

# The theme of lost identity in refugee ship, richard cory, and unknown citizen

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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## **Introduction**

As individuals, we all want the best out of life. In difficult times, we branch out to other people that we consider to be in similar situations. Despite being so afraid, it is still possible for us to feel empathy and share compassion for other people. Fear of lost identification led to multiple speakers attempting to locate their place in America. While Lorna Dee Cervantes’ “Refugee Ship” captures the experience of a person stuck in between two cultures, Edwin Arlington Robertson’s “Richard Cory” and W. H. Auden’s “Unknown Citizen” exposes the feelings of appearances versus reality of the world.

## **Refugee Ship**

Motivated by the search of identity, Lorna Dee Cervantes’ “Refugee Ship” is a powerful cry to language, written for the book, *Emplumada* (1981). In this poem, Lorna goes into depth of race and family. The speaker is aware of the history but not completely infused because she has never learned Spanish. This has always been an issue for the speaker. She admits, “Mama raised

me without language” (Cervantes 5). Lorna uses this to focus on her origin, yet emphasizes how the culture is alienated. Her style of writing, using the metaphorical ship adds to the journey of her bloodline. She describes, “ I feel I am a captive aboard the refugee ship. The ship that will never dock” (Cervantes 10, 11, 12). The craft is at sea with its confused passengers hoping for a place to land. Despite them being physically there, they accept that the ship will never reach “ safety”. Since there isn’t an end to the passage, the speaker’s feelings will remain the same as well.

## **Richard Cory**

Edwin Arlington Robinson uses connotation in “ Richard Cory” in a way that speaks the truth about human conditions. He writes as if the poem could have been published recently, as a society, people are still being placed on high pedestals. The “ man that has it all” is Richard Cory, who is described as, “... a gentleman from sole to crown, ... imperially slim, and admirably schooled in every grace” (Robinson 3, 4, 10). Robinson considers the differences in financial status between the two. The people stood aside and watched while Richard Cory came to downtown: the level of the townspeople. To have the chance to speak with him, the people became excited. The people dreamed of being as high on the pedestal. The people sacrificed, pushing themselves to the fullest in order to be exactly like him. Then, suddenly Richard Cory commits suicide. This is a message that Richard Cory wanted to leave behind to the townspeople. Killing himself represents that true happiness can never be purchased and that appearances can be quite deceiving.

## Unknown Citizen

This poem written by W. H. Auden, in 1939, “ Unknown Citizen” emphasizes a citizen who to the state was considered as a “ saint”. Satire is used against the speaker to make clear that the citizen, serving the “ Greater Community”, has lost his identity. This way of writing helps Auden brings out the irony between the words of the speaker who presents the poem and the thoughts of the poet. He confirms, “ And all the reports on his conduct agree that, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint” (Auden 3, 4). To insist on the sainthood, the speaker adds “ He worked in a factory and never got fired, but satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.” (Auden 7, 8). The speaker is satisfied with the behavior of the citizen, however the poem allows the readers to evaluate the standards that are judging him. Auden expresses his attitude including connotation of “ Was he free? Was he happy?” (Auden 28), and obscurity of “ The question is absurd. Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard” (Auden 28, 29).

## Conclusion

The poems’ focus on the experiences of the characters helps analyze a sense of attempting to regain back their lost identities. By bringing the reader closer to their “ locations” through layers of words, and the figure of speech symbolizing the messages that are within, the poems define the dislocation of each individual. These poems offer the readers a rare opportunity to discover the extensive effects of experience alienation among America.