Kelli Holwadel

Mrs. Hollenbach

English Period B

17 December 2010

Literary Analysis

There are many similarities and differences involving the themes and characters in *Of Mice and Men, The Green Mile,* and *A Lesson Before Dying*. A common thematic idea in both texts that Gaines and Steinbeck portray is the idea of hopes and dreams. Hopes and dreams are the foundation that makes life worth living, but they are also double-edged. They are marked by disappointment. The closer one comes to fulfilling a dream, the closer one comes potentionally being disappointed.

In the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck portrays the idea of hopes and dreams throughout the novel. From the beginning of the novel, Lennie and George share a dream that they want to achieve together. George tells Lennie the story about their future dream and them owning their own farm. “O.K. Someday—we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs” (14). Hopes and dreams are symbolized by George and Lennie’s desire for their own piece of land. They believe if they work hard and save their money, they can afford to buy a home and work for their own rather than someone else’s.

In the novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines also portrays the idea of hopes and dreams. Grant hopes that he can escape the society, because he thinks things will never change. He believes his society won’t ever change and that nothing can be changed without being destroyed. Grant wants to be able to prove to himself and Jefferson that it is possible to rise above the differences between the whites and blacks. While Grant is at the Rainbow Club with Vivian he tells her,

“We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves. So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious cycle—which he never does. Because even though he wants to change it, and maybe even tries to change it, it is too heavy a burden because of all the others who have run away and left their burdens behind. So he, too, must run away if he is to hold on to his sanity and have a life of his own” (166-167).

This quote relates to Grant facing black men in the south. He could stay and be broken by the white establishment or run away from his responsibilities and make a new life for himself.

Another dream Grant hopes to achieve is the responsibility of finding hope, dignity and self respect for Jefferson before he dies. Grant feels he can’t help Jefferson with his life because Grant doesn’t have his own life figured out yet. Grant’s aunt wants Grant to visit Jefferson and try to make him into a man before he dies. Grant doesn’t believe he can help out Jefferson and asks Vivian how he is supposed to help Jefferson. “I still don’t know of the sheriff will even let me visit him. And suppose he did; what then? What do I say to him? Do I know what a man is? Do I know how a man is supposed to die? I’m still trying to find out how a man should live. Am I supposed to tell someone how to die who has never lived?” (31). At first, Grant doesn’t want to visit Jefferson, but does it anyway because he loves his aunt and wants to make her happy. This quote speaks of Grant’s own securities. Grant is confused about his responsibility to help Jefferson. Despite Grant’s education and teaching, he understands very little or no more than anyone else in the black community about finding the meaning of life.

In the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie and George are united because they are isolated and have only each other. We know this is true, when George tells Lennie that they got a future together.

“Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place…With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don’t have to sit in no bar room blowin’ in our jack jus’ because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us” (13-14).

George and Lennie’s dream is eventually lost by the accidental killing of Curley’s wife demonstrating that no matter how hard one works, there are strong forces outside of one’s control that ultimately determines one success or failure.

In the beginning of both *Of Mice and Men* and *A Lesson Before Dying*, the characters are confronted with the idea of hopes and dreams, and the responsibility of caring for someone weaker and lesser than themselves. In both texts dreams and hopes are not about realistic ambitions, but about finding a way to survive, even if it’s just filling your mind with visions that may not come true. They are just futile attempts to escape reality.

Works Cited

Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1993. Print.

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men.* New York: Penguin Books, 1993. Print.