

A perspective at owl creek bridge



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The conflict between the North and South divided families and split the country in half throughout the time of the Civil War. This division is represented in the split consciousness of the protagonist in the compelling short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" written by Ambrose Bierce. Peyton Farquhar, a wealthy Confederate defender who was unable to join the Confederate army, took it upon himself to take action when the war came to his doorstep. Being an Alabama resident, his intentions and connections with the South led to his downfall and execution on Owl Creek Bridge. This essay will examine how Bierce uses point of view, symbolism, and imagery to express Peyton Farquhar's duality of consciousness in order to exhibit the refusal to accept one's situation.

To elaborate, Bierce implements a third-person limited perspective allowing the reader to not only inspect the emotions and thoughts of Peyton Farquhar, but to also give the readers the ability understand how Peyton's consciousness is split between the situation of his reality, and the situation he is experiencing in his mind. In addition, readers can also see Peyton's refusal to accept his circumstances. For instance, Bierce describes a vision that Farquhar realistically imagines while standing on a wooden platform. " ' I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home... ' " (Bierce). Although Peyton is safely standing on a plank that hangs over a stream during this time, he is restricted in movement with ropes tied around his hands and neck. He will soon be hung on the Owl Creek bridge by Federal soldiers that had captured Peyton

attempting to attack a sentinel whom was guarding the bridge. Peyton comes to a realization that he will soon die which creates mental adversity for him. To avoid his current circumstance, Peyton shifts his attentiveness from reality and creates an ideal situation in his mind. This refusal to accept his situation causes problems for Peyton, because as readers can see in part three, he allows his delusion to overpower his real situation. For example, after being hung, Farquhar's thoughts tell him that he had escaped the hanging. He imagines being released from ropes that he was tied in, and he dodges bullets from the Federal soldiers at the bridge as he swims to make his way home. When Peyton finally arrives home to his family, he experiences a heavy impact behind his head on his nape. Although readers do not know the origin of the jolt, right afterwards, Bierce confirms that Peyton is still hanging from the bridge, and he is dead. As we can see from earlier in the story, these aspects are points that Peyton specifically imagined before he got hung. Because of his delusion, he believed that what he was imagining was actually real, but as readers, we can come to an understanding that he was slowly coming to death. Peyton's optimism of finally reaching his family came to a tragic end.

In continuation, Bierce uses symbolism in his story to allow readers to understand the separation of consciousness of Peyton Farquhar from his reality and the thoughts in his mind, and also his inability to accept his situation. As shown in part one, before Farquhar gets hung, he notices a chunk of driftwood travelling with the stream beneath him that piques his interest and removes his focus from reality. According to the short story, "the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him". Peyton used

the driftwood distraction to evade thinking of death and the situation he was about to experience; however, Peyton is still reminded of the reason why he is experiencing the situation of the present. As readers, we are able to see the significance of the driftwood shortly after in part two. While Peyton is in conversation with the Federal scout that was disguised as a southerner, the scout mentions the North's advancement on Owl Creek bridge and then states, "' the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge... ". In this moment of Peyton's past, Bierce reveals why Peyton is in his current situation. As readers can see earlier in this conversation, the Federal scout tells Peyton that those who attempt to interfere with the bridge will be hung, and since readers know that Farquhar is about to be hung in present time, they can infer that he has tried to do just what the Federal scout stated. This driftwood mentioned in the conversation is the symbol of his demise. It reminds Peyton of the reasoning behind his eventual hanging. By giving readers this connection, Bierce is able to distinguish the separation between Peyton's reality and the thoughts of his past.

Finally, Bierce uses imagery in his short story in order to show readers how Peyton Farquhar's thoughts are divided from real life along with how he refuses to accept his situation. For example, at the beginning of part three, Bierce declares to the reader that Peyton has been hung, and he loses consciousness. Despite this, it states that Peyton " was awakened". We as readers come to an understanding that this part of the story is explaining a delusion Peyton created in his mind because he doesn't want to die. As mentioned earlier in the essay, Peyton's imagines that he is successfully

completing with his escape plan. Furthermore, his mind still maintains aspects of his reality. For example, later on in the part three it says, " His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it". This evidence gives the reader an image of the suffering that Peyton is experiencing after the hanging. Although Peyton is feeling this pain in his delusion, the readers, however, are able to understand that this pain is actually deriving from his reality because to conclude the story Bierce states, " Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck" (Bierce). Because of his delusion, Peyton comes to a state of unconsciousness that ultimately forces him to experience the pain of reality.

As a result of a careful analysis of this historical tale , it is apparent that Ambrose Bierce utilizes a third person limited perspective, the driftwood as a symbol, and imagery in the plot to demonstrate Peyton Farquhar's separated conscious in order to show his inability to accept his reality. By doing this, readers can see that problems may occur such as a loss of hope, remembrance of your mistakes, and pain. Because of this, it is best to just accept one's situation. Trying to avoid one's current circumstances by changing one's mindset by distractions or delusions will not change the result or consequences of the present.

Work Cited

- Bierce, Ambrose. " An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." The Millennium Fulcrum, 1988. *Gutenberg*. Web. 22 January 2019.