

"the most dangerous game" a story by richard connell essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"The Most Dangerous Game" (1924), a short story written by Richard Connell, is one of the first literary pieces to tell the tale of human hunting – a subject highly popularized in the contemporary popular culture. The story is frequently viewed as an entertaining "hunter-becomes-the-hunted" tale filled with suspense and thrill (Thompson 86). However, despite this popular interpretation, the story conveys a deeper socio-political message about the impact of war and violence on people, by juxtaposing two representatives of the New and Old World in a dark and menacing setting.

The two primary characters in the story are a world-famous American hunter Sanger Rainsford and a Russian Cossack General Zaroff, who meet on an isolated island where the Russian expatriate resides in solitude, together with his mute servant Ivan (Connell 15). Once the reader learns about the men's characters, it becomes clear that their names are, in fact, charactonyms. Rainsford's first name is a play on the word "sanguine," meaning lively, optimistic, and cheerful – all these adjectives are representative of the "great American democratic ideal" (Thompson 87). Ominously, his name also sounds similar to the Latin word for blood, "sanguis." On the other hand, the Cossack's name, apart from having the -off ending to signify his Russian roots, bears a particular resemblance to the word "tzar," which denotes the authoritative leader of the pre-revolutionary Russia. Thus, the very names of the characters imply a clear contrast between the democratic New World and the aristocratic and violence-ridden Old World.

This distinction is further highlighted through the story's secondary characters. Apart from the tale's protagonist and antagonist, only two other

people are mentioned in the story, each one of them associated with Rainsford and Zaroff, respectively. However, the interactions between the main characters and their associates are highly indicative of their personality. In the case of Rainsford, his brief conversation with Whitney in the beginning of the story sounds casual and informal, yet respectful – a kind of interaction that two amicable equals would have (Thompson 89). Zaroff and Ivan, on the other hand, present a completely different kind of relationship. First of all, Ivan is both deaf and mute, meaning that he is unable to provide a human connection for Zaroff. However, it appears that the latter treats him like nothing more than a useful object. When Ivan dies, the only thought of him that occurs in Zaroff's mind is that "it would be difficult to replace him," and even this thought does fully occupy him as he immediately starts reflecting on his other concerns (Connell 44).

The symbolism that Connell uses to describe the character of Zaroff is also highly significant in terms of capturing his evil personality. The first symbol is the color red that repeatedly occurs in the situations that involve Zaroff, be it the rich Russian borsht, Zaroff's bright lips, or his servant's crimson sash (Connell 16, 17, 35). This color is typically associated with violence which even Zaroff admits is his main hobby in life (Connell 17). Similarly, darkness is another story's leitmotif surrounding the character of Zaroff. Since the very beginning of the story, the author talks about the night's blackness that is so thick it is almost "palpable" (Connell 4). The color describes not only the story's setting – the gloomy and isolated Ship-Trap Island – but also the protagonist's appearance, with his black eyebrows, military mustache, and eyes (Connell 15). Similarly, Ivan is depicted wearing a black uniform

(Connell 14). These repetitive mentions of black and red create not only a rather menacing portrait of the general but also an overall sinister atmosphere.

However, even though initially the main characters are significantly contrasted, this clear distinction between them fades away as the story progresses, so as to emphasize the effect that war and violence have on people. As Rainsford swims to the island in the beginning of the story, he hears a “ high screaming sound” of an animal “ in an extremity of anguish and terror” (Connell 9). As the audience learns later, this animal is, in fact, a human being. However, Rainsford is so innocent at this moment that even he, an experienced hunter, does not realize that the scream comes not from an animal, but from a person. Later in the story, when Zaroff proposes to Rainsford to hunt sailors together, the man is clearly disgusted and appalled by the proposal (Connell 33). Being involuntarily drawn into Zaroff’s cruel game, Rainsford is completely transformed under the influence of fear and desire to survive. The abrupt ending of the story captures this transformation by emphasizing that Rainsford is happy to be alive, and does not have any concerns about the violence that transpired at the island.

Undoubtedly, Connell’s story is a classic “ hunter-becomes-the-hunted” tale that excites the readers’ senses by keeping them in suspense. It is, however, important to examine the story’s historical context to understand its deeper meaning: wars and violence are capable of transforming even the most democratic countries into brutal and aggressive societies.

Connell, Richard. *The Most Dangerous Game*. North Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace, 2014. Print.

Thompson, Terry W. "Connell's *The Most Dangerous Game*." *The Explicator* 60. 2 (2002): 86-88. Print.