

Literature review on battle of the ants by henry david thoreau: literary analysis...

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Introduction

People are indeed not created equal. They all have different faces, personalities, abilities, beliefs, principles, and cultures among others. With that being said, Henry David Thoreau's literary piece *The Battle of the Ants*, found at the twelfth chapter of *Walden*, is a great example of this actuality. The story tells of how a simple story of war or battle between two species of ants, which are different in size and color, can serve as a reflection of the main implication of humanitarian conflicts in today's reality. Thoreau used black and red ants as an allegory to depict the inequality between races, to grasp knowledge about men's struggles, as well as the pointlessness of their hostilities.

This analysis will talk about the plot of the story, its theme or universal message, the literary criticism that needs to be addressed in order to comprehend the main point of the story, and the insights about the story as a whole. Also, the comparison between the ants and humans in terms of their attitude, approach, and mindset towards fighting a battle is stated in this analysis. In this regard, this paper will provide a formalist criticism to highlight the story's structure and uniqueness as a literary piece, how it gives a profound interpretation of something seemingly mundane, and how the author shows an interconnection among various life forms.

Plot Summary, Characterization, and Setting

The characters in the story are the red and black ants that were situated in a wood pile on the author's wood yard. It is an unusual yet an attention-grabbing and out-of-the-ordinary characterization and setting for the story,

but as a whole, it gave justice or integrity to what the author wanted to convey to his readers. The Battle of the Ants begins with Henry David Thoreau nonchalantly strolling around his wood yard when he suddenly saw the pile of woods surrounded with ants, a clash of red and black clans, fighting against each other even if one was way bigger than the other. Later on, he matched up these ants against human beings, creating the symbol that is clearly evident from the beginning of the story. He also pointed out that it was the only battle, which he has ever witnessed that didn't have any noise. He realized that humans never fight in such a determined way like this. In the author's words,

“ On every side they were engaged in deadly combat, yet without any noise

that I could hear, and human soldiers never fought so resolutely.”

(Thoreau)

Thoreau used personification or embodiment and related human qualities and characteristics to animals as a way of making sense of the actions he saw in the ants. He also used overstatements and exaggerations like touching on the topics of the American Revolution, the Myrmidons in Greek mythology, the vengeance of Achilles to recoup Patroclus, and other human wars or battles in order to underpin its anti violence or anti war argument even if it was clearly stated that it was a fight between the ants.

As well, he described the ants in human ways. For instance, the red ants were analogous to the republicans while the black ants were analogous to the imperialists. He even said that the interest and curiosity he got from watching the ants was like being involved in human wars. The red and black

ants, albeit their physical differences, came to symbolize human beings in different races and cultures and an image of skirmishing equality and discrimination.

“ I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference.” (Thoreau)

Theme, Point of View and Conflicts

Thoreau used the battle between the black and the red ants to illustrate how ants get into a brawl for a real war and interestingly made a comparison between ants and humans. He then assailed the American Revolution in having an unfounded and wide-off-the mark standpoint as the people of Concord became furious and enraged at some point during the war.

Comparing it to the battle of the ants, he wanted to point out that ants, in that sense, are braver and more indomitable than the humans who were present in the war. Additionally, more ants died in their particular battle than those people who scuffled at the Concord. Ants also did not need any outside sources to help them in their battle unlike humans who just employ other people through the use of money or other things in order to have manpower and to gain the objective they set prior to engaging in the war. A pertinent annihilation to Thoreau's intention is that in truth and certainty, the ants in their battles -- as seen and narrated by the author -- are more prudent and sound than humans when there's war in their land. Thoreau supposed, “ They fought with more pertinacity than bulldogs. Neither manifested the least disposition to retreat. It was evident that their battle-cry was Conquer or Die.” (Thoreau)

In a sense, the ants' reason for war is not just for material things like most humans desire; rather the ants purport war to be able to provide security, power, and authority for their colony.

Meanwhile, the story provides a universal meaning or a wide range idea that human beings, must be able to think critically before doing anything that can harm us or destroy us holistically. Like the ants, people must know the reason why they are fighting and this must not be for selfish reasons; rather, they should strive to form a camaraderie or comradeship with other people. Replicating the epic deeds and conduct of the ants in the story can also be a means for us to defend our cluster or race.

“ I never learned which party was victorious, nor the cause of the war; but I felt for the rest of that day as if I had had my feelings excited and harrowed by witnessing the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle before my door.” (Thoreau).

Literary Criticism

This paper will make use of the Formalist Criticism as an approach to the literary work *The Battle of the Ants*. In particular, the characters in the story made the most impact, as it was fascinating to see how the battles that the ants have are so parallel with those that humans have, but that these little creatures seem to be braver and have a stronger conviction with their causes than humans do. In this regard, it effectively makes the reader realize that it is quite shameful for men to be fighting their battles seemingly half-heartedly.

The various aspects of the story are related in that they depict a seemingly

ordinary occurrence, but that it is given a profound interpretation by the author. In particular, the setting of the author's wood yard, the ants as the characters, and the scene where the ants are fighting is something that can be seen in any home's wood yard. In fact, it is so ordinary that people often take them for granted. This makes the author's interpretation of them even more interesting. The story symbolized how a war or a fight for our own right should be. The author wanted to convey the message that people must learn not to act like a coward when an occurrence like this happens in the future. People should forget material things; rather, they should focus on what lies ahead of them and what would be beneficial for many. The battle between the black and the red ants is a great paradigm of viciousness and bloodshed, molded into one great fight for their life's dispositions and to be able to bring pride to their race even if it will cost their lives.

Insight

Since there are several clusters of races and groups of life forms present on earth that are dissimilar from each other, it is hard to compare one to the other. Nonetheless, the lessons behind the story of the ants are somewhat worthy of discernment because those lessons confer the readers with the right to imagine or envision how humans can improve their way of life. It simply reiterates to them the good example of how ants battle for their own lives and how they struggle to conquer and endure in order to attain the life they are predestined to subsist.

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