

Example of battle of ants by henry david thoreau essay

War



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Thoreau seeks to communicate to his audience in a unique and an ideal way. He employs poetic license personifying the ants in his story. Essentially, one needs to examine the context of the work in order to understand the message communicated by Thoreau. He observes the battle that pits two large ants. Interestingly, at first sight, he imagines that combatants in the war are only two large ants. However, he soon realizes that the two ants are actually two groups of ants, the red and the black ones. Thoreau deliberately suggests that the two groups of ants are not equal in power. From the onset, it is obvious that the black ants, described as the Black imperialists have the head start. It is imperative to appreciate the message in this characterization. Ideally, Thoreau seems to suggest that in war, the parties are never of equal power. Often, the stronger party would dominate the other. This is notwithstanding who the aggressor is and who the aggressed is. Thoreau, therefore, employs the battle of the ants to demonstrate the human irrationality. He seems to suggest that wars are fought to be won and that it does not matter who is the aggressor; he says, " Their aim is conquer or die." This position is further confirmed by Thoreau's admission that he did not get to know the victorious party nor the cause of the war. All he is sure about is the fact that he witnessed the war. It becomes imperative for the audience to understand the context of this message. It is obvious that Thoreau uses the red ants to demonstrate the plight of the minority in society. Given that his work came at a time when slavery was at its peak, it can be argued that Thoreau characterizes the typical black man and woman in the form of the red ants.

However, it is equally significant to appreciate Thoreau's observation of the

resilience and resoluteness of the ants in the battle. He says despite not knowing the cause of the war nor the end of the war, he witnessed one of the great battles. In fact, he picks the chip in which the battle by the ants occurred. In this approach, Thoreau seems to be reminding his audience of the unnecessary engagement in battle which often lacks any moral or philosophical foundation. It is a battle founded on no grounds. One can see the obvious irrelevance of the war. In addition, Thoreau deliberately postulates a situation where no party emerges as a direct winner. He observes the fact that fighters from either of sides, that is, the black and the red ants, are either dead or dying. This illustrates the losses incurred in the battle. These losses do not necessarily affect the enemy only. They affect both parties. That Thoreau elects death as the final consequence of war shows his disdain for war. It goes deep in reflecting the societal losses that abound whenever a war is waged. This read in connect with the fact that neither party is recoded to have been victorious effectively communicates the futility of war. In this case no party necessarily had grounds for the war. Closely connected with this is Thoreau's observation of the non-ideological approach to the war. The war is joined more out of peer influence rather than on firm moral or philosophical foundation. A good example Thoreau employs to illustrate the lack of a foundation is seen in his observation of the uninjured fresh red ant. The ant even after the awareness of the double numbers of their adversaries proceeds and at no time does he entertain thoughts of withdrawal. This approach is a portrayal of a typical soldier's attitude. Ordinarily, in the military the decision to withdraw from war is never arrived at by the foot soldiers. For them even with the realization of their

weak position, it is anticipated that they wage the war further. Thoreau appears to warn them of impending danger awaiting them.

The language Thoreau employs vividly brings out his experience. He says they were struggling, wrestling and rolled on. This description shows the intensity of the war which is later described by Thoreau as a significant struggle. In the same breadth, Thoreau suggests that the battle of the ants can be equated to the historical war at Concord. The latter was a war enmeshed in racist undertones. The racial divide informs Thoreau's work. He calls the two rivals ants as the two races. This is deliberately intended to have the audience relate the battle of the ants to the racial battle which at that time was an ongoing political process.

Finally, reading the Battle of Ants gives the third perspective of war. This perspective is unique for its appreciation of the complex circumstances that occasion wars. In the eyes of Thoreau, these battles are unnecessary and should be dispensed with through an application of rational judgment. Just like the two races of ants contesting with each out to protect their interests, so do the racial battles where the domineering parties undertake to exploit the minorities.

Works Cited

Thoreau, Henry David. " The Battle of the Ants." New York: McGraw Hill, 2000.