

Someone that Doesn't Love a Wall

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Abstract

“Richard Cory,” written by Edwin Arlington Robinson, is basically a poem about a wealthy, well-respected man’s decision to “put a bullet through his head” (16). It is a surprising, blunt ending to an otherwise up-beat poem. Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” is, superficially, a poem about two neighbors meeting in the spring to rebuild the wall that separates their properties. One of the neighbors begins to question the reason for the wall. We can assume that the wall is a metaphor for barriers between two people who could have a relationship if the wall were non-existent. A similar metaphoric wall is the driving force behind Richard Cory’s isolation from society, and like the simpleton neighbor in “Mending Wall,” the people on the pavement insist on maintaining the barrier between themselves and Richard Cory. “Richard Cory” and “Mending Wall” share a common theme, the disdain for walls between people.

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In the first two lines of Robinson’s poem we begin to see a distinct separation between Richard Cory and the townspeople; “Whenever Richard Cory went down town / We people on the pavement looked at him” (1-2). It is easy for the reader to imagine standing in front of a crowd about to give a speech, feeling the stares the audience sends in his direction--the cold, distant stares of people waiting for him to lose his place. Richard Cory must have felt this isolation from all the people down town, but he tried to blend in with the crowd. Robinson writes, “And he was always human when he talked / But still he fluttered pulses when he said / ‘Good-morning,’ and he glittered when he walked” (6-8). He openly tries to connect with them, but according to the poem, the people never respond to him. Their heartbeats race, but we never see a place where they respond with warm words or any words, for that matter. Richard Cory, the man, is described by the people on the pavement as follows: “He was a

gentleman from sole to crown" (3). Judging by the word choice of sole rather than soul, we can see that the people only thought of Richard Cory's outward appearance. This simple word choice is one of the earliest signs of the barrier placed between Richard Cory and the townspeople. Richard Cory, most likely, did not have a friend who saw the man he truly was. No one knew his soul, his entire being, and because of this he felt alone, isolated from the townspeople. The poem mentions Richard Cory's wealth, "And he was rich-yes, richer than a King-" (9). Richard Cory may have been wealthy in terms of gold, but he was lacking in a rich social life. We can assume that kings are isolated simply because of their place of power. Kings usually have people around them, such as wives and heirs. Poor Richard Cory, though, was richer than a king, so he was also more isolated. The wall between Richard Cory and the townspeople prevented him from having lasting friendships. "And Richard Cory, one calm summer night / Went home and put a bullet through his head" (15-16). Unfortunately, Richard Cory was never able to bring down the wall between him and the townspeople, mostly because the townspeople continued mending the wall by believing Richard Cory was perfect.

The speaker in "Mending Wall" meets with his neighbor every spring to repair the wall that separates the speaker's apple orchard from his neighbor's pine trees. The speaker, though, does not see meaning in the mending of the wall: "There where it is we do not need the wall" (23). This wall can be seen as a metaphor. The wall represents a barrier between two people. The barrier can be one of many things or even many things that sprouted from one small problem. The speaker's neighbor is not a well educated man: "He moves in darkness as it seems to me" (41). The neighbor cannot see the light, or rather, the possibility of a better life if the wall were taken down. The neighbor simply does what his father had done before him: "He will not go behind his father's saying" (43). The neighbor continues to restate his father's legacy; "He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors'" (45). The statement contradicts itself to an intelligent person. Neighbors can be good friends, but if there is a "fence" between them the neighbors can never create a true friendship. There will constantly be a barrier between them. In his own essay, titled "Frost's Mending Wall," A. R. Coulthard mistakenly writes, "Twice he [the speaker] slips up and gives away his true feelings. Early in the poem, after noting that hunters help keep the dread walls down, he casually adds 'I have come after them and made repair / Where they have left not one stone on stone,' His complaint is about the work, not the wall" (41). Coulthard's point of view is far too cynical and lazy. The speaker may be complaining about the work, but he only does so because he sees no use for the fence: "He is all pine and I am apple orchard / My apple trees will never get across / And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him" (25-26). If the speaker truly were complaining about the work he would not have referred to the mending of the wall as an "outdoor game" (21).

"Richard Cory" and "Mending Wall" share a common theme, the disdain for walls between people. If the wall had not been between the two neighbors in "Mending Wall" no harm would have occurred. The apple trees would not have damaged the pine trees. It is not as if a wall can stop seeds from moving through the air. The wall, however, was mended and the reader never sees a human bond form. In "Richard Cory" the wall is a murderous beast. It isolates Richard Cory from any possible relationships. If the wall had not been so tediously mended by the townspeople, then perhaps Richard Cory could have saved the bullet for the next time he went out on a hunt. According to the speaker in "Mending Wall," hunting brings

down walls: “The work of hunters is another thing / I have come after them and made repair” (5-6). Hunting can be a useful form a male bonding. It provides a comfort area between two people in hope of a new friendship. In the end we learn that there is indeed “something that doesn’t love a wall” (1). Richard Cory died hating walls, and the owner of the Apple Orchard simply bruises his hands from mending one. The end result simply proves that walls can be a crippling force in life.

Biography

Nathan Holloway is an aspiring novelist and a freshman English major. He was born and raised in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and he currently lives in Manning, Arkansas. He is the son of Tracy and Cindy Holloway.