

Masculine positive reinforcement and approval of the traditionally

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Masculine Gender Roles in Washington Irving's The Legend of Sleepy

Hollow In his short story, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", Washington Irving utilizes imagery and characterizations to create the highly gendered, stereotypically masculine character of Brom van Brunt. Irving also reinforces the stereotypically masculine gender role of Brom by the note on which he ends the story.

Irving's willingness to create such a character and do so in a manner that shows him well received by the other characters in the story demonstrates the author's positive reinforcement and approval of the traditionally masculine gender roles that Brom embodies. The reader is first introduced to Brom seemingly as an antagonist to Ichabod. Instantly, the reader is bombarded with characterizations that create the image of a strong, powerful, man. He possesses a "...Herculean frame and great powers of limb..." along with a temperament that is "... of mingled fun and arrogance" (Irving 381).

In Irving's creation of Brom, not only is the imagery constituting his physical appearance important, but also the relationship of this dauntingly masculine character to others. He is well respected by others, as "The neighbors looked upon him with a mixture of awe, admiration, and good will" (Irving 382). Similarly, his friends "...regarded him as their model" (Irving 381).

The images Irving utilize in the introduction to Brom establish him as an undeniably "manly" character. However, what is also important is how the traits and actions that create Brom are received by those around him.

Socially, Irving makes it clear that Brom is an "alpha male" in that other

members of his community value and respect him seemingly as a result of his identity and actions.

In this way, Brom serves to positively reinforce the idea of sensationalized masculinity to the reader. Brom's role as a positive reinforcer to a masculine gender stereotype is furthered by the manner in which Irving ends the story. Following his encounter with the "headless horseman", Ichabod leaves the town and thus abandons his courtship of Katrina, leaving Brom in position to marry her. In response to references to Ichabod, Brom "...always burst into a hearty laugh...which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell." (Irving 403).

Here, Irving insinuates that Brom is responsible for running Ichabod out of town, perhaps as one of his "boorish practical jokes" (Irving 384). The attribution of Ichabod's departure to Brom once again serves to positively reinforce Brom's highly masculine character traits. It is his stereotypically masculine personality traits that predispose him to commit such a joke against Ichabod, and he is rewarded for it by beating Ichabod for Katrina's hand in marriage. Similar to the manner in which his character traits earn him the respect of others, they also earn him a bride. In the end, Brom is victorious seemingly as a result of his highly gendered identity. In conclusion, Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* portrays the stereotypically masculine character Brom in a positive fashion. Brom embodies the traditional masculine gender role, and these qualities enable him to succeed in the story.

These traits earn him the respect of his community and the bride of Katrina. Irving creates a character that is not only undeniably masculine in the traditional sense but also is rewarded for it. The identity of Brom and his resulting victory over Ichabod, as a result, further the notion that “ nice guys really do finish last.”