

How one takes life for granted



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How One Takes Life for Granted: Comparing and Contrasting the Poems

'Richard Cory' by E. A. Robinson (1897) and 'My Papa's Waltz' by Theodore Roethke(1948)

At first reading, there are many poetic similarities in the verse forms, rhythms, rhyming systems and language devices in both 'Richard Cory' and 'My Papa's Waltz'. Both contain symbols, metaphors, and sensory imagery; in Roethke, this was mostly tactile while Robinson's poem was more visual. Both focused on one significant male. Most important, both poems reveal that all is never quite what it seems, even though the speakers told the incidents from the perspective of 'this is how it was'. Further examination will show how different these works are in how they relate to the topic, yet how they both confirm that the speakers told of life as they saw it, taking things for granted. Both however, exposed an understanding of the truth and what lies beneath the surface.

'Richard Cory' had a universal speaker, using " we" throughout. This helped to set him apart from " we", the ordinary people who looked at him as " a gentleman from head to crown" (l. 3). The tone contains irony, awe and envy: " we thought that he was everything/To make us wish that we were in his place." (l. 11-12). The metaphor and visual imagery in " and he glittered when he walked" (l. 8) create pictures of somebody bedecked in gold and precious jewels, symbols of wealth. The envious tone changed later to bitterness with the words: " So on we worked. And went without the meat and cursed the bread." (l. 13-14), as if this was all life could be for them, the difference between rich and poor. The last line exposed how taking life for granted was a big mistake. This untouchable, aristocratic man who seemed to have it all, " Went home and put a bullet through his head." (l. 16). The

poem had a lilting, easy, almost ballad type style, up until the shocking final line that was in stark contrast to how Richard Cory was perceived. The clear message was that people and life should never to be judged by outward appearances, or apparent circumstances.

Though similarly like a song, in contrast, 'My Papa's Waltz' had a voice that suggests the speaker was the poet as a child, sharing memories of his father. The tone was also one of awe, but full of tenderness and love, with a hint of fearful unease. Roethke used words like " dizzy", " death", and " beat" indicating all was not as jolly as it appeared. The poet stated this at the outset with " The whiskey on your brath" (l. 1). It may be easy to take for granted that this was a fun incident, a happy event between father and child: " We romped until the pans/Slid from the kitchen shelf" (l. 5-6), noise and movement vibrant in the words bringing tactile, auditory and visual imagery together. But unlike 'Richard Cory', there was an underlying worry in the child's mind about waltzing with his drunken father; potential and unintended violence was not far away. This was evident in the symbols and metaphors in " You beat time on my head/With a palm caked hard by dirt" (l. 13-14) and in " The hand that held my wrist" (l. 9) and " My right ear scraped a buckle" (l. 10).

The event of a child and father waltzing became almost threatening; the mother's face that " Could not unfrown itself." (l. 8) foreshadowed the idea that all was not as it seemed. Here was a little boy who loved his father, but bent himself to the will of a drunken man, with some fear. The poem will recall memories of father child relationships for many. Again, like Robinson, Roethke was showing that outward appearances needed to be looked into; nothing should be taken for granted at face value.

In conclusion, both poems expressed universal truths. Outward symbols and society's norms in both incidents, when examined, contain deeper meanings beneath the surface. Richard Cory had it all, yet this was not enough. The little boy had nothing, but understood how life's dangers could be overcome. He was "still clinging", while Richard was dead. Both pieces are fine illustrations of why life should never be taken for granted.