

Characterization and the use of situational irony in richard cory

Literature



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Characterization and the Use of Situational Irony in “ Richard Cory” In the poem “ Richard Corey” by Edwin Arlington Robinson, the perceived perfect life of Richard Cory is starkly contrasted by his unimaginable suicide thus creating a distinct look into situational irony. This irony itself further provokes the readers to look into the inner being of the central character, Richard Cory. The collective narrator, “ we” and Richard Cory are in two different situations in which the meanings of suicide are contrastive with each other. Indeed the author’s characterization of his subject facilitates greatly to this irony of situation that keeps the readers carefully secluded from Cory’s world. Refraining from focusing on the cataclysms and absurdities of Richard Cory’s life the author chooses to keep his readers in the same darkness that the collective narrator, “ we” of the poem seems to remain in. Referring to the characterization Joyce C Levenson notes that Arlington Robinson “ gives us nothing of his subject’s motives or feelings. He sketches in Cory’s gentlemanliness and his wealth, but not his despondency, and he lets the suicide seal the identity of the man forever beyond our knowing or judging” (45).

Again in the poem, the narrator’s self-characterization itself serves as a foil to the characterization of Richard Cory. Referring to the function of the “ we” in the poem as a character, W. R. Robinson says, “ in “ Richard Cory,” where the collective “ we” speaks as a character” (34). By the narrator’s word, it is evident that the “ we” refers to the majority of the commoners, in everyday life, who struggle hard for the bread and butter, as the collective narrator “ we” says, “ So on we worked, and waited for the light,/And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;/And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,/

Went home and put a bullet through his head" (Robinson, "Richard Cory"). In contrast with the narrator's hardship, Richard Cory "was rich...richer than a king/ And admirably schooled in every grace" (Robinson, "Richard Cory"). The word 'perfection' suits best with how Richard Corey appears before the readers. Aristocratic charms such as 'clean favored', 'imperial slim', 'quietly arrayed' etc, make him more desirable to the working class people. However, at the same time, one more thing that underlines the image of Richard Corey is satiety. He is "everything" (Robinson, "Richard Cory"). Indeed in the narrator's world where everyone struggles hard for life and struggle to defer death as far as it is possible, Cory's suicide is almost surprising, as Hoyt C. Franchere says, "the crashing climactic moment of the night that Richard Cory "went home and put a bullet through his head" appalls every reader with its suddenness" (32). In literal term, Richard Cory apparently has everything. Such a wealthy, prosperous and perfect life is desired by the "we" in the poem, as the collective narrator says, "he was everything/ to make us wish that we were in his place" (Robinson, "Richard Cory"). By putting these opposing aspects such as perfective life and suicide, hardship and desire to live, etc side by side, the author provokes his readers to find a probable meaning for the unimaginable suicide of Richard Cory. The author wants to remind his readers of the fact that life is not what it looks like. Even though Cory looks like a sufficient individual, he really is not such sufficient. In this regard, Franchere comments, "What private sense of failure, what personal recognition of his own inadequacy, or what secret unfulfilled longing drove Cory to suicide, Robinson does not say; he leaves the reason for his readers to determine" (56). Also there is another

possibility that Robinson wants to say that the burden of satiety is far more unbearable than the hardship and struggle for life; that absurdity of existence reaches its climax when man is deprived of the opportunities of struggling for life. Richard Corey is “ everything” and “ rich –even richer than the king” (Robinson, “ Richard Cory”). So the fulfillment of all of his goals and dreams of life pushes him towards suicide. But the working class townspeople who go without meat, still survive through their work. But the irony is that the townspeople are not farsighted enough to view the pain of satiety. Ultimately, they continue their work for their survival, but Richard Corey commits suicide on “ one calm summer night” (Robinson, “ Richard Cory”).

Works Cited

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