

Snake

Experience, Human Nature



Analysis of Theme in "Snake" A theme found in the poem "Snake" is that the respect man has for nature hinges on the difference between instinct and learned behavior. D. H. Lawrence expresses this theme through the use of similes and conflict. The literary elements used in the poem help clearly point out this meaningful message. As the poem begins, the narrator comes across a golden-brown snake as he approached his water trough. At first, the narrator shows respect and admiration for the creature.

As stated in line (27), "But must I confess how I liked him, How glad I was he had come like a guest," shows he felt honored by the snake's presence. It is the narrator's natural instinct to feel this way. The narrator then goes on to compare the snake to cattle by saying in line (16) "He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do, and looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do." The use of this simile represents the respect the narrator has for the snake and reflects on the snake's harmless behavior. Soon after, the narrator's natural admiration and respect for the snake is interrupted by the voice of his education.

Here begins the main internal conflict the narrator faces. The narrator listens to the voice in his conscience say, "The voice of my education said to me, he must be killed, for in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous. and voices in me said, if you were a man, you would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off. (Line 22)" The narrator's decision to listen to the voice of his education instead of his true feelings is what ultimately brings about the main consequence, which is the sense of guilt resulting from such a petty action.

The consequence the narrator faced for killing the snake he had once admired was the feeling of regret and guilt. Although he showed respect and felt honored by the snake's presence, both were overshadowed by the action of the narrator. The peaceful atmosphere immediately shifted when the narrator thought in his mind, " And immediately I regretted it. I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act! I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education. (Line 63)" The negative feelings felt by the narrator were brought forth by something that man usually views as insignificant, the relationship between nature and man-kind. All that was left for the narrator to do was to extinguish his self-inflicted sense of sin against nature. The poem concludes on line 72 when the narrator utters, " And I have something to expiate: a pettiness. " The poem " Snake" clearly sends the message that the respect man has for nature depends on the difference between the inner conscience and the impulse of learned human behavior. The theme shines light on the importance of the relationship between nature and mankind because at the end of the day, they are both more similar than we assume.