

The Scarlet Ibis

By James Hurst



The Scarlet Ibis

Background



The physical setting—
American South in 1918



The historical setting—
end of World War I

The story is set in the American South. Its climax takes place in 1918, the year World War I ended. You'll find references in the story to battles being fought far away from its peaceful southern setting. Why do you suppose the author chose this setting?

Meet the Writer

James Hurst was born on a farm in coastal North Carolina in 1922. After studying at North Carolina State College, he served in the army during World War II.

Hurst wants readers of "The Scarlet Ibis" to think of how the war raging among "brothers" in Europe is related to the conflict between Doodle and *his* brother.

He reflects, "people always suffer when others try to make them over in their own image."



United States soldiers fire a machine gun in Belleau Wood, France, in June 1918.

What is the Point of View in Scarlet Ibis?

- First person point of view
- Told in flashback
- How old is the narrator before the flashback?
- "But sometimes (like right now), as I sit in the cool, green-draped parlor, the grindstone begins to turn, and time with all its changes is ground away—and I remember Doodle."



Conflict

- Internal?
- External?



Mood

- **Mood:** the emotion created in the reader by all or part of a literary work
- a) haunted, lonely- created through many dead things, dying, empty cradle, graveyard flowers
- b) tension between Doodle and brother in which brother is trying to get Doodle to do what he wants
 - -brother wants to smother him with a pillow for not being "all there"
 - -brother makes Doodle touch the coffin
 - -brother is intent of having Doodle walk because of his own pride

Theme: The insight about human life that is revealed in a literary work.

- Themes are rarely stated directly in literature. (In “Marigolds” and “The Scarlet Ibis” they are!) Most often, a reader has to **infer** the theme of a work after considerable thought.
- Theme is different from **subject**. A story’s subject might be stated as “growing up,” “love,” “heroism,” or “fear.”
- The theme is the statement the writer wants to make **about** that subject.
- For example, if the subject is “growing up,” the theme might be expressed thusly:
 - For most young people, growing up is a process that involves the pain of achieving self-knowledge.
- The theme must be stated in at least one sentence; most themes are complex enough to require several sentences, or even an essay.

Key Lines that Develop Theme

- "There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others) a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears the seed of our destruction..."
- "All of us must have something to be proud of"
- "Pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death."

How is pride "wonderful and terrible"? (p.366)

- Wonderful because he teaches Doodle to walk
- Terrible because he does it for selfish reasons
- How does this quote function in the story??

"The Scarlet Ibis"

Literary Devices

Foreshadowing: hints of clues of events that have yet to occur

- "summer was dead, but autumn was not yet born"
- Summer of 1918 was blighted- plant growth replaced by death and decay
- "...last graveyard flowers were blooming"
- such times make him "remember Doodle"
- Doodle's real name only looks good on a tombstone
- arrival of the bird, its death, and Doodle burying it
- Fall of Ibis- Doodle's fall
- Doodle's response to the Ibis
- "Dead birds is bad luck...Specially red dead birds!"

Allusion- new literary term

- Allusion- a reference in a work of literature to a well-known character, place, or situation from literature, music, mythology, film, religion (especially the Bible), art, or history.
- *The Family Guy* frequently uses allusions. Ex. This scene is an allusion to a scene in *The Lady and the Tramp*.



Three Allusions in our story

1. Belleau Woods- WWI battle sites

2. Hansel and Gretel- "It was too late to turn back, for we had both wandered too far into a net of expectations and had left no crumbs behind."

3. "If we produced anything less than the Resurrection, [Aunt Nicey] was going to be disappointed."



Imagery

- **Imagery** is descriptive language that deals with any of the five senses (sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste), and even **movement**.
- Essentially, imagery is any series of words that create a picture, or sensory experience in your head.
- The use of figurative language (similes, metaphors, and personification) helps create imagery in writing. Let's look at some examples.

Examples

- "...with a tiny body which was red and shriveled like an old man's"- **simile that appeals to the sense of sight**
- "...curtains billowed out in the afternoon sea breeze, rustling like palmetto fronds"- **simile that appeals to the sense of sight and provides movement**
- "Even death did not mar its grace, for it lay on the earth like a broken vase of red flowers." –**simile that appeals to the sense of sight**
- "The [rain] drops stung my face like **nettles**"- **simile that appeals to the sense of touch**
- **Nettles** are covered with tiny, nearly invisible stinging hairs that produce an intense, stinging pain, followed by redness and skin irritation.

Death Imagery

- Bleeding tree
- Rotting brown magnolia
- Ironweeds grew rank
- Graveyard flowers
- Mahogany box
- Black clouds, darkness descended

Symbols

- A symbol is a thing or idea that stands for something else
- The main symbol in the story is the scarlet ibis which stands for Doodle
- Why does the author choose the scarlet ibis as the symbol as opposed to another bird?
- With what is red usually associated? Why choose a red bird and develop red imagery?



