Anti-feminist Ideas In Rip Van Winkle

Rip Van Winkle by Washington Irving is an anti-feminist text because of the symbolism between the Dame and Britain, and her unimportance as a character.

In the story, Rip Van Winkle falls asleep for 20 years and misses the American Revolution. The Revolution is arguably the most important event in our nation's history. The Dame is symbolic of Britain's monarch, and Rip represents the colonists who seek freedom from their control. “He was fain to draw off his forces and to take to the outside of the house-the only side which, in truth, belongs to a henpecked husband” (pg. 7). This quote shows the leash Rip's wife has on him, and how he is left to escape into nature for consolation. This is problematic because the wife was just an annoyance to Rip, while Britain completely dictated the colonists' lives. This included making them house soldiers, taking over their finances, forcing several taxes, etc. It is backward to think that the Dame is in any way similar to this despotism.

The wife of Rip Van Winkle is portrayed as an overpowering nag whose role is the villain in the story. Her character is irrelevant to the plot other than to prove the point that Rip was a victim. When in reality he was a lazy, unmotivated, and unconnected husband. We are given little insight into what their relationship is like from her perspective because her voice is viewed as unimportant. Irving pushes the backward idea that all wives do is complain, and nothing is ever the husband's fault. He couldn’t even be bothered to give the wife a name, as she is only referred to as the Dame of Rip. This supports the misconception that all a woman is a wife and not an individual. Once the Dame dies, her death is looked at as a positive, getting completely disrespected and made a mockery of. “There was a drop of comfort, at least in this intelligence” (pg. 73). Irving portrays her death as solacing, a beacon of light for Rip. The only perk Rip could think of looking back on his wife was her house making. Irving, whether he was aware or not, completely disrespected the role of a wife. A marriage is a two-person job, and putting all of the blame on one individual is wrong no matter who it is. Her unimportance to the story shows how women are still seen as background noise, something to poke fun at.

Rip Van Winkle by Washington Irving furthers misogynistic ideas due to the meaning behind the Dame and Britain, and her roles insignificance in the story.