

A Deconstructive Analysis of Edwin Robinson's Richard Cory



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ABSTRACT: This literary research focused on the deconstructive analysis of the poem of Edwin Arlington Robinson's Richard Cory. This theory claims that language is everything and that language never leaves us with the reality of the referent. The Deconstruction criticism of the text in this paper followed three stages: Verbal, Textual, and Linguistic. "Richard Cory" is one of the poems written by Edwin Arlington Robinson. The poem talks about people's high and low social status in a particular community, physical appearance, and the reality of life. From the title to the poem's content, the readers can have different interpretations and meanings of it. Results have shown that Richard Cory's poem has gotten new meanings and interpretations based on the researchers' ideologies and subjectivities. This study concludes that the newly discovered and given meanings of "Richard Cory" can still have another alternative meaning based on another reader's or person's point of view.

KEYWORDS: Binary opposition, Contradiction, Deconstruction, Verbal, Textual, Linguistic

INTRODUCTION

The concept of deconstruction within a text encompasses arguments that advocate for the philosophy of paradox, critique of metaphysics, and radical empiricism. In his book "Jacques Derrida: Basic Writings" (2020), edited by Stocker, B., the author elucidates Derrida's perspective on meaning and interpretation. According to Derrida, interpretation is perpetually entangled in the interpretation of interpretations due to the inherent nature of language, which never directly exposes us to the reality of the referent. He added that language is a system of signs, contradictions, and binary oppositions.

Deconstruction does not mean the destruction of the text. It may involve dismantling the text and closely reading and analyzing it but not concluding that it has no meaning. In deconstruction, the reader must be aware of how Derrida used it as a literary theory and how it gives other meaning and interpretation to a text.

Although deconstruction spans disciplines and has evolved into a coherent approach to literary critique, it is a metaphysical debate. Burgess, C. (2019) in his book, *Challenging Theory: Discipline After Deconstruction: Studies in European Cultural Transition, Volume One*. Routledge explained Derrida's points on how conceptual oppositions, whether in the text, philosophy, literature, or politics, are not mutually exclusive but irredeemably contaminated by or reliant upon each other. Likely, this theory is ultimately operational for the meanings and unstable. Derrida's deconstruction theory tries to suppress or defer the meaning of any text shown. So, literary persons cannot control their pieces of literature from this point of view. Haider, A., Nazeer, I., & Ahmad, K. (2022).

Furthermore, Monroe (1925) stressed that Richard Cory's poem of Edwin Arlington Robinson is recorded as one of the first, and still one of the best, of his numerous contradictions in human character. By having a closer reading and analysis of the text, we give other meanings to the poem. The poet used vocabulary in the text, which could suggest new meanings every time a reader reads it. We usually come across unique aspects of the text when we evaluate and analyze it critically. Every time a further aspect of that text is revealed to us, several critical perspectives draw divergent conclusions from that exact text. So, deconstruction is fit enough to discover and explore the hidden meaning of the text.

RESEARCH METHOD USED

This study utilized a literary textual analysis using a Deconstruction theory. The three stages of deconstruction, namely verbal, textual, and linguistic, were considered and served as the criteria for the critique. The primary data source was the Richard Cory poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson. The data analysis tool used was the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida. The researchers investigated to find out the hidden meaning of the poem.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

French philosopher Jacques Derrida coined and developed the Deconstruction theory in the 1960s. His ideas and critique opposed the concept of structuralism—deconstruction aimed to discuss the relationship between text and its meaning. Derrida believes a text has no single meaning and can have different interpretations and meanings. The researchers took the poem “Richard Cory” by Edwin Arlington Robinson. The poet creatively and skillfully showed how the rich and the poor status in the community differ and how they have something in common. The researchers tried to apply the principles of deconstruction theory to the poem “Richard Cory” to find out the real and hidden meaning of the text and how it differs from that of the poet’s intention and aim. Based on Peter Barry’s three stages in deconstructing a text, the researcher used deconstruction and divided it into three phases: verbal, textual, and linguistic. The researcher discusses all the aspects and elements of deconstruction theory available in the poem used.

The Verbal Stage

According to Alam (2019), the verbal stage is purely verbal; it is the same as the conventional form of close reading of the text, looking for paradoxes and contradictions. The researcher found many words and phrases used as verses and lines in the poem “Richard Cory.” In this poem, the researcher found the first paradox in the first stanza of the poem:

*Whenever Richard Cory went downtown,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean, favored, and imperially slim.*

A paradox may be a sentence, a phrase, or a statement contradictory to common sense and yet is perhaps actual and not possible (Haider, Nazeer, & Ahmad, 2022). So, in the first stanza, there is a contradiction in the statement because Richard Cory is not a king, so why should he be a gentleman from sole to crown? Yes, he could be a gentleman, but using the word crown may lead to confusion even if he is compared to a king because of his riches that people envy. Another thing is his being “imperially slim.” This talks about him being more of an emperor than just a king. There could be confusion between him being a rich man, being like a king, and being like an emperor. The poet used this paradox to skillfully show how rich Richard Cory is and how much people envy him. The second contradiction was found in the 2nd stanza of the poem:

*And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still, he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.*

The poet describes Richard Cory to be the wealthiest man in town. There is a contradiction with the speaker’s statement because he was said to be quietly arrayed, so someone dressed well is a human, and someone who talks is also a human. The speaker does not need to say he is always human when talking. Also, the terms “fluttered pulses” and “glittered when he walked” could make him less of a human because something that glitters is gold and not human. There is a contradiction between what the speaker means by him being a human and giving him descriptions that are not human-like. The third contradiction was found in the 3rd stanza of the poem:

*And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.*

There is a contradiction in the third stanza because of the line, “We thought that he was everything.” We all know that someone may have all the riches in the world, but he cannot have everything in life. So, why should the neighbors have second thoughts of him having everything then? Yes, we usually wish we were in someone’s place, especially if he has all the riches, but there is no point in thinking he has everything. There will always be something that we need to work on in ourselves to keep us going. We cannot have everything in this world, which is why there is an overlapping meaning between the rich and the poor. The fourth contradiction was found in the 4th stanza of the poem:

*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.*

In the last stanza, there is a contradiction with the speaker’s statement, which is “cursed the bread.” Yes! We do curse but with someone and not merely on something. There is a contradiction with the speaker’s statement because they are the ones struggling and cursing the bread, but it ended up with Richard Cory taking away his life with the use of a bullet. In the last stanza,

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the poet creatively shows how someone others think has everything does not have it and is most likely to be lonely. Richard Cory was rich but was not heard if he was okay or going through something.

The Textual Stage

The textual stage is the same as the verbal stage but on a larger scale. The researcher considered the overall view of the poem and took the individual phrases, shifts, and breaks found in the poem. In this stage, the deconstruction critic looks for breaks and shifts in the continuity of the literary text of the poem. These shifts can be the instabilities of attitude or lack of unified and fixed position. Shifts have various kinds, like shifts in time, focus, point of view, tone, vocabulary, pace, and attitude.

The poem's title is "Richard Cory," meaning a man named Richard Cory. The poet discussed and described him in the poem, but after reading it, it was not just about him. The speaker, the neighbor, also highlights in the poem how they envy Richard Cory and his life. In the first and second stanzas, the tone is relaxed. The neighbors talked about how admirable Richard Cory is. In the third stanza, their tone jumps from admiration to wishing they were in his place. In the last stanza, they talk about how they work hard but still cannot have everything, and it ends up with Richard Cory losing his life despite having everything as his neighbors thought. There is a shift in focus because the author does not merely talk about Richard Cory alone in each stanza but also talks about the neighbors whom he described as having a different status compared to Richard Cory.

In the poem, the poet gives us a very sample of how we usually disregard every blessing that comes our way. By closely reading and analyzing, the verse tells us that we should be mindful and grateful for our blessings and not think of things that are not in our reach, especially to envy others and their successes. Another thing is that, no matter how rich or poor we are in life, we need a family and a friend to listen and hear us when we are going through something. We need to listen and be heard simultaneously so problems can be solved and not end by taking our lives.

The Linguistic Stage

The deconstruction critic discovers questions, the adequacy of language moments, and language as a medium of communication in the linguistic stage. It entails searching for implicit or explicit references in the literary material under consideration. The literary text also examines and checks the untrustworthiness and unreliability of language. The critic looks for the unspoken and impossible-to-explain terms that the poet says in every line and stanza. These are language deflates or inflates or objects which are misrepresented. In this poem, the poet uses paradoxes but does not use them as often as possible.

The poem discusses the binary oppositions of rich/poor and appearance/reality. The poem clearly shows how the poet describes and gives the difference between a rich and an inferior status in the community. Like Richard Cory, you seem to have everything when you are rich. You are being admired and looked up to. When you are poor, you seem always to work hard but still cannot meet ends and have everything in life. You always wish to be rich and be like someone rich. The poem tells us that when we are rich, it does not mean that we have everything and are happy; when we are poor, it does not mean that we have nothing and are unsatisfied. There is an overlapping meaning between being rich and being poor. The poet tried to let us realize how being poor could mean much more than being poor. It means that we may not have all the riches in the world, but at least we have families and friends with whom we may talk and share our problems regarding appearance and reality, which are not physically said in the poem's lines. It is still being talked about after reading the whole poem. The neighbors expect so much from Richard Cory after seeing him in his physical appearance. They admired him for how he talked, dressed, and carried himself in front of them, but they were not mindful of what was behind those beautiful smiles, voices, and appearances of him. They did not know the problems he carried despite having all the riches in the world. There is an opposition between appearance and reality. Appearance is given privilege in the poem, but reality should also be given importance, and people should dwell on what is accurate rather than something that is an expectation and just merely an appearance.

CONCLUSION

The textual meanings of the words used in the poem can be easily grasped and deciphered, and how these words are deferred and never present. Using a poststructuralist sense, the binary oppositions mark the interplay of meanings and interpretations. The signifiers in this poem constantly change when one closely reads the poem. The poet used paradoxes and contradictions to show the conflicting meaning of the text. There were also various kinds of shifts and breaks in the poem. The poet used those shifts and breaks to make his literary piece more unique, impressive, and attractive.

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