

Ambrose bierce an occurrence at owl creek bridge essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Analysis

Ambrose Bierce was an American editorialist also a journalist a short story writer and a satirist. He is probably best known for his mystical story, 'An Occurrence at owl Creek Bridge' which is set in the American civil War as well as his satirical lexicon 'The Devil's Dictionary'. He had quite a sardonic view of human matters and was also pretty vehement as a critic actually earning himself the reputation, 'Bitter Bierce'.

Bierce was born in Ohio on June 24th 1842 and quickly rose to fame after publication of his short stories and other literary pieces. He disappeared after going to Mexico in 1813 to gain a first hand account of the civil war in that country and was never found thereafter.

Bierce's style is rather cold and mystical with 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' one of the best examples of this narrative.

Setting

The story takes place during the American Civil War and is the actual story of a character called Peyton Farquhar . He is actually caught trying to sabotage a bridge and is eventually condemned to die by hanging from the same bridge. Bierce describes the whole story with uncanny realism and incredible panache especially the sequences where Farquhar begins imagining that he has escaped the clutches of his captors and has actually evaded death.

Point of View/Characters/Plot

The first part of the story starts with Farquhar close to death as he stands on the bridge accompanied by some Union soldiers who are actually supervising

his execution. As he stands there awaiting death, pleasant thoughts flow through his mind centred on his wife and children and he feels a sudden urge to be once again close to them. He feels distracted by some clanging noise and hatches up his own escape plan in the meantime. He also conjures up a scenario where he can escape his tormentors by diving into the river and going back to his wife and children. But inevitably, he is jerked back to reality and he meets his end on the noose.

In the second part we have a character study of Peyton Farquhar who comes from the South but he also is in keeping with the Confederate cause. He is obviously very much in keeping with the Southern cause and assists the Confederates in every way with which he possibly can. He also gets involved in a plot to sabotage the Owl Creek Bridge but then eventually ends up caught red handed as anyone who is caught damaging property held by the Union faces summary execution by hanging.

The third part of the story focuses on Farquhar falling into the water where he eventually discovers that his hands are slowly breaking free from his bonds and that his senses have turned into a superhuman aspect. He actually begins seeing things which are not possible in real life and attempts to reach his home 30 miles away whilst the soldiers are firing on him but he cannot feel any bullets. Eventually he realizes that all this is a dream and that he is actually dead. It is an uncanny end to a chilling story.

Occurrence at Owl Creek Essay:

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge is definitely a chilling story which focuses on Bierce's dabbling with supernatural things. His background in satire also

enables him to focus on various aspects of the story which might perhaps go unnoticed before actually reading it. First of all, the uncanny structure of the story is rather different than what one is used to, it is split into three parts with each section having a different subject. One has to conclude that Bierce did have some Southern sympathies in his psyche as he seems to describe Peyton Farquhar as a gentlemanly planter who has a purpose in life, that of helping the Confederates. The Union side is somewhat tampered as we are made to feel that these soldiers are duping Farquhar in an attempt to get him hanged and remove another Southern sympathizer from their midst. Bierce is also quite circumspect about the description of Farquhar who appears to be a rather harmless character apart from the fact that he is helping the South. The first part of the story creates a sense of unperturbed emotion which runs through the events rather chillingly, at least in the descriptive aspects. We see Farquhar as a victim of circumstances with not much chance of surviving the drop even though he is thinking and observing what might happen if he had to escape. Bierce is skillful at weaving the themes of desolation and hopelessness with those of intrinsic survival and facing reality. The story in this sense contains various leitmotifs which are perhaps rooted over the fact that the civil War was a rather despicable conflict which pitted brother against brother in what can only be termed as a bloodbath.

However the story also has the classic themes of trying to escape from an impossible situation. His style is also very original in the sense that he creates characters which are in the background but at the same time move forward with almost monotonous regularity. The third part of the story is

particularly intriguing in the way it develops as one is almost carried over into another world, a very original technique for the time. The final concluding elements of the story are rather riveting especially when all goes black and we are faced with a very real life situation of a man being executed and eventually breaking his neck. Bierce's literary style is to be commended in this respect and is probably one of the most original as far as American literature is concerned.

Personally I found the story a truly riveting one due to various aspects. First of all it is set in the Civil war which is indeed a favourite topic of mine and it also develops very nicely across various facets and aspects. Secondly, the character of Farquhar is also highly intriguing and the way his story develops also demonstrates a sense of forlorn longing very much in keeping with Southern romantic ideals. Last but not least I was bowled over by the final descriptions of the planter's death and his encounter with the supernatural. It is a story to which I will return to time and time again not just for its excellent narrative style but also for its ability to shock.