

The emotion of fear in richard wright's "native son"

Literature



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David J. Schwartz, an American motivational writer and coach, once stated “Action cures fear”. In short, doing something to stop your fear will no longer make you scared of your fear. Schwartz’s quote connects to the character Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright’s, *Native Son*. Bigger is controlled by the fear of white people and this fear caused Bigger to kill Mary Dalton, daughter of Mr and Mrs. Dalton, however unlike Schwartz’s quote killing Mary Dalton didn’t cure Bigger’s fear of white people as it only made it worse. Richard Wright uses symbolism and intense diction to make an argument that fear enables people in particular African-Americans to fight for their lives which leads to consequences.

The book starts off with Bigger Thomas waking up and getting dressed until his sister Vera shaking with fear told Bigger that there was a rat. The rat was “pulsed with fear” as it “emitted a long thin song of defiance ... pawing the air restlessly” (Wright 6). The rat and Bigger share a lot of similarities such as living in unsanitary conditions but also foreshadows Bigger’s character as someone who fights every day for survival as his actions are motivated by fear. The rat also symbolizes the struggle that African-Americans at the time have to live in and were forced to live in ghettos as everyday they struggle to survive. African-Americans and the rat also face violence more frequently as they are both exposed to savage murder and violence such as lynching for African-Americans done by white Americans. Gus, a friend of Bigger, was walking with Bigger and as they were walking Bigger saw a plane and says “I could fly a plane if I chance” which caused Gus to reply back by saying “If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane”(Wright 17). The plane shows the gap

between white and black and how much they can achieve. The term “ the sky’s the limit” only refers to white Americans while African-Americans can only reach as far as the ground. Bigger and Gus are below the plane while the white man is above them which shows how divided whites and blacks.

The symbol of the plane also justifies white’s authority over blacks as planes are above in the air and they are being flown by white people. White Americans look down over African-Americans making them feel superior to America. Later on in the book, Bigger, Mary, and Jan , Mary’s boyfriend, were driving to Ernie’s Kitchen Shack for a meal. Mary told Bigger that she wanted to know “ just [to] see how your people live I want to know these people”(Wright 70). Even though Mary and Jan are showing sympathy towards Bigger and the whole community but they are unable to see how uncomfortable Bigger was as “ his heart was beating fast and he struggled to control his breath”(Wright 70). Mary and Jan were blind to Bigger’s emotions and feelings as they were unable to make Bigger feel comfortable but more towards discomfort. Blindness is also when Mrs. Dalton was unable to see Bigger when he murdered Mary as in the text it states “ Mary? Is that you? ... Mary! Are you ill?”(Wright 86).