

Linguistic and Narrative Cohesion in An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

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The reader's bewilderment at the end of Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" is less a result of Peyton Farquhar's death than the timely coordination of this man's violent execution with the reader's sudden realization that instead of a detached objective reading he has been cajoled into a subjective experience (Ames 53). The reader is able to cross over into the consciousness of the protagonist at the moment when experience ends because of the story's cohesion and coherence. A focused examination of specific passages and themes in each of the story's sections demonstrates how Bierce satisfies the expectations of the reader and provides a reasonable subjective experience through known-new contracts of sentence structure and narrative style.

Martha Kolln points out that the study of cohesion "concerns the connection of [sentences](#) to one another, to the 'flow' of a text, to the ways in which a paragraph of separate sentences becomes a unified whole" (19). The known-new sequence is a rhetorical technique to provide cohesion between sentences, [paragraphs](#), and even ideas.

Specifically, it is a contract in which "old, or known, information . . . will appear in the subject slot, with the new information in the predicate" (236). Narrative style can also be validated by the preceding schema network. Each section is defined by its predecessor.

Bierce's story is divided into three sections: the first describes the final preparations for the military execution of a civilian prisoner, the second flashes back to the incident that led up to his capture, and the third recounts the sensations, thoughts, and feelings of the condemned man as he drea...

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