

'night of the scorpion'
by nissim ezeziel,
and 'sacrifice' by
taufiqrafat essay s...

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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"Night of the Scorpion" by Nissim Ezekiel is a poem about a child witnessing an event in his life. This was quite horrific, as vivid details of his mother being stung by a scorpion are portrayed in the poem.

On the other hand "Sacrifice" by Taufiq Rafat (1927-1998) portrays a sacrificial ceremony, in celebration of laying the foundation of a new dwelling. The purpose of this sacrifice is to give the dwelling good luck. "Sacrifice" is by an English-language Pakistani poet who is credited with introducing a characteristically Urdu movement into original English writing by Pakistanis.

The two poems are both similar in that they contain a lot of religious beliefs, but each is portraying a different religious background. They both use a circle as the symbolic gesture to their religions. In both poems a circle was created around the victims to make sure of no escape.

Within the poem "Night of the Scorpion", all families in the community are concerned about each other, as everybody goes to Ezekiel's house and takes part in the rituals as if all this is part of normal family life. He learns about scorpion stings, and rites involved with them in the community.

Scorpion stings maybe expected where they live, because they all seemed to know what to do. They live in a very close-knit community, which believe in God and the devil, so they are religious. Their religion is different from Christianity. Placing emphasis on medicine, they prefer religion. This is due to the fact that there were no doctors available. Many different beliefs are associated with the scorpion such as the devil, darkness, evil.

"Sacrifice" was a poem emphasising the cultural belief of bringing good luck to a building. This was done by a sacrifice, of a goat with what seems to be a white-bearded elder, ceremonially breaking the virgin ground. The goat had to be killed in a certain way in which all the blood in the animal was totally drained. The blood is deemed as the life force of the animal or soul. By sacrificing the animal's life force to the ground, this in turn would give protection to the ground the dwelling stood on.

Both the poets witness the events that took place. They both have conflicts with what is happening from a religious point of view.

The "Night of the Scorpion" is written from the point of view of a child looking on over his mother. The description of what he saw was of somebody looking in on the action but not taking part. The writer did not convey much emotion from himself to what was happening. If anything he had some sympathy towards the scorpion, "Ten hours of steady rain had driven him to crawl beneath a sack of rice", in the rain.

Rafat, in "Sacrifice", seems to feel the need to explain ritual detail. "It is a necessary, part of the ritual that it is his hand only, which should draw the blood." At least the poet was well intentioned. He lets us know from the very beginning that his real sympathies are with the goat. "As he moves the knife across the neck of the goat" and "I can feel its point on my throat". This is an identification that is spasmodically kept up throughout the poem by the poet. However, Rafat's sympathy isn't much use to the goat, if he has his doubts about the ceremony, what is he doing here?

Both poets want to give a feeling of what is going on. Each has their different involvement levels. Rafat tries to involve you in the characters. Nissim is more of a narrator of the event.

"Night of the Scorpion" is structured in free verse, but it does have an exquisiteness when read with the right inflection. The poet's main role was that of an interpreter and guide to unfamiliar area.

The stanzas within the poem, "Night of the Scorpion", are very different. The first being a very long forty-five lines in total. The second being very short only three lines. This gives the emphasis of relief from his mother at the end of the poem.

Within "Sacrifice", the stanzas are set out in five different sections the three main central stanzas are six lines long with the beginning only four and a short ending of two lines. The first stanza puts you in a perspective of how the goat feels. The second explains a view around the animal to be slaughtered. The third describes the actual killing and in the last line reminds you of the goat's perspective "Four calloused hands imprison my jerking legs". The fourth stanza explain the scene afterwards as the first digging of the foundation take place with a crowd of on lookers. Finally the last stanza is the most shocking explanation of how the author of the poem feels "We are not laying the foundation of a house, but another Dachau". This has been done to shock the reader, keeping them tense and distraught, even after they have finished reading the poem. It is the poet's final feeling on how

disgusted he is with the ceremony. Where " Night of the Scorpion" is totally opposite, leaving the readers relieved, producing a happy ending.

Within the " Night of the Scorpion" the common denominator is the poet's attention to observation and reflection over cerebration (actions of the brain). What goes on around you can have a mental effect on the positive attitudes to survive. This is shown within the poem in the curse, blessing and chanting that's going on. The atmosphere is built up with vivid descriptions of what is going on.

The author in " Sacrifice" tries to put the reader in the perspective of the goat to make it feel more intense which takes place in the first and third stanza. In the fourth stanza, the children, blank templates, are looking on over this " tableau", being programmed as though this is a normal occurrence.

The " Night of the Scorpion" had a lot of comparisons such as the peasants are compared to fly's swarming and the shadows like giant scorpions.

The last stanza, in " Sacrifice" is a shock of sorts. " We are not laying the foundations of a house" and" But another Dachau". There is so little preparation for this in the poem. Dachau is a concentration camp you would have to do research to find out what went on during the Second World War to understand what Rafat intended the audience to believe.

Within " Night of the Scorpion" you can see panic in the father's. As a married person I can feel what is going through the fathers thoughts. The

team work that a partnership needs to survive, when one facet of the team has gone the team fall to pieces for a while, until a leader pulls the team together. This is one of the thoughts going through the father's mind. Also there is the other thought of devotion and love for his wife. This leads him to try any thing in his power to keep the team together even though he might be a sceptic with some of the ideas to help his wife.

For something to be as vividly in Ezekiel's mind as when his mother got stung it must have been quite horrific. His Mother is glad it was not her children. As a parent it always seems that there is a stronger bond between the children and their mother, as she is pleased she was bitten and not the children. It was such a frantic poem but at least it did have a happy ending.

In " Sacrifice" why did Taufiq Rafat go to his friend's house for this ceremony? This is the question I have been looking at in my endeavour to understand the poet's mentality. If I was going to a ceremony which involved such a horrific sacrifice I would turn down the invitation. Overall the poem was very disturbing and I felt like putting it down after the first stanza. The last stanza highlight exactly how I feel about the whole poem, " But another Dachau".

The poems were totally opposite to each other, one showing love, panic and relief the other showing brutality, control and disgust. My favourite was the " Night of the Scorpion" at least it had a happy ending.