

Example of 'richard cory' - simon vs. robinson literature review

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Both the Edwin Arlington Robinson poem 'Richard Cory' and the song of the same name by Paul Simon tell the tale of the titular Cory, a rich but benevolent man who seems to have it all. He is wealthy, but he uses his wealth well, giving to others when he can, and is polite to others - " He was always human when he talked" (Robinson, line 6). However, this benevolence and his being on top of the world makes his suicide at the end of the poem/song confusing to all. While Robinson focuses on the quiet dignity of the man, and the equally mysterious circumstances that would have led to his suicide, Simon's adaptation of the song is framed in the jealousy and desperation of the narrator himself - each verse is ended with a repeating chorus that laments his own life and establishes his wish " that [he] could be Richard Cory" (Simon, line 7).

Simon's contemporization of the poem into song form leaves in most of the things that Robinson notes about Richard Cory: the gentlemanliness, the humility, the giving, and the grace. Even Simon's narrator's jealousy is reflected in the perspectives of Robinson's words - " we thought that he was everything / to make us wish that we were in his place" (lines 11-12). The chief difference between Simon and Robinson's workers is one of perspective; Robinson's workers believed that they could work their way into Richard Cory's position through sacrifice (" On we worked and waited for the light, / And went without the meat and cursed the bread") (Robinson, lines 13-14). However, Simon's character just " wishes" that he could be Richard Cory. While Robinson's poem ends with Cory putting a bullet in his head, implicitly ending the workers' dreams of being like him, Simon still sings the

aforementioned chorus after learning of the suicide. The implication, therefore, is that even a short, rich life is better than a long, poor one.