

# Literary analysis of “The Hermit Story”

“The Hermit’s Story” is a short story by Rick Bass. The plot of the story brings out a theme of a magical world. The narrator and his wife visit Ann and Roger over a Thanksgiving dinner. Due to the blackout that they experienced, Ann starts narrating a story of her experience twenty years before in Saskatchewan. In the story, Ann had been hired by Gray Owl to train his dogs. After completing the training, Ann sets out with Gray owl to teach him how to work his dogs on how to hunt birds. They get so engulfed in the job that they end up losing track of Gray’s home and deviate miles away from home into the winter. Gray searches for water for his dogs when he spots an area covered with ice. Stepping on it he falls into the water below, and Ann decides to jump in to try and save him. She realizes that he was under the ice on the surface waving at her. The lake had no water below, and so they stay there for almost two days. It was an eight feet deep dry lake, and the air was different from any other that Ann had ever breathed. They sleep on top of one another for warmth and lit fire to keep warm as they searched for a way out. It makes the experience in the lake feel magical, an experience like no other they had before.

The setting of the magical tale is in a house where the narrator and his wife had visited Ann and Roger for a Thanksgiving dinner. The power is out and after the couple wine and dine; Ann starts telling a story of an experience that she had twenty years before in Saskatchewan with a man named Gray Owl, who had hired Ann to train her German dogs. The fact that the storm that engulfed the place on that day knocked out the electricity creating darkness and the couples sit o around the fire creates a perfect setting for telling a story (Charles, 2004).

The style is an important part of the story to expound on the theme of a magical world in the story. The writer uses poetic descriptions, metaphors, rhythmic prose and makes suggestions

of the mythic importance of the experience that Ann had. Though the style used is metaphoric, it is not fancy but rather simple and straightforward. This makes the theme come out clearly instead of making the story a mere fascinating tale of a waterless lake that is frozen. Bass uses the metaphors to set up and also maintain the entry into the world of the fairy tale. The use of words to compare such as, “as if” repeatedly made it possible to bring out the legendary nature of the dogs after Ann trained them. It made the dogs come out as being amazing following Ann’s training. About the training that Ann had given to the dogs, Bass states that Ann’s transformed the dogs “from wild and unruly pups into well-trained hunting dogs, “as if” they are rough blocks of stone with their internal form existing already.” The use of “as if” has the significance of bringing out the fairy tale world that the story intended to expose in the story (Bass, 2002).

Bass also relies on Symbolism to bring out his theme of a magical world. Even before bringing out the story of a dry lake that the characters fall into, the opening of the story talks of a blue world that had an ice storm. The blue was symbolic of a scent trapped in the ice. The narrator says “blue like a scent trapped in the ice, waiting for some soft release, so that it can continue spreading (Bass, 2002). “ Moreover, having a blue ice storm meant that the snow that Ann and Gray walked the dogs was a blue lie the sky. It was symbolic of them walking in the sky with the entire world being snow under them. The only thing that signified their walking on the snow was the pull of gravity and the snowshoes that they wore. Their feeling like they had ascended into the sky, with the world being full of snow was symbolic of their descent into the mysterious world of the frozen lake. The power outage was also symbolic of a world of darkness that was a perfect shift into the world of magic (Charles, 2004).

From the earliest of days when Freud first conducted psychological experiments, he used symbolism to study mental disorders and other concepts in psychology (Routledge, 2010).

Symbolism is an invaluable way of individuals understanding things and the gateway to their subconscious. Symbols are a crucial tool for individuals to beat their fears and promote psychological security among individuals since we all do not want to feel vulnerable (Routledge, 2010). They are also crucial, ways of passing on information in a candid way that is captivating to an individual. In the Hermit story, Bass uses symbolism to support their theme. He uses it to depict the human power over nature and to take the reader on a journey of the magical world that surrounds us. He uses the symbols of ice that is life threatening to emphasize the human dominance and provide hope to people since the world is magical and has more opportunities to offer than we think. In the story, Ann was shocked when Roger falls into the lake on the ice and thought that he had drowned only to find out that underneath the ice was a beautiful place a serene and magical place that offered them a way home.

In psychology, fairy tales like the one in the Hermit story can be used for Therapy. The fairy tale therapy assists a child or at times an adult to work through issues they are not ready to talk about or even to offer them psychological strength to face issues (Sutherland, 2011). It can be used for children to help them work through their fears phobias with illustrations from fairy tale figures and symbols. The fairy tales play the role of causing an emotional resonance to an individual and appeal to their conscious and subconscious levels (Sutherland, 2011). In the Hermit story, Bass uses metaphors and imagery to appeal to the emotional state of the reader. The author also uses symbols and a form of writing style that takes the reader on a journey to a world of fairytale where everything is possible. The symbolic use of ice and people falling into a lake could be interpreted as the problems that a person may be facing. The interpretation may appeal to the situation that may seem desperate or irresolvable in an individual's life. It also enables an individual to realize that not all cases are hopeless socially when Roger and Ann

survive the fall into the lake that turned out to be dry inside despite the ice that covered it. It, therefore, makes the theme of a magical world more appealing to the reader. The theme works to pass a message to the audience and hence the relevance.

In conclusion, bass uses the theme of a magical world to appeal to the reader on the fact that the world has more to offer than one may think superficially. He uses the literary elements to bring out the theme in a logical, efficient and systematic manner. The theme is what made the short story stand out.

## References

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