

# Stylistic Analysis on Richard Cory

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**Abstract:** This paper mainly consists of three parts, first to introduce the back information of the author and the poem; next to analysis this poem from three levels: the phonological level, the lexical level and the semantic level; last, to conclude the end of this poem from the above analysis and infer the social enlightenment towards modern life of this poem.

**Keywords:** Phonological; Lexical; Semantic; Stylistics

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## Introduction

Richard Cory is a portrait poem written by Edwin Arlington Robinson, an American New England poet, at the end of the 19th century. He had an unhappy childhood in Alna, Maine. However, his talent in literature brought him to Harvard University as a special student at the age of 21. Unfortunately, His father died when his first year at Harvard. Composed with his sad life as a child, his father's death foresaw the tragic but realistic tone of this poem in his later life. Later, his published his first book, *The Torrent and the Night Before* in 1896 in New York. His work became a hot and won Pulitzer Prize three times in the 1920s.

With poets like Frost, they, together, boosted American poem creation, and he also makes the greatest American poet in the first twenties of twenty century. Robinson experienced two stages in poem creation: in his early stage, he centered on short lyric poem of personal portrait, which obviously demonstrates the psychic trauma and incurable loneliness rooted from traditional, fixed-minded people in modern civilization; the later stage focused on long narrative poem. Because he lived through his father's death and his two brothers' career challenge and failure, he set on to pay more attention on losers. He has formed a style pf tidy and uniform meter and rhythm with breakthrough in theme and strong irony. His poems can invoke readers inspection to oneself and rethink their life. His representative works are *The Torrent and the Night Before*, *The Man Against the Sky*, *Richard Cory*. *Richard Cory* first issued on 1896, is one of the most famous portrait poem from his poem collection *The Children of the Night*. He uses dramatic way to show Cory's character: Instead of skinny, he is slim. He is a well-educated gentleman, with soft and comfortable manner. He lives an admirable life without worries from food and clothes. However, man like this took his own life on a quiet night. This stagey twist causes strong shocks to readers, which shows that the karma from modern civilization on traditional and old-fashioned people is extreme and heavy. It also demonstrates that the wealth in material life cannot necessarily compensate the poverty in spiritual life. Man's life makes meaning only when he has a purpose or belief to live on. This poem doesn't only imply Robinson's understanding towards life that life should be full of twist and turn, only those brave ones who are able to face up the difficulties can taste the funny of challenging life.

Richard Cory remains one of Robinson's most popular poems. It recalls the economic depression of 1893. At that time, people could not afford meat and barely live by bit of bread. The hard-time experience made the town people even more aware of Richard's difference from them, so much so that they treated him as royalty and his life as the life destination.

## Analysis

This paper tries to analyze the relationship between the groups of image, figures of speech, tension, ambiguity, and theme in the text from the perspective of stylistics, and further explores the spiritual world of Richard Cory, the protagonist of poetry and the his death, so as to draw inspiration beneficial to the spiritual world of mankind.

The main content can be inferred that Cory possesses abundant wealth as well as good manners, which are highly admired by his town people. However, he chooses to xend his life by committing suicide.

In phonological level, this paper largely centers on rhythm. Rhythm and rhyme are the essence and key difference for poem from other form of literature. Thus, it is essential to analyse the phonological level when understanding a poem. Influenced by Dr. Suman, Robinson shows his respects to early traditional rules of rhythm and rhyme almost in every his works, especially in his former stage.

The entire poem is written in iambic pentameter (each line has five stressed sound and five unstressed with unstressed first). The rhyme scheme is set up in a basic ABAB CDCD EFEF GHGH pattern, with the lines divided up into four stanzas, quatrains to be exactly. The whole poem are dotted with diphthongs as the foot, for example, the /au/ in the first stanza, the /ei/ in the second stanza and the /ai/ in the fourth stanza. Besides these, Robinson also uses lots long vowels like /i:/, /u:/. When reciting this poem, the long vowels and diphthongs needs more time to pronounce which earns some times for readers to think over and savour the profound meaning of the poem.

To maximize the music quality of poem, the poet uses alliteration, assonance, consonance . For alliteration(Press the head rhyme, consonant), for example, in the first stanza, “whenever ..... went.....”and “.....we worked, and waited.....”on the rhythm foot of /w/, “people.....pavement”on /p/, “he.....human”on /h/; Assonance ( Quasi rhyme, vowel) , “down”and “town” on / au/ in the first stanza, “fluttered” and “pulse”on /ʌ/ in the third stanza, “put”and “bullet” on /u/ in the last stanza; for Consonance (end rhyme ), the examples are spread in the first stanza ”town” of first line and “ crown” on the foot / au/ “him” of second line and “slim” on / i/; in the second stanza “arrayed” and “said” on foot /ei/, “talked” and “walked” on /ʌ:/; in the third stanza “king” and “evening”on foot /i/, “grace” and “place”on foot /ei/; in the fourth stanza “light” and “night” on foot /ai/, “bread” and “head” on foot /ʌ/. From those foot, there is a circle of rhythm on /ʌ/ and /ei/, it does not only sounds more fluent but also leaves an impression of bland, just like Richard’s life, boring and meaningless.