- The last graveyard flowers were blooming, and their smell drifted across the cotton field and through every room of our house, speaking softly the names of our dead.

– Personification

- A grindstone stands where the bleeding tree stood, just outside the kitchen door,...



Frangipani is sometimes known as Graveyard Flower

- clove of seasons

- Red flower

- Red = blood/death

- Cloves are not ready to be picked until they are 5 years old, linking Doodle's "late blooming" for a child

- symbol

- the oriole nest in the elm was untenanted and rocked back and forth like an empty cradle.

- Simile

- imagery: visual



Figurative Terms Definitions

- Simile: comparison using like or as
- Metaphor: a comparison of two unlike things
- Personification: giving human qualities to something inhuman or inanimate

- ...and now if an oriole sings in the elm, its song seems to die up in the leaves, a silvery dust.
 - Metaphor
 - Or personification
 - Imagery: visual, auditory



- He seemed all head, with a tiny body which was red and shriveled like an old man's.
 - simile

- They named him William Armstrong, which was like tying a big tail on a small kite.
 - simile

- He might, as long as he lived, lie on the rubber sheet in the center of the bed in the front bedroom where the white marquisette curtains billowed out in the afternoon sea breeze, rustling like palmetto fronds.
 - Simile
 - Sight & Auditory Imagery
- Trembling, he'd push himself up, turning first red, then a soft purple, and finally collapse back onto the bed like an old wornout doll.
 - simile

- We were down in Old Woman Swamp and it was spring and the sick-sweet smell of bay flowers hung everywhere like a mournful song. "I'm going to teach you to walk, Doodle," I said.
 - Simile
 - Imagery: olfactory
- He collapsed onto the grass like a half-empty flour sack
 - simile

- But all of us must have something or someone to be proud of, and Doodle had become mine. I did not know then that pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death.
 - metaphor
 - theme
- When he fell, I grabbed him in my arms and hugged him, our laughter pealing through the swamp like a ringing bell.
 - Simile
 - Imagery: auditory, kinesthetic

- Keeping a nice secret is very hard to do, like holding your breath
 - simile
- People in his stories all had wings and flew wherever they wanted to go. His favorite lie was about a boy named Peter who had a pet peacock with a ten-foot tail. Peter wore a golden robe that glittered so brightly that when he walked through the sunflowers they turned away from the sun to face him. When Peter was ready to go to sleep, the peacock spread his magnificent tail, enfolding the boy gently like a closing go-to-sleep flower, burying him in the gloriously iridescent, rustling vortex. Yes, I must admit it. Doodle could beat me lying.
 - Symbol
 - Simile
 - Imagery: visual

- Success lay at the end of summer like a pot of gold, and our campaign got off to a good start.
 - simile

- Promise hung about us like leaves, and wherever we looked, ferns unfurled and birds broke into song.
 - simile

- In May and June there was no rain and the crops withered, curled up, then died under the thirsty sun.
 - personification

- That afternoon it roared back out of the west, blew the fallen oaks around, snapping their roots and tearing them out of the earth like a hawk at the entrails of a chicken.
 - simile

- Cotton bolls were wrenched from the stalks and lay like green walnuts in the valleys between the rows, while the cornfield leaned over uniformly so that the tassels touched the ground.

- Simile

- As we slipped through the dog days,

- Idiom: An expression that means something other than the literal meanings of its individual words.

- Doodle stopped eating, with a piece of bread poised ready for his mouth, his eyes popped round like two blue buttons.
 - simile

- Even death did not mar its grace, for it lay on the earth like a broken vase of red flowers, and we stood around it, awed by its exotic beauty.
 - Simile
 - Symbol

- How many miles it had traveled to die like this, in our yard, beneath the bleeding tree.
 - symbol
- When we reached Horsehead Landing, lightning was playing across half the sky and thunder roared out, hiding even the sound of the sea.
 - Personification
 - Imagery: auditory, visual
 - Setting: Why is this significant setting?



- We never spoke (what are the words that can solder cracked pride?), but I knew he was watching me, watching for a sign of mercy.
- The rain was coming, roaring through the pines, and then, like a bursting Roman candle, a gum tree ahead of us was shattered by a bolt of lightning.





Red Flowering Gum Tree

- The drops stung my face like nettles, and the wind flared the wet, glistening leaves of the bordering trees.
- The sound of rain was everywhere, but the wind had died and it fell straight down in parallel paths like ropes hanging from the sky.

Red Nightshade



- Finally I went back and found him huddled beneath a red nightshade bush beside the road.

For a long, long time, it seemed forever,
I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen
scarlet ibis from the heresy [1]of rain.

[1] heresy—n. an action or opinion
contrary to what is generally thought of
as right





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