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Reading response 1

The story of a country doctor is John Berger's biography on Dr. John Eskell, who in the book is called Dr. John Sassall. This particular story recounts a time when Dr. Eskell is called to aid a woodsman who has been pinned beneath a fallen tree.

Berger met Dr. Eskell as a patient and later followed him along with photographer Jean Mohr in order to make his biography. With this knowledge, it is clear that whatever was experienced was likely through a 1st person point of view. However, Berger has taken creative license within this story by providing the thoughts of the other actors in an omniscient 3rd person point of view.

This has the possibility of making him an unreliable narrator because there is no way of knowing if the insight he provides such as "But now his very sureness made it seem to them that he was part of the accident: almost its accomplice" (pg 18) is true. This narrative style enables him to capture the urgency and speed at which the event took place. It also shows how quickly the woodsman's life changed; one wrong move leaves him pinned beneath the tree. Though the doctor states that he will not lose his leg, the reader does not know if the man will make a full recovery, whether he will be able to walk or return to his normal life and how long it will take. The reader is as much in the dark as the woodsman. It is also important to analyze the question

one of the woodsmen asks of the doctor, “He’s lost his leg, hasn’t he?” (pg 19). To understand the source of this question, there must be an understanding of the setting. Based on the Land Rover and telephones, the story likely takes place after 1948; additionally, the book was published in 1967, so it likely took place in the 60’s or late 50’s. This time period is what Arthur Frank in *The Wounded StoryTeller* describes as the modern period of medicine in which western biomedicine is improving and it becomes possible to cure ailments and eradicate diseases that were death sentences. The “restitution narrative” begins to take hold in the western world where people begin to expect to get better and return to their normal lives. While they are sick, they cannot see themselves as complete or whole; they are damaged. People at this point are moving away from accepting the will of a higher power or a belief that their suffering is part of a “greater plan”. It is because of this shift in understanding that the woodcutter wants to know if his co-worker will be whole again. There is an expectation that he will recover and if it is not met, it will mean a reevaluation of the self and a search to make himself whole in a new sense again.

Works Cited

1. Jones, Roger. "Books: *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*: Trouble in the Forest." *The British Journal of General Practice*, Royal College of General Practitioners, Apr. 2015, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4377605/.
2. Berger, John, and Jean Mohr. *A Fortunate Man: the Story of a Country Doctor*. Canongate, 2016.