Ethan Frome Essay, Research Paper

Everybody has tragic flaws. Some of the decisions that we make in life have an everlasting impact. Edith Wharton, author of Ethan Frome, writes about Ethan Frome, a man troubled by his own decisions. Ethan, married to Zeena Frome, has an affair with Zeena s cousin, Mattie Silver, leaving him stranded between the two. In his effort to have his clandestine affair with Mattie and cover up so Zeena would not find out, Ethan manifests qualities of fear, desperation, and impracticality.

Ethan has many fears, which tend to plunge him into senseless acts of desperation. One night, when Ethan stood outside in the cold winter of his village, he saw Mattie dancing with Dennis Eady, a local handsome man. Ethan thought about himself and the sight made him unhappy, and his unhappiness roused his latent fears (31). Ethan is married to Zeena and shouldn t feel jealous of Dennis Eady. After she finished dancing, Ethan approaches Mattie. Afraid of being alone, Ethan slipped an arm through hers, as Eady had done (40). To worsen his fear, Zeena catches Ethan shaving, a sign that Ethan is improving his countenance for someone. Zeena s thrust of forthrightness had frightened him more than any vague insinuations about Denis Eady (34). Ethan will never stop fearing as long as he continues to have his affair with Mattie.

Also, Ethan acquires impracticality. First, Ethan is impractical when he falls for Mattie Silver. He feels that she had an eye to see and an ear to hear (29). Ethan is married and should not seek pleasure in other women. Likewise, when the cat breaks Zeena s priceless pickle-dish given to her as a wedding present, Ethan takes the broken pieces and laid the pieces together with such accuracy of touch that a close inspection convinced him of the impossibility of detecting from below that the dish was broken (76). Ethan s attempt to cover up the situation will only increase his guilt. Ethan should show the broken pieces to Zeena and apologize. Lastly, Ethan is impractical when he volunteers sternly that he would drive Mattie to the train. He tells Zeena that he is going to drive her over myself (129). This is impractical because it just ascertains Zeena s suspicion of Ethan s love for Zeena. Wasn t Ethan s relationship with Mattie supposed to be secret?

In addition to his impracticality, Ethan shows signs of desperation. One day, when Zeena talks to Ethan about replacing Mattie with a servant, Ethan becomes angry. In desperation, he says to Mattie downstairs that you can t go, Matt! I won t let you! She s always had her way, but I mean to have mine now— (107). Ethan s growing love for Mattie causes him to defend her, something that he should not do. Also, the thought of Mattie out all alone made him shiver. Just before he talks to Zeena that day, despair seized him at the thought of her setting out alone to renew the weary quest for work (107). Ethan is so desperate as to have afterthoughts of Mattie out in the cold. What kind of husband is so cruel as to love his affair-partner and not his wife? In the ultimate act of desperation to elope with Mattie, Ethan decides to suicide with Mattie to live eternally in each other s arms. To kill themselves, Ethan and Mattie decided to drive a sled into an elm tree. At the last moments of their supposed lives, Mattie and Ethan saw the last instant when the air shot past him like millions of fiery wires; and then the elm (147). Even though they survived the crash, they lived in despair and guilt for the rest of their lives.

Ethan is full of fear, impracticality, and desperation. His shaving instilled fear into his mind. His impracticality allows him to have an affair with Mattie. And finally, his desperation almost cost him his life. Flaws are part of everyday life. If we never make mistakes to experience fear, impracticality, and desperation, we will never grow as people. Vince Lombardi, one of the greatest football coaches of all time, said that Once a man has made a commitment to a way of life, he puts the greatest strength in the world behind him. It’s something we call heart power. Once a man has made this commitment, nothing will stop him short of success.

Planning Notes

4/01

Generalization: fear is bad

Background: Edith Wharton, plot, time, and setting, Ethan Frome

Thesis: Ethan is fearful, impractical, and desperate

Examples of: Fear

General: Fear is bad.

Specific: dancing with Dennis Eady (pg. 40)

Specific: scared of being alone (pg. 31)

Specific: shaving incident (34)

General: Impracticality is bad.

Specific: falls for Mattie silver (pg. 29)

Specific: puts broken pickle-dish parts in closet (pg. 76)

Specific: drive her to train (pg. 129)

General: Desperation is bad.

Specific: desperate for Mattie to stay (pg. 107)

Specific: can t let Mattie go (pg. 107)

Specific: killing each other (pg. 147)

Conclusion: Restate your thesis: Ethan is full of fear, desperation, and impracticality.

Re-introduce three generals : His shaving instilled fear into his mind. His impracticality allows him to have an affair with Mattie. And finally, his desperation almost cost him his life

Universal Application: Flaws are part of life.