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Finding the Deeper Meaning

In Thomas C. Foster's book, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, he demonstrates how all books can be analyzed to find a deeper meaning. Foster drags you through chapter after chapter of examples and directions; while his writing may be bombastic and even overwhelming, his theories can become very useful when reading different pieces of literature. Foster's theories can be applied to many pieces of literature -- "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell is one of them. Connell's short story proves many of Foster's arguments: blindness, weather, Greek mythology, even symbolism are demonstrated throughout "The Most Dangerous Game". While Foster never referred to the short story, the scenarios and the way it is written supports many of Foster's arguments.

In Foster's chapter on blindness, he discusses its ability to make a person's thinking -- and decisionmaking -- cloudy. As Rainsford is looking on the direction of the gunshots he had heard "it was like trying to see through a blanket" (Connell, p.2); he is referring to the darkness of the night. While he is not literally blind, the darkness blinding Rainsford; Foster emphasizes that you can't get "hung up on what it meant in a literal sense" (Foster, 203). After falling off of the yacht, Rainsford swims towards the gunshots and sounds of a dying animal -- something a person would not be expected to do normally. Foster says when someone is blinded they are "guided by an unseen power" (206). This can be seen in this situation as Rainsford is blind to the reputation the island has by his familiarity with hunting and his disparity for help. The

darkness on the island can also change Zaroff's characterization -- giving him a sense of dementia which leads him to his choice of hunting.

The weather in the story foreshadows as to what Rainsford will go through; even his name has "rain" in it which may be foreshadowing his change in character. According to Foster, fog "always signals some sort of confusion" (p.80) which is exactly what happens; Rainsford does not know what Zaroff is hunting and is confused as to why he is doing it. Connell describes the fog as "moist black velvet" (Connell, 1) creating a sense of contrast between the beauty and the darkness. Fog demonstrates that "matters under consideration are murky" (Foster, 80) which can, again, lead back to how little Rainsford knows about Zaroff and the situation he has found himself in. The fog in the beginning of the story creates a creepy and mysterious setting, which builds suspense in the reader's mind; it foreshadows to something bad happening. While weather creates a certain setting or mood, greek mythology builds ethos and emphasizes characterization.

Foster says "myth is a body of story that matters" (65) and if the reader is paying attention to what Connell writes, the many mythological references become evident in the story. Most of these references revolve around General Zaroff. Zaroff reads on Marcus Aurelius - the last of the five good emperors - and hums songs from "Folies Bergere" which indicate his higher class and knowledge in philosophy. After finding out the game Zaroff was hunting, Rainsford inquired on where he acquired them, "he answered 'Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me'" (Connell, 8). This alludes to Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, revealing that Zaroff believes what he is doing is not wrong and is even justified by the gods. The short story uses mythological references to increase ethos along with symbols.

Connell uses many symbols to build characterization and deepen the setting of the story. While many symbols can be found in literature - they don't mean "one thing for all of us at the

same time” (Foster, 99). When Rainsford washes up on the island he describes “an unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle” (Connell, 4). After reading further and learning about Zaroff, you can see that the jungle represents Zaroff’s tangled and twisted mind. The first page of “The Most Dangerous Game” creates a picture of the island as in isolated and harrowing place where no sailor wants to end up. The isolation of the island symbolizes the isolation between Zaroff and the morals of civilizations. Symbols will depend on “how the individual reader engages the text” (Foster, 103), but the symbols in this story can build the reader's understanding of the characters.

Foster's theories can be applied to almost all pieces of literature - “The Most Dangerous Game” is one of them. Foster's theories on blindness, weather, Greek mythology, and symbols can all be tied into this short story. A lot of these build characterization and allow the reader to more deeply understand what a character is going through. While the reader might miss these important themes in the first read, if they re-read the story the themes will make the meaning more obvious. After diving into Foster's, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, it becomes evident that there are many parts to a piece of literature, and each part creates a more meaningful understanding.