Ethan Frome 6 Essay, Research Paper

Ethan Frome is lead by desire however controlled by duty. Ethan is a self-contradicting character. Ethan is firm and strong, however Ethan is also feeble and weak. Ethan desires Mattie however he is bound to his duty as a husband and tradition to Zeena. Ethan is strong in that he sticks to his duty, but Ethan shows his weakness when he is manipulated by Zeena.

I find the season of winter to be a symbol for Ethan. A reference coming from the Dictionary of Symbols by Jack Tresidder defines the season of winter; “Winter may appear as an old man by a fire or a bare-headed woman in a winter landscape. It is linked with Hephaestus (Vulcan) or Boreas, the salamander or wild duck, and Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces.” According to astrologers, Capricorns have responsible, disciplined, practical, methodical, cautious, serious, and sometimes pessimistic natures. According to astrologers, Aquariuses feel most comfortable in the world of ideas; they find situations that require emotional responses, such as personal relationships, to be difficult. Also, according to astrologers, Pisceans tend to be idealistic; sometimes the real world gets too harsh and ugly for them. To escape unpleasant realities, some Pisceans retreat into their own dreams and fantasies, and Pisceans can be delicate and vulnerable, especially when under emotional stress. Ethan most definitely falls under these categories. Ethan is emotionally weak, in that he allows Zeena to control him. Ethan was described, in the beginning of the book, as looking far older than he was in actuality. His work and torment made his physical appearance to match his inner suffering. Winter is typically seen as cold, dark, and lonely. These are reflective feelings succumbing Ethan.

Love mostly suites those who remain oblivious to the harsh reality of our duty. Duty binds but love sets people free. Ethan realizes his duty, the duty of tradition, the duty to remain with Zeena. Ethan realizes this duty to be inescapable, though Ethan does attempt to commit suicide with Mattie, for he longs for the love he feels to set him free. Ethan does not want to be held down but it is inevitable.

I also find the storm which had appeared to continue all night to be a symbol reflecting Ethan. A storm can be defined as an atmospheric disturbance in the form of strong winds usually accompanied by rain, snow, or other precipitation and sometimes accompanied by lightning or thunder. There is a disturbance overwhelming Ethan constantly. Ethan cannot overcome this storm. Ethan is, indeed, not content with his marriage with Zeena. Ethan’s feelings contradict one another, forming a storm of frustration and indecisiveness forming rage, discontent, depression, and confusion.

In the book, an orchard is described. This orchard, full of starved apple-trees is yet another symbol regarding Ethan. Ethan’s marriage with Zeena once was able to grow the healthy fruit of happiness and success, but somewhere along the line, someone or something neglected these fruit-bearing trees. Inference also played a role in the corruption of this fruit that has now gone sour. These trees have now no chance to return to its original integrity no matter how valiant the attempt; the damage has been done.

The “garden” that was to made by Ethan for Mattie is also what I find to be a symbol for Ethan. A garden can be made to grow many different things. From a botanical garden, to a berry garden, whatever you wish to be grown you may plant. Ethan wishes to be with Mattie and desires to “plant” a bond with her. Ethan did not make this “garden”, however Ethan had the desire to make it. This garden would grow and flourish to become a successful grounds for life in great abundance. The “garden” is basically, as I see it, a symbol of “what could be”. What could be, cannot be, due to duty. Ethan is bound by duty till the end.

With these symbols, as a few examples, I find Ethan to, indeed, be feeble and weak. Though, I do admit, it does require a great amount of strength to maintain the life in which he has made for himself, I find Ethan to be hopelessly burdened and branded for life. A life full of suffering is not a life worth living. Ethan realized this and attempted suicide, however this foolish act only lead to a life of even worse proportions. They say that if you give a man the necessary tools and supplies, a man will build himself a trap. This trap that is made is made unconsciously, therefore, since this trap is made unconsciously, it cannot be escaped; the solution cannot be found. The only solution that will suffice is to live with this trap, sadly, for life.