
THE CHARACTER OF ICHABOD CRANE AS A REFLECTION OF HUMAN GREED AND FOOLISHNESS IN WASHINGTON IRVING'S THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

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Abstract: *literary characters often function as reflections of human nature and moral values. This study analyzes the character of Ichabod Crane in Washington Irving's The Legend of Sleepy Hollow as a representation of human greed and foolishness. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research examines Ichabod Crane's actions, motivations, and psychological traits through characterization theory and moral-psychological approaches. The findings reveal that Ichabod Crane's intellectual ability is overshadowed by material ambition and irrational fear, leading to his moral and social downfall. This study concludes that Irving employs Ichabod Crane as a moral critique of human weakness, emphasizing that intelligence without moral wisdom results in failure. The research contributes to literary studies by highlighting the relevance of moral criticism in classic American literature.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a mirror of human life, portraying moral values, psychological conflicts, and social behavior through fictional characters. Through literary works, readers are able to recognize human strengths and weaknesses, as well as ethical consequences resulting from moral failure. Characters in fiction are not merely narrative devices but symbolic representations of human nature.

Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a well-known American short story that blends humor, superstition, and moral reflection. The central character, Ichabod Crane, is depicted as an educated schoolteacher whose excessive ambition and irrational fear ultimately lead to his downfall. His desire to marry Katrina Van Tassel is motivated by wealth and social status rather than genuine affection, while his belief in supernatural stories demonstrates his foolishness and lack of rational judgment.

This research is significant because it explores the contradiction between intelligence and morality. By analyzing Ichabod Crane as a reflection of human greed and foolishness, this study aims to reveal Washington Irving's moral criticism and its relevance to universal human behavior. The study also contributes to character analysis in American literary studies by emphasizing moral and psychological dimensions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Character and Characterization

Character is a fundamental element in literary works, functioning as the medium through which authors convey themes and moral messages. Nurgiyantoro (2018) defines characterization as the method used by authors to present a character's traits through actions, dialogue, thoughts, and reactions. Stanton (2012) emphasizes that characters are central to narrative development and meaning.

Recent literary studies suggest that characters represent psychological and moral realities of human life. Through character analysis, readers can evaluate ethical values and understand how personal weaknesses influence destiny according Bennett and Royle (2016).

Moral Approach

The moral approach focuses on ethical values embedded in literary texts. literature reflects human morality and serves as a tool for moral evaluation. Moral criticism examines how characters' actions lead to consequences, reinforcing ethical awareness among readers and and highlighting moral responsibility Barry, (2021).

Psychological Approach

The psychological approach analyzes characters' mental states and motivations. Freud's psychoanalytic theory explains human behavior as driven by unconscious desires and fears. This approach is relevant in understanding Ichabod Crane's greed, fear, and irrationality as psychological weaknesses that dominate his rational thinking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. The data consist of words, phrases, and sentences taken from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving. The primary source of data is the literary text itself.

Data collection techniques include:

1. Close reading of the short story
2. Identification of textual evidence related to greed and foolishness
3. Systematic note-taking of relevant quotations

The data are analyzed by classifying them according to characterization theory and moral-psychological perspectives. Interpretation is conducted to explain how Ichabod Crane's traits reflect human moral and psychological weaknesses how Ichabod Crane's traits reflect human moral and psychological weaknesses Creswell & Poth,(2018).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Ichabod Crane is portrayed as an intellectually capable yet morally and psychologically flawed character. Washington Irving constructs Ichabod as a representation of human greed and foolishness through his thoughts, actions, and reactions to his environment. These traits ultimately lead to his downfall and function as moral criticism of human weakness.

Ichabod Crane's greed is primarily reflected in his obsession with wealth and social status. His interest in Katrina Van Tassel is motivated by her inheritance rather than genuine affection. This is evident when Ichabod contemplates "her wealth, her rich old father, her

inheritance of vast farms” (Irving, 1820). His imagination immediately transforms material wealth into economic opportunity, as he considers how it could be “readily turned into cash” (Irving, 1820). Such thoughts demonstrate that material ambition dominates his mindset. From a moral perspective, this obsession reflects ethical imbalance, as Ichabod values wealth over human relationships. Irving uses this trait to criticize individuals who allow greed to override moral judgment.

In addition, Ichabod’s greed is also symbolized through his excessive appetite and imagination of abundance. His fascination with food and luxury represents uncontrolled desire and lack of moderation. This physical manifestation of greed reinforces his moral weakness and highlights how material desire governs both his mind and behavior. According to characterization theory, repeated emphasis on desire and excess reveals a dominant personality trait, which in Ichabod’s case is greed.

Besides greed, Ichabod Crane’s foolishness is shown through his irrational fear and blind belief in superstition. Although he is a schoolteacher, he is described as “the greatest consumer of marvels and superstitions” (Irving, 1820). Instead of questioning ghost stories logically, he accepts them without skepticism. His fear intensifies as his imagination grows, causing him to misinterpret natural surroundings as supernatural threats. This is reflected when ordinary sounds and darkness disturb him and provoke panic.

Ichabod’s foolishness reaches its climax during his night journey home, where fear completely overpowers reason. His physical reactions such as quickening his pace and fleeing in terror demonstrate psychological instability. Ultimately, Ichabod’s disappearance from Sleepy Hollow symbolizes the consequence of irrational fear and lack of critical thinking. Irving uses this outcome to emphasize that education alone does not guarantee wisdom when it is not supported by rational judgment and emotional control.

Overall, the findings confirm that Ichabod Crane embodies the conflict between intelligence and morality. His greed leads him to pursue material wealth without ethical consideration, while his foolishness causes him to surrender to fear and superstition. Through irony and humor, Washington Irving presents Ichabod Crane as a moral symbol, illustrating how human greed and foolishness can result in personal downfall. This makes *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* a timeless literary work that continues to reflect universal human flaws.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ichabod Crane represents human greed and foolishness through his material ambition and irrational fear. Despite his education, he fails to maintain moral balance and rational thinking. Washington Irving employs Ichabod Crane as a moral symbol to criticize human weakness and ethical failure. The findings affirm that classic literature remains relevant in portraying universal human flaws and moral lessons applicable to modern life.

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