men’s clubs, associations, and secret societies in the last third of nineteenth century” (Snyder 26) became alternative places where men could be free from the “impersonal demands of work, the affectional demands of woman and family” (27). Although Rip is married, he can stand for the figure of the Bachelor. He is depicted as being “one of those happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who takes the world easy, eats white bread or brown, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound” (Irving, “Rip” 10). He rejects the family duties of the traditional patriarch in his first life and during his sleep he participated in the bachelor subculture through the companionship of males with peculiar visages drinking and gambling. His temporary and illusionary life during his sleep can suggest the fact that the Bachelor cannot be regarded as a permanent and respectable member of a society; he should be exiled or imprisoned. Accordingly, it can be concluded that Rip mirrors disorderly or marginal men, those “itinerants in time and space” who Kann describes; those who “fit nowhere and deserved to be distrusted everywhere” (Kann, *Republic* 78). Rip’s troubled masculinity, David Greven declares, is mirrored in his flight from both manhood and domesticity. He is “an isolate who is apart from men as well as women, alienated from the structures of hetero-normality that include homosociality and marriage” (Greven 102): “Rip’s heart die[s] away at hearing of these sad changes in his home, friends, and [finds] himself thus alone in this world” (Irving, “Rip” 21). He is such a foreigner who doubts about his own identity; he is wondering “whether he [is] himself or another man. [. . .] I’m not myself- I’m somebody else” (Irving, “Rip” 21). Accordingly, it can be concluded that Rip has an anxious kind of masculinity, as a result of the compulsory norms of marriage, heterosexuality and the hegemonic
norms of his time. He escapes from a society in which he is not considered as a worthy man due to its standards of manhood, and he comes back after his twenty years of sleep to a society where he still does not belong. The people he encounters after his arrival are those “none of whom he knew;” he is surprised “for he [has] thought himself acquainted with everyone in the country around” (Irving, “Rip” 17). In this regard, Rip is represented as a man who should be eliminated from the society since he cannot meet those standards of manhood at his time.

The Bachelor and the Fear of Immortality in “Rip Van Winkle” and “Sleepy Hollow”

Considering both stories in the light of nineteenth-century disorderly men, it can be argued that both Ichabod and Rip mirror the figure of the Bachelor. Irving agrees with considering procreation as the main duty of a man, one that was expected by American founders in the nineteenth century. In both stories, Irving suggests that since the Bachelor cannot be immortalized through fatherhood, he should be exiled from the society. Irving reinforces these ideas with Ichabod’s disappearance at the end of the story, and Rip’s escape (a kind of disappearance) from Sleepy Hollow. In the case of Rip, in spite of the fact that he is not a childless man, his children are described as “ragged and wild as if they belonged to no one” (Irving, “Rip” 10). Thus, it can be suggested that Rip’s children do not belong to him and he cannot be immortalized through his fatherhood. Even if one regards Rip as a man with children, since “he does not mind losing inherited property” (Warner 784), and he does not accumulate properties for his children’s present and future lives, it is not possible for him to be immortalized by his children.
One of Irving’s characters who is regarded as a worthy man, never exiled from the society, is Brome Bones. As discussed before, he acts as the Heroic man or a man with hegemonic masculinity who finally marries Katrina. In this regard, it makes sense to say that Brome Bones immortalizes himself with this marriage. Brome is not a Bachelor or a man failed as a result of being impoverished, and his social position is fortified through his marriage with the wealthy Katrina. His companions are rough riders, unlike Ichabod whose playmates and companions are Sleepy Hollow’s “larger boys,” and unlike Rip whose companions are children and women of his neighborhood (Irving, “Sleepy” 7). Another character who is a worthy man of Sleepy Hollow is Van Tassel (Katrina’s father), “a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer,” who owns a large estate (Irving, “Sleepy” 13). He is a respectable man in his society, as a result of being wealthy as well as being a father. He is immortalized by his only heir, Katrina. In this regard, it can be concluded that in addition to being isolated from the society, the Bachelor suffered an anxious kind of masculinity in a patriarchal society. According to Michael Warner, here patriarchal society is defined as a society in which “the normative order of gender and sex is oriented to the secession of fathers” (776).

Conclusion

To sum up, gender as different social positions with a variety of meanings can be defined according to each society’s cultural and political environment. A Male’s or female’s representation is implied in effects of the whole of the given meanings of each society. In spite of variety of these meanings in each culture, “a sex-gender system is always intimately interconnected with political and economic factors in each society” (Rivkin and Ryan 716).
Nineteenth-century American literature shows how masculinity and male sexuality are strongly influenced by the alterations caused by the emerging paper economy. This reinforces Teresa De Lauretis’s claim that gender does not originally exist in the human body. Many men in the late nineteenth century were anxious about both their own masculinity and other’s; as a result of the emergence of changing, overlapping and competing multiple models of manhood during this time (Snyder 27). Antebellum America witnessed different kinds of masculinities which emerged as alternatives to the traditional patriarch, the dominant ideal of the time. The point is that in spite of the existing masculinities, the old ideal was not eliminated but changed to a modern patriarchy based on hegemonic norms and rules. This resulted in an anxious kind of masculinity on account of a man not finding out which alternative can secure him as a mature man in the republican society.

Examining the construction of masculinity in Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in the historical context of antebellum America, it can be concluded that Irving tries to outline the masculine anxiety, panic and humiliation of the period in the stories’ protagonists. Both fictions manifest the male’s struggle to obtain his masculinity as it was defined in the context of the 1819 panic and hegemonic norms resulting from the American Revolution. The male protagonists of Irving’s stories are seeking to find a way in order to gain their full manhood, which is corrupted by their economic corruption. In addition, their appearances, their behavior, their fates, along with the way they are treated by their surrounding people, suggest the cause of their failure to achieve the hegemonic expectations of the period. Irving’s protagonists are deserving of exile from the respectable community of men, from the society, as well as from the story itself. Both of them are removed from Sleepy Hollow.
In the light of the theme of immortality, Warner believes that Irving appreciates the life of a man with his ancestry and his posterity (781). According to what was expected from a Family Man in a republican marriage, Warner sees marriage and its goals as “an institution of estate building and childbearing rather than intimacy; children were needed either for labor or for transmission of property; and sexual acts could only be legitimated in theory as attempts to breed” (Warner 777). In this regard, it can be concluded that in addition to Ichabod’s and Rip’s economic corruptions, their representations in the stories as the Bachelor, leads to their exile from the respectable community of men.
Works Cited


