**An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge**

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Psychological thrillers can be treacherous enough to successfully lead their readers along a falsified path of hope that culminates into a macabre dead end. The short story ‘An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge’ written by Ambrose Bierce in 1890 is one such example. The author was himself a civil war veteran and has written this story so that it is full of historical content for psychological as well as literary analyses.

The plot of the story belongs to the finest annals of psychological fiction. The first part of the story has been set in stark contrast to the third part. The foremost juxtaposition is the silence and ‘death’ of the first part that can be compared to the almost inhumanly fast pace at which the story moves in the second part. In the first part, soldiers have been defined as motionless ‘statues’ who are simply doing their jobs as sentinels or spectators. Officers are also standing still with folded arms as if they were all greeting death with respect. The senses of the reader are repeatedly revoked to various forms of silence in this part of the story. Motionless, lifeless, lonely and deathly silence. By the end of this part, the fate of the doomed man is simply in the hands of the lieutenant quietly standing on his plank. As the ‘rope breaks’ in the third part and Fahrquhar plunges towards the stream, bizarre levels of realism emerge in the story. Contradicting the silence and motionlessness of the first part, his hands move without his voluntary bidding. The explosion in his senses appears in the story appears in excruciating detail. There is violent swimming and evasion of several firing rounds from the previously unmoving soldiers. Sounds and explosions happen again and again. The second part acts as the bridge and the explanation of deceit. Even though the story ends with an intense twist, this constant juxtaposition of death with life ending in death again; gives the story an immaculate plot.

The theme of this story can be understood from various perspectives. One of the most widely studied and understood perspective is the psychological one through which we figure out how even clear foreshadowing in the first part could not stop readers from falling prey to delusion and distortion in the final part. In the last sentence of part one, Bierce clearly states that the following thoughts ran through the mind of the doomed man. Yet the eye reads on and the brain believes the perversions halfheartedly sold as reality in the third part. Moreover, even the deceit of the federal scout described in the second part fails to prepare the average reader for the ending. Another clear theme of this story was the depiction of war. A secessionist slaveowner with tender gray eyes, a fine home and a beautiful wife is priceless commentary on war and the humanity of its countless victims.

Characters appear namelessly in ‘An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge’ but their features stay and make a lasting impact on the story. The most wholly described character is that of Fahrquhar himself as he dreams of his hands being free and suddenly experiences freedom followed by days of journeying and reaching his home all in the span of a few moments before death. However, the character of the soldiers as rigid, unmoving statues and that of death as a respected dignitary are all equally important.

There are dazzling linguistic strategies at play in this story. These make all the pieces of its puzzle come together impeccably at a horrifying end.