

"richard cory" by
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robinson essay



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Adaptation of literature works has been of great importance on songwriting history since the start song composition. As soon as songs were recognized to have the power to convey literary messages in music, literary works became the wealth of ideas for songs. Many critics of literary works saw the ever growing incident of adaptation as a betrayal to the literary principles because they viewed songs as only a mass medium without in depth and originality. When song adaptations are judged by literary critics to have a literary bias, song and music critics and theorists justifiably protest. If a message is conveyed only by the literary manner of it, a song might begin in a disadvantaged position. This explains much of the uproar over literature on extratextually adaptations in songs. If a literal work defines the message and tells the story, the songs, even followed by its video clip; by nature of its difference from the literal work then inevitably appears as a sorry second.

It is however insignificant to try and prove the superiority of one over the other. In the adaptation of the Poem "Richard Cory" by Edwin Arlington Robinson, into the song "Richard Cory" by Simon and Garfunkel for example, it can be said that the poem handles the outlook and expresses the internal state of mind in a manner that is more complicated than the song (Wagner, 1975). On the other hand, the song has the benefits of image, sound and dramatic expression at its disposal and gives a parallel and completely different version of the same message which is impossible with the poem. Therefore, seeking to create a hierarchy between the two, poem and the song, will be unproductive as much as it will be subjective.

Intertextuality is a term made-up by Kristeva (1980) and it is used to "signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes ... other texts

whether by open or covert citations and allusion, or by the assimilation of the formal and substantive features of an earlier text". This is exactly what we see in the two kinds of art work under study in this research paper. Will first look at the two types of "Richard Cory" as a poem first, then as song and try to analyze how extratextual adaptation of one relates to the other.

The poem "Richard Cory" was first published in Robinson's second book of poem collections, *Children of the night*. It is a lyrical, short and dramatic sketch of a character that has made Robinson very famous. In this poem, Robinson describes a wealthy person who is well mannered, educated and is admired by many people in his town. The town that is imaginatively created by Robinson is "TilburyTown" which he populates with various frustrated people and he (Robinson) is one of them. The poem can be taken to be an ironic commentary on the dream of success, power and wealth in America. This is because Cory goes home and kills himself despite the wealth and admiration he has commanded in that particular town. The reason Cory kills himself is unspecified, perhaps alienation from other people or spiritual emptiness. His suicide leaves those people who admired him and wanted to be like him amazed at the purpose of living. Throughout this poem, the poet introduces explores the classic theme of not judging people by their appearance; rather, there is more to a person's life rather than just what appears on the outside. The poem also suggests the idea that money cannot buy happiness. Robinson appears to question the morals of both Cory and the persona as well as the values of the American dream.

The song "Richard Cory" was written by Paul Simon in 1965 and was recorded by Paul Simon and Garfunkel and released in 1966 as part of their <https://assignbuster.com/richard-cory-by-edwin-arlington-robinson-essay/>

second album *Sounds of Silence*. The song tells a story of Richard Cory from the point of view of one of the workers in his factory. This worker admires Richard Cory and envies the advantages and benefits Cory enjoys and he believes that Cory is a satisfied man. With all the attention he has from the media and his charitable hand to the less fortunate paints Cory as almost an ideal man with a perfect life. The Cory in this song suffers the same fate as the one in the poem because the song ends with a similar verse with that of the poem: "Richard Cory went home last night and put a bullet through his head." The chorus repeats itself after each verse with the worker saying how he wishes he was Cory even after he learns that Cory has killed himself.

This song is extratextually to the poem to some degree. This is because; it refers to text in the poem whose contents and ideas the text of the song resides. The song is based on the original text in the poem and uses references within the poem like: the title of the song "Richard Cory" is exactly the same as the title of the original poem by E. A. Robinson (1897), having been written many years before the composition of the song by P. Simon (1965). Explicit enabled the songwriter to use a set of meanings from the poem to finely suggest a different dimension to the song. While adapting, the original text was transformed extratextually into a musical or melodious text. This transformation of medium from the poem to the song involved different parts and elements of the poem. The structures, signs, characters, the order of events of the poem produced a multitude of great combinations in the song adaptation.

Simon adapted the structure of Robison's poem by using the same number of stanzas as used in the poem. Each stanza had the same number of lines like those in the poem with the only difference being in repetitive chorus. The chorus is absent in the poem and is used by the songwriter as a peak point; a point of emphasis on his message that the speaker was not really satisfied with the life he led as a peasant and as casual worker. He just admired Cory and wanted to be like him, even after his death. The poem does not tell us if the town people still wanted to be like Cory after they learnt of his suicide. Another thing adapted by Simon from the poem is the last phrase of the song: " Richard Cory went home last night and put a bullet through his head," making the song an adaptation of the poem as far as structure is concerned.

The other point of intratextual adaptation of the poem to the song is the characters: Richard Cory and the Speaker. These two are similar in the two types of art genres and they represent a common ground on which adaptation can be established. Simon adapted these two characters to establish the themes of poverty and wealth; the same themes addressed in the poem by Robinson. This reveals that the text of the song is directly attached to the poem by necessity and not by chance. Needless to say, songs are adaptations are med out of necessity and the songwriter wanted to put foreword these two themes and he adapted them directly from the poem making them similar in terms of theme. Since Simon selected consciously from the poem, the elements that compose the song, we need are exploring how these elements have been sucessfully appropriated by the song. It is therefore useful to establish the " original authority" of the

adapted elements into the song. Even though most of the words are different and one may argue that this is not an adaptation of the poem, there are referential relations in terms of structure, themes and characters with the poem that have already been established.

The song however has its material in terms of the repeated chorus, its own words and additional characters like the people of the press taking Cory's pictures reveals the song's harmony and unity that emphasize its characteristics as a song. Extratextuality led Simon to take part in a cultural and usually literary dialogue, paving way for new expressions of the message in the original poem. The poem carries the message of the working class people in America wishing for riches while the rich, despite of their wealthy, have their own problems and therefore it puts the American dream to question. Not so many people read poems as compared to those who listen to music. Most people who read poems are literature professionals or those people who just love poems. However, a person can listen to a song being played everywhere and anywhere because when they hear a song, they cannot close their ears to it. For the message carried in the poem to reach people as Robinson had intended it, Simon adapted the message into a song and together with Garfunkel, tuned it into a melodious expression of the original message making the poem just a reference point and not the complete form.

This concept of extratextuality has enriched the understanding of the complicated relationship between the poem and the song. As we examine the adaptation, we are not just looking at the relationship between the poem and the song, but also at wider perspective. In addition, song adaptation

extratextualizes with the literary source, creatively exploring the spatial setting offered in the poem. As seen earlier, the poem is likely to have been set in an imaginary town; TilburyTown. This was a place of spiritual blindness and crassness linking the poet to a small town in New England which was a utilitarian, repressive social environment routinely designated as Puritan ethic. In this town, people are poor but others like Cory are rich and the working-class people who spend hours and hours toiling for small pay wish they could be like him. Simon adopts the same but he puts the place to be a factory. From Cory's factory, the worker toils hard to get pay and curses the poverty that he lives in and wishes that he could be like the owner of the factory; very wealthy and enjoys all the benefits at his disposal. This worker does not even question why Cory killed himself. All he knows is that; given all things constant, he wishes he could be like him. Simon while adapting this setting deliberately decided to highlight on certain elements that had remained subversive or latent in the poem by invoking the activities of the industrialization period, trying to re-structure the frame of the poem to fit the interpretation.

When studying and examining this adaptation along with the concept extratextuality, the link between the poem and the song are positioned in a less hierarchical order and looks more like an exchange, adding up both the song and the poem. The examination of this extratextual adaptation results in breaking away from the fixed concept of the "original versus copy," which has always dominated similar discussions of song adaptation in the recent years. Therefore, the complex relationship between the poems and songs should then be explored and investigated in terms of additional theoretical

and conceptual dimensions. The extratextual approach is one of the most accepted additions to the theory of literal adaptation. The idea that poems and songs are created from entirely different sign and structural systems that do not correspond to each other is being discarded rapidly from the extratextual approach, in which in which poems and songs and other forms art are also brought under the same context. Literal texts and other types of text, no matter the genre and the medium are usually corresponding.

The song " Richard Cory" by Simon and Garfunkel can therefore be viewed as an interpretation of the poem " Richard Cory" by E. A. Robinson with the use of a different medium. It is essentially a translation from a poem to a song, of a story with a common message. This brings us to a conclusion that literature does not survive in a void culture but this culture is constantly recreated by the changing civilization of which it is part. Particularly, the examination of popular culture fittings of literal works such as extraliteral adaptation can show how literature functions as a living text that becomes part of an organic, sense-generating process in the society.