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COMPANIONSHIP AND CONTRAST: AN ANALYSIS OF GEORGE AND LENNIE IN STEINBECK'S *OF MICE AND MEN*

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Abstract
*John Steinbeck's celebrated novella, Of Mice and Men (1937), immerses readers in the harsh world of Depression-era migrant labour, where the poignant bond between George Milton and Lennie Small stands in stark contrast to the pervasive loneliness of the time. Critical discussions have extensively covered the work's themes–isolation, masculinity, the elusive American Dream. Yet, what has received less focused attention is a systematic, side-by-side analysis of the two central characters themselves. This study aims to fill that gap by applying a structured analytical tool: the FRAN framework, which examines the dimensions of **F**eelings, **R**elationship, **A**ctions, and **N**ature. A close reading through this lens reveals that Steinbeck crafts George and Lennie not merely as opposites but as complementary halves of a whole. Their interconnection embodies essential human contradictions: reason and instinct, autonomy and need, power and fragility. Ultimately, Steinbeck leverages their interdependent bond to deliver a dual critique–one of a brutal socioeconomic system, and another that affirms companionship and shared meaning as fundamental human necessities. The FRAN framework, therefore, proves its utility as a practical model for methodical character study in literary analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading literature does not entail passive reading, but rather an exercise of excavation, in which critical reading attempts to retrieve the hidden meanings that have been buried in a text. This interpretation piece is especially essential when one is faced with the novella, the literary genre, which walks the fine line between the brevity of a narrative and the thematic richness. *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck has a seminal place in this tradition. It is a creation of harsh, unrelenting strength, in which sprawling themes of social alienation, broken dreams, and the human need to connect are cut down to the richly drawn lives of a few characters in a California ranch. In fact, as theorists of literature Wellek and Warren (1977) have supposed, literature is a reflection of life, replicating its social reality. This principle is reflected in the narrative by Steinbeck, turning the ranch into a micro-world of the economic despair of the 1930s America, a world that is broken and characterized by the deep and overwhelming sense of loneliness.

At the center of this world and the legacy of this novella lie the strained, affectionate relationship between the migrant workers George Milton and Lennie Small. This is not some plot device but the core of the story and the origin of its tragic destruction. When we think of character as M.H. Abrams (1981) does, as the character in a piece of literature whose moral, emotional, and intellectual characteristics are conveyed by both word and action, then George and Lennie are a masterpiece of characterization. They are the core of the fiction, to

take the words of Stephen King that characters are the real key to good fiction. The major themes of the novella have been appropriately and critically dissect by scholarly criticism. Nevertheless, it might be said that such thematic interest has occasionally been at the cost of a more detailed, methodical comparison of the main characters themselves. The exact dynamics of their characterization how Steinbeck builds up their opposing personalities and how this particular opposition creates the emotional and philosophical power of the narrative is a field that can be explored closer.

This work, thus, aims at shifting away of a general thematic discussion to a narrow focus on character building. Its main research question is as follows: How does Steinbeck develop George and Lennie as mutually supporting, symbiotic figures, and what does this careful character creation tell us about the central issues of the novella? In a bid to answer this question, this analysis will use a systematic framework designed to examine characters in a dissectional manner, which I have dubbed the FRAN model; that of Feelings, Relationship, Actions, and Nature. By using this framework to bring a close reading of the text, one can have a disciplined analysis of the way these two men work not alone, but as one, complex body. We will see the story is dependent on each other, and the dependence forms the vessel of the most dramatic tensions and