

Critical analysis of "a sunrise on the veld" by doris lessing



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007, Doris Lessing crafted fiction that is deeply infused with autobiographical touches, especially from her experiences in Africa. All of her works center around modern themes such as the clash of cultures, the gross injustices of racial inequality, the struggle among the opposing forces within an individual's own personality, and the conflict between the individual's conscience and the collective good. Her short story "A Sunrise on the Veld" documents the protagonist's initiation from youthful arrogance to the maturity of experience.

This story enfolds in its narrative the transformation of a young boy's belief in his superiority over the world to his understanding of how vulnerable he is and how similar he is to the other inhabitants of the veld. The author shows an extreme mastery of craft in projecting home her viewpoint through the persona on the boy, namely, life is unpredictable. Written in third person narrative, the plot of Doris' narrative is complex in nature. Lessing portrays a boy (who does not have any specific name, making him a symbolic character) who is over filled with vainglorious sense of pride at his complete mastery over his body:

" he played with it for the fun of knowing that it was a weakness he could defeat without effort"

His hubris is evident from his sense of superiority over the forces of nature, as the boy believed in his adolescent triumph: " Even my brain- even that! I can control every part of myself." Deluded by his euphoria over his belief that he is a usurper upon the forces on nature the boy prided in the fact that

he had proved his merit, that he had defeated the undefeatable forces of nature by sheer will power alone. As the boy reminisces:

“ he had once stayed awake three nights running, to prove that he could, and then worked all day, refusing even to admit he was tired; and now sleep seemed to him a servant to be commanded and refused”

The boy was completely entrenched with a feeling of invincibility and he sought the world with adolescent wonder and excitement. Unable to help with the vigorous joy of life the boy asserted his individuality by his exultant attitude and an ecstatic dash through the veld. Ironically like any typical youth the boy believed himself to be a fully mature man with utter and complete command over his life. As the boy himself muses:

“ I am fifteen! Fifteen!... There’s nothing I can’t become, nothing I can’t do.. I contain the world. I can make of it what I want. If I choose, I can change everything that is going to happen”

In order to initiate the process of maturity Lessing puts the boy through a test of merit. His jubilant and exhilarated state of happiness comes to a sudden halt when the boy notices a contradiction: “ in the deep morning hush that held his future and his past, there was a sound of pain... a kind of shortened scream.” The boy loses his animation altogether and becomes alert and focused so as to identify the source of the strange sound. It doesn’t take him long to pin point the origin of the strangled scream to a mangled buck that looked like:

“ a figure from a dream, a strange beast that was horned and drunken legged... it seemed to be ragged”

The boy's maturity comes under the strain of natural forces outside his control when he is forced to witness the gruesome manner of death of the innocent buck. The comes into a direct conflict with his own conscience when becomes evident when the boy hesitates to put the creature out of its misery. As the narrator delineates:

“ it came into his mind that he should shoot it and end its pain.. But then he thought: if I had not come it would have died like this. So why should I interfere?”

This struggle with the opposing forces of his own personality forces the boy to realize the painful truth that he has no command over nature. The boy is subject to face the pinching reality that he does not have the power to change the course of life, that he could not interfere with Nature itself. The boy realizes that: “ all over the bush things like this happen; they happen all the time; this is how life goes on, by living things dying in anguish”. For the first time the boy realizes that Nature has to run its course and that he could do nothing to alter its course. The boy felt a searing pain in his own body at this revelation and unable to help himself he uttered:

“ I can't stop it. I can't stop it. There's nothing I can do”

This stoic acceptance of the horrific reality of life marks the boy's initiation into the process of maturity and it also marks a realization on the part of boy that he is not an adult but an adolescent after all. However he could not

sever his emphatic link with the anguish of the dead animal and we witness that: " he found that the tears were streaming down his face, and his clothes were soaked with the sweat of that other creature's pain". This pain also unravels another significant reality to the boy when he realizes that there is a similarity between the buck and his own persona. Like the boy the buck too had been euphoric, full of life until the moments before its horrific death. And the boy wonders:

" perhaps an hour ago, this creature had been stepping proudly and free through the bush... proudly stepping the earth, tossing its horns, frisking a pretty white tail...walking like kings and conquerors..."

And then he was suddenly met by an unexpected death which marred the beauty of the young animal. It is then that the boy realizes that not only is he incapable of affecting the nature but that he too was subjugated to it. At some point of his life the boy too would lose the struggle and like the buck he too will be forced to let go. This realization strikes another cord into the boy and he admits his own mortality. This admittance becomes evident when the boy mutters to the ants:

" go away. I am not for you- not just yet at any rate. Go away"

The boy's transition from the haughty sense of superiority to a more realistic attitude of stubborn immaturity becomes evident when the boy realizes the error of his own ways. The boy acknowledges the fact that his past actions had been cruel. Like the suffering buck he too had delivered his share of cruelty on innocent animal. This painful realization evaporates all his

previous euphoric sense of delight at this own superiority and we see that <https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-of-a-sunrise-on-the-veld-by-doris-lessing/>

the boy is unable to face the criminalizing pangs of his own conscience; thus, " he would not face it. He was a boy again, kicking sulkily at the skeleton, hanging his head, refusing to accept his own responsibility."

It can be said that Lessing's purpose behind writing the story or the message which she tries to bring to her readers is that life is uncertain. At any unpredictable moment a sudden shift of fate could lead to the termination of the fragile human existence. Thus the air of immortality with which humans garb themselves is totally in contrast to the reality and is, thus, immature. The nature of man is mortal asserting or assuming otherwise is simply uncharacteristic and delusional. Lessing through the medium of the boy forces her readers to realize that Nature is above the influence of the frail and mortal men. The life of an individual is influenced and directed by forces outside his control and that the best a man can do is to cope with the realities of life and accept his fate in a stoic manner.