In the lexical level, this paper chiefly focuses on words and the order of some words’ places. Robinson is very loyal to art. Each word in his poem is well contemplated. Frost once said in his poems, people can feel the new spots out of traditional manner. Robinson is so picky about his wording that he would spend hours studying which word can create a better reaction.

Therefore, for the lexical level, in this poem,the word ‘Richard’ comes from Germanic, which means a powerful leader, and there was a king called Richard, thus, from this word, we get the feeling that the next figure would be somebody. However,Cory is the name of the Anglo-Saxon from the bottom. Hence, there comes the strong contrast linking to the hero’s wealthy material life but poor spiritual life, which foreshadows his tragedy at the end of the poem. Second, the author also inclines to the referring meaning or intonation of the words. For example, “clean-favored” means that he is smart dressed and nice-looking; “slim” instead of “thin”; “arrayed” instead of “dressed”; “human” instead of “educated” or “courteous”, which makes the whole poem even more graceful in form and content and more catchy in rhyme. It is not only the speciality of traditional form of poem, but also coincidences with our protagonist in this poem, purposefully using articulated fancy word to enlarge the distance between Cory and the rest.

In the third level, this paper concentrates on sentence. In semantic level, speech of figure is foregrounding and makes the content more memorable and aesthetic. In this poem, the author uses symbol, parallelism, antitheses and irony.

Symbol is a technique in which authors denote certain images or thoughts into the word. Thus, in this poem, symbol is emaciated in the the following words: Meat and bread symbolizes material life; light symbolizes the hope and spiritual life while night symbolizes the opposite side, which gives people a feeling of depression and pondering. As ordinary people had to struggle with hard and poor material life but live under the hopeful light with one purpose that is to make themselves full the next day. Their lives were more daring and attempting, while Cory, because he already possessed what the rest wish to have and he has nothing to fight for materially and spiritually, he felt hopeless for his lonely life and killed himself.

Parallelism means two or more similar or same sentence structures or phrases with relevant meaning are used. It injects stronger expressions and emotions to readers, leaving fresh and impressive image. In this poem, In the second stanza, the two ‘and’ clauses and the ‘when’ clauses quicken the speed and enforce the tone. While in the fourth stanza, the two ‘and’ clauses produce sharply contrast, which highlights the emotion of the whole poem.

Antitheses is to compare two contradictory things to more the features of the two things even more obvious and clearer meaning. In this poem, antitheses entitles aesthetic to the form, images and tones. The character of Richard Cory is a well-educated gentleman living a care-free life which shapes a huge contrast with the people who only live on hard and dry bread. It also shows us a vivid picture in which Richard lives a well-off life and we the people live on street, hoping for better tomorrow. The image of ‘light’ and ‘night’ also shapes an evident contrast. Besides this, the unexpected ending also causes big contrast with Richard’s character shaped in the early stanza. However, the end also makes sense for the previous contrasts lay a stunt pavement for the high point of the whole poem.

Irony is that the speaker intentionally say the opposite things to enforce the intended meaning. In this poem, the first three stanzas gradually depicts Cory's perfect life in all rounds and naturally we, the people, saw his life as our life goal; nonetheless, the author breaks our expectation by Richard's suicide on a tranquil night. This leads to a heavy irony where what the normal people wish is the weapon destroying the wealth. From this, we can infer that in this complicated society, life is not always easy and everyone has his own difficulties to confront, however, as long as he has one purpose in his daily life, it is always too early for him to end his life.

## Conclusion

Robinson's work are simple in word but profound in meaning. Due to his own family situation, he exceptionally cares more about people in rabbit hole and retrospects the value of life. His earnest attention to social issues urges him to pundit on some irrational major social phenomena and hope people can notice its damage. Richard Cory, as the first poem in the theme of sharp contrast between material life and spiritual life, not only gives us a picture of then society, but also shades a light into modern life, even though it is created a century ago. In this poem, Cory is alien to the townpeople. He lacks contact with other people even though he is wealthy. He does not necessarily resist the erosion of his inner empty. Just like modern ad highly-developed 21<sup>st</sup> century, technology has brought human kind into the age of information and outer-space exploration, general public have gained much more than our previous generations and should be less worrying and anxious. Unfortunately, the fact is that men's nature, and their relation with the nature, their neighbors as well as the society has undergone an astounding change. People tend to be more exclusive about human resources and material channels because they lack basic communications and trust with their surroundings. Hence, it is imaginable that modern people are in an indifferent relationship with friends and over-strained mind state with twisted humanity.

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