

White rhinoceros

Business



Black Rhinoceros The Black Rhinoceros at Brookfield Zoo Eating sweet potatoes, carrots, and bread Looked like my uncle's extended family Crowding around the table at Thanksgiving Mrs. Movehill suddenly started crying On the second-grade bus, which often stalled, And the next day we had a substitute teacher Who said that rhinos have poor eyesight And swivel their tube-shaped ears in all directions So they can hear their enemies approaching, lions And people who carve their horns into daggers Or mash them into pain relievers. My parents bought my shoes on discount At Wolinsky & Levy, and so whenever I raised Either foot my sole said " Damaged." That's why I kept my feet close to the floor. When Mrs. Movehill returned, she wore dark Dresses and told us that the Black Rhinoceros Is the same muddy color as the White Rhinoceros, Which is strange, if you think about it, and we did.

What does it feel like to have two horns Tilting up on a huge head, Mr. Rhinoceros? You lumber around in your skin of armor Like and exiled general or a grounded unicorn. Everyone knows that a pachyderm in peril Would still rather live in the open savannah. We can't tell if you are trumpeting forward Or backward in your scrubby house. -Edward Hirsch The New Yorker August 1, 2011 White Rhinoceros One of the hardest lessons we learn in our lives, is that the world's a harsh place.

It's a sad day when a young boy or girl begins to really believe the classic cop-out that " life isn't fair." And it is sadder yet, when we see how society has brought that day ever sooner into our lives. The human race is in a fragile place right now, as its hope is slowly, but very surely, being lost. In some ways, Edward Hirsch's " Black Rhinoceros" is a lesson on how to live

our lives amidst the cruelty of this modern world. It examines the human reaction to the suffering that is inevitably part of our lives, and it forces us to rethink how we pursue the dreams and ambitions that define us. “Black Rhinoceros” tells two stories: the tragedy of Mrs.

Movehill, and the degradation of her symbolic counterpart, “The Black Rhinoceros at Brookfield Zoo” (1). Both are undergoing the same crisis: they are losing hope in life and in themselves. And as we come to see, their struggles are direct reflections of the conflicts within ourselves. The first stanza begins by immediately personalizing the poem for us. Using typical “heartwarming” subjects of Thanksgiving and family, the speaker effectively softens us up for the rest of the poem by allowing us to see ourselves in the poem, and in a comfortable situation. This later becomes a tool for the speaker to force us to see the faults of the rhino within ourselves as well.

But the moment of security is slapped out of us in the next stanza, which begins “Mrs. Movehill suddenly started crying” (5). The natural response to that is to ask “why?”. Well just as soon as it began, the story is dropped for a while, and our question is left unanswered. Mrs. Movehill’s story is mentioned only two short times in the poem, and then, only through extremely indirect implication.

Mostly we must try to make our own inferences, based largely on whatever else is around it. With that in mind, the rest of the second stanza begins to reveal a connection between Mrs. Movehill and the Black Rhinoceros. “And the next day we had a substitute teacher/who said that rhinos have poor eyesight” is the direct reaction to Mrs. Movehill’s crying (7-8).

The reader feels a natural correlation between the rhino and Mrs. Movehill when they are both used as subjects in the same stanza. In lieu of that apparent connection, “ poor eyesight” (8) would naturally apply to Mrs. Movehill as well, which introduces foreshadowing of her reaction to whatever has happened to her; as well as to the meaning of the connection between rhino and teacher, which obviously goes beyond visual impairment. The third stanza is a continuation of the second, as it describes how the rhino lives in caution of its enemies, which are listed as lions and, a little more interestingly, “ people who carve their horns into daggers/or mash them into pain relievers” (11-12).

This creates an interesting array of possible meanings. “ Daggers” could easily imply harm towards others, while “ pain relievers” quickly bring to mind implications of self-harm (11-12). We are slowly beginning to see the connections between Mrs. Movehill, the rhino, and the internal pain of some kind present in both. The next stanza presents a shift in the focus of the speaker.

He is now telling an experience of his own. This shift back to himself is one of the major indications of the speaker’s universality of message. The speaker describes getting shoes at Wolinsky and Levy, “ and so whenever I raised/my foot my sole said ‘ Damaged’” (14-15). The author yet again uses implications to convey meaning; this time a little more direct by using a clever play on words. “ Sole”(15) fits into the literal story of the section, and its homophone “ soul”, makes the story meaningful. This is the speaker sharing his suffering and personal pain; presumably the same as that of Mrs.

Movehill and the Black Rhinoceros. He is universalizing his message. The fact that three very different beings, not even all of them humans, have all felt the same pain, is both leading the reader to make observations about his own life, as well as validating the argument that we have yet to fully grasp, at this point in the story. The end of the fourth stanza and the remaining three after that, are where the source of our subjects' sufferings are brought out. The fifth stanza brings the return of Mrs.

Movehill, with the only explanation being that she wore dark dresses and she said " the Black Rhinoceros/is the same muddy color as the White Rhinoceros," (18-19). " Dark/dresses" (17-18) are really our only clue; and though it may not be clear to some at first, her wearing of dark dresses may've been her attempt to conceal bleeding; bleeding that might have caused her to suddenly start " crying/on the second-grade bus,"(5-6); bleeding probably linked to a miscarriage. Bleeding, from a miscarriage that might make her lose all hope, and see the White Rhinoceros of the life she may have had as " the same muddy color"(19) as the Black Rhinoceros of her broken dreams, and suppressed pain, hidden beneath the cloth of dark dresses. The story of Mrs. Movehill, as brief as it may be, is the one real-life example that was needed for the metaphor of the poem to make sense. When Mrs.

Movehill returns seeing the White Rhino and the Black Rhino as the same " muddy" color (with emphasis on the implications of despair in the word " muddy"), it is her losing all hope she had for a better, happy, fulfilled life; the life she would have had if she'd borne a healthy baby. And since that's where her story ends, we get a sense that that is how she lives out her life;

<https://assignbuster.com/white-rhinoceros/>

in a state of incompleteness and total inward despair. And that's the key word: inward. Mrs. Movehill is imploding on her own despair. She has known such great pain that she is no longer allowing herself to be happy.

And from there, the metaphor all starts to make sense. The implication "that rhinos have poor eyesight" (8), is foreshadowing for Mrs. Movehill's unwillingness to move beyond her grief, and failure to keep the vision of her battered dreams clear and strong. The rhinoceros of her hopes and ambitions, is constantly on the alert, constantly afraid of being hurt again, and inevitably begins to kill herself over the pressure of constant vigilance. She is forever enslaved by her own hand. But it was not just Mrs.

Movehill who tried to move hills and failed. Sometimes, living our own lives is as hard as moving mountains, and every person on this planet has felt genuine pain and suffering trying to do so. Perhaps not as great as Mrs. Movehill, but we have all felt it to some degree. And we all fall into this same trap. We experience the cruelty of this world and never want to risk feeling it again; and in the process we lose the meaning in our lives.

The speaker, after telling how when he had to buy shoes on discount his "sole said 'Damaged'" (15), explained "That's why I kept my feet close to the floor" (16). Pain in this world is the single greatest deterrent to the progress of mankind. It is impossible to live a life without Damage to the soul; so why do we keep ourselves from flying every time suffering enters our life? We will never reach the heights of greatness each of us is capable of, if we never raise our foot off the floor. Why do we refuse to fly? One of the greatest things about this poem is the style with which it is conveyed. The speaker is

a child, or at least an adult sharing his childhood sentiments, and the language is the perfect combination of curiosity, naive innocence, and infallible sensibility.

After relating how Mrs. Movehill said the Black and White Rhinos were the same muddy color, he responds “ Which is strange, if you think about it, and we did”(20). It’s amazing sometimes how clearly a child may see the illogical nature of a thing, where their elders do not. A sad day it is, indeed, when a child learns of the world’s cruelty. For he was right, of course, it is a strange thing for us to assume that the life we could live, the life of our dreams, is no better than the life we have now, in which dreams are just that... dreams.

Up to this point, the child narrator’s attitude was one of purity and innocence; but at this point it turns more disgusted, more questioning, as if he finally understands what it was all about. In the sixth stanza, he questions us: “ What does it feel like to have two horns” “ Mr. Rhinoceros?”(21-22). The sarcasm drips from such a statement, for he knows we have no idea what it means to wield that horn anymore, the horn that once defined who we are. “ You lumber around in your skin of armor/like an exiled general or a grounded unicorn”(23-24). The image of a strong, armored rhinoceros walking toward us springs to mind.

Only, when we get close, we can see the sadness in its tiny eye, trapped in its own armor. We shun ourselves from the pain of this world thinking we are strong, but really we are breaking ourselves down, killing ourselves from the inside. The final stanza is the speaker simply on his knees. He begs us to see how far we’ve gone astray, and how our lives could be saved if we only freed

ourselves. “ Everyone knows that a pachyderm in peril/would still rather live in the open savannah.

/ We can’t tell if you are trumpeting forward/or backward in your scrubby house”(25-28). Everyone knows freedom is the only way to live. Without freedom, a man or woman is nothing. Our dreams and ambitions, our free lives, have always been “ pachyderms in peril.” As long as there is suffering in this world, our souls will be in danger.

But even if we are forever on the run, our lives lived in freedom and in the happiness that comes from being our own true unique person; that would forever make up for it. We could be “ trumpeting” forward in our lives, proud and fulfilled as we live the lives we were meant to. But as it is, we don’t know if we’re flying, or falling back to earth. A famous Buddhist monk once said “ Without suffering, you cannot grow. Without suffering, you cannot get the peace and joy you deserve. Please don’t run away from your suffering.

Embrace it and cherish it.” “ Black Rhinoceros” is not a scolding. It is not trying to show us why we are all bad people with no sense of ourselves. It is trying to show us what could be, by showing us how we are keeping it from being so. Just as the rhinoceros skillfully protects itself from the harshness of the world and is able to keep its regal persona because of it, so do we cave ourselves in and suppress the suffering within us. By suppressing our pain in an attempt to shield ourselves from the cruelty of life and this world, we effectively kill the spirit within us.

Our dreams can never be realized, and our lives can never be free, if we never allow ourselves to be hurt. Suffering is a part of our lives, and we must

<https://assignbuster.com/white-rhinoceros/>

learn to coexist with the harshness of our world, if we ever wish to truly find ourselves.