Text analysis – Ethan Frome, first part of chapter V

TEXT

*They finished supper, and while Mattie cleared the table Ethan went to look at the cows and then took a last turn about the house. The earth lay dark under a muffled sky and the air was so still that now and then he heard a lump of snow come thumping down from a tree far off on the edge of the wood-lot.*

*When he returned to the kitchen Mattie had pushed up his chair to the stove and seated herself near the lamp with a bit of sewing. The scene was just as he had dreamed of it that morning. He sat down, drew his pipe from his pocket and stretched his feet to the glow. His hard day's work in the keen air made him feel at once lazy and light of mood, and he had a confused sense of being in another world, where all was warmth and harmony and time could bring no change. The only drawback to his complete well-being was the fact that he could not see Mattie from where he sat; but he was too indolent to move and after a moment he said: “Come over here and sit by the stove.”*

*Zeena's empty rocking-chair stood facing him. Mattie rose obediently, and seated herself in it. As her young brown head detached itself against the patch-work cushion that habitually framed his wife's gaunt countenance, Ethan had a momentary shock. It was almost as if the other face, the face of the superseded woman, had obliterated that of the intruder. After a moment Mattie seemed to be affected by the same sense of constraint. She changed her position, leaning forward to bend her head above her work, so that he saw only the foreshortened tip of her nose and the streak of red in her hair; then she slipped to her feet, saying “I can't see to sew,” and went back to her chair by the lamp.*

*Ethan made a pretext of getting up to replenish the stove, and when he returned to his seat he pushed it sideways that he might get a view of her profile and of the lamplight falling on her hands. The cat, who had been a puzzled observer of these unusual movements, jumped up into Zeena's chair, rolled itself into a ball, and lay watching them with narrowed eyes.*

*Deep quiet sank on the room. The clock ticked above the dresser, a piece of charred wood fell now and then in the stove, and the faint sharp scent of the geraniums mingled with the odour of Ethan's smoke, which began to throw a blue haze about the lamp and to hang its greyish cobwebs in the shadowy corners of the room.*

*All constraint had vanished between the two, and they began to talk easily and simply. They spoke of every-day things, of the prospect of snow, of the next church sociable, of the loves and quarrels of Starkfield. The commonplace nature of what they said produced in Ethan an illusion of long-established intimacy which no outburst of emotion could have given, and he set his imagination adrift on the fiction that they had always spent their evenings thus and would always go on doing so...*

*“This is the night we were to have gone coasting, Matt,” he said at length, with the rich sense, as he spoke, that they could go on any other night they chose, since they had all time before them.*

*She smiled back at him. “I guess you forgot!”*

*“No, I didn't forget; but it's as dark as Egypt outdoors. We might go to-morrow if there's a moon.”*

*She laughed with pleasure, her head tilted back, the lamplight sparkling on her lips and teeth. “That would be lovely, Ethan!”*

**Analysis**

The text belongs to chapter five and the scene refers to Ethan thoughts on Mattie. The scene is set in Frome’s house: Mattie is sewing, whereas Ethan is already come back home.

The narrator describes the weather condition and the atmosphere with a lot of particulars and through a synestesia (“*muffled sky”*) he wants to give to the readers, the idea that the place where Ethan lives, is so sad that nothing ever happened.

In addition, the description may refers to Ethan’s feelings after an intense work day. But after there is a contrast between feelings before seeing Mattie and after seeing her. Ethan feels to belong to an another reality, a world “*where all was warmth and harmony and time could bring no chang”*. He is relieved when is with Mattie, indeed he asks her to come closer to him.

But Ethan, in a particular moment, imagines Zeena’s face overlapped Mattie’s face, and he has a momentary shock. He is scared about his feelings and emotions for Mattie. The “love” he feels for her, is too dangerous, and he is too weak to go against society values and fears people opinion. He doesn’t have a strong personality and cares too much about his reputation.

He is a dreamy person, so he same wants to experiment and know Mattie, so he find out pretexts to share moments with her.

After the atmosphere returns gloomy. “*Deep quiet sank on the room”* , the narrator using the word “sank” wants to highlight the dramatic and heavy atmosphere, also with the silence’s description.

While Ethan is talking to Mattie, he is making in his mind a sort of **fiction**: when he talks to Mattie, he finds himself in another world, an illusionary world, he dreams about a world where they are allowed to love each other.

He has two ways of viewing love: it is a “*long-established intimacy”*, that is what he has or want to have with his wife and a *“outburst of emotion”* that is what he feels when he meets Mattie.

He invites Mattie to go away from that place and that reality, but with not much convinction, believing that they have a very long time . But she reacts with irony. He with a simile “*as dark as Egypt outdoors”* , (that is a common saying to say “really dark” ) to justify the fact that they can’t go out. Here Ethan wants to convince her that it isn’t the suitable moment to get out: he know that the suitable moment will never happens. The reality is that he will not fight for this love because he fears too much people judgment and puritan values, that will never allowed this behaviours.

Both are awareness about this sad reality but they continue to meet and share moments only because when they pass time together, they feel a bit sense of lightness from the world that continue to burden their life.