

Question:

Give the character sketch of Ichabod Crane.

Answer:

Ichabod Crane, although the protagonist of the story, is basically an inglorious, ugly man who lacks manliness. He is less a character than a caricature. His grotesque appearance is often a source of humour for the readers. Ichabod is described as a tall, extremely lanky fellow with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, dangling arms and huge feet. His head was small and flat at the top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes and a long snipe nose. His smartness lies in the fact that he is more educated and sophisticated than the native villagers. A stern schoolmaster, Ichabod seems to be a cruel tyrant ruling over his students. He administers justice with discrimination rather than severity, taking the burdens off the back of the weaks and laying it on those of the strong. The revenue arising from his school was small and scarcely sufficient to furnish him with his daily bread, for he was a huge feeder and had the “dilating powers of an anaconda”. Thus he lived successively a week at a time in the houses of

the pupils whom he instructed.

In addition to his other vocations, he was the singing master of the neighbourhood. He picked up many bright shillings by instructing on psalmody. His travelling lifestyle gives him greater access to gossips and thus he is welcomed warmly in the farmers' houses.

Gluttony is a vice which Ichabod is guilty of. It is this huge appetite in Ichabod which leads to his downfall. He is fond of eating and his hunger seems to be insatiable. The only reason that he wants to marry Katrina Van Tassel is that she would inherit all of her father's wealthy farm. When Ichabod visits her house, he sees the sheer spread of old Baltus Van Tassel's property. There was an abundance of swallows, martins, pigeons, turkeys, pigs, ducks and poultry. He instantly visualises these creatures as roasts-pigs, pigeon-pies, geese in gravy, ducks in dishes, sausages and other sumptuous items of a winter fare. Ichabod is also a hypocrite and acts meek and mild before the villagers, in order to gain favours from them, to satisfy his hunger. He helps in their household chores, but he actually hates doing them.

Another flaw in Ichabod's character is his cowardice, though he is fond of anything that is supernatural, and has mastered "Cotton Mather's history of New England Witchcraft". He takes fearful pleasure in listening to the direful tales. He is absolutely a coward at their recollections during the evening. He scares himself so badly that he sings songs to himself while returning home in the evening to maintain his composure. This trait in him is exploited by Brom Bones, who tricked him to eliminate him as a rival.

The absurdity in his character is also highlighted in the story. He excitedly sends his students home from school early so that he can prepare for the party. He borrows a horse so that he can arrive in style. Even so, he looks absurd on the broken down horse that he rides. He is more likely the target of the story or the butt end of the joke. He does his best to control the circumstances, but he does not have the grasp of reality or the skills to do so. Gluttony blinds him to see the real nature of what he sees around him.

The night he left the party in despair, he was followed by the Hessian trooper - the

Headless Horseman on Sleepy Hollow. It was actually Brom Bones in disguise, who hoped to scare him off. Instead of fighting Brom Bones and winning Katrina, he is overwhelmed with fear and runs away, thereby acting quite opposite to how a hero should act. Thus, Ichabod is nothing but an anti-hero, a caricature whom Irving has portrayed quite effectively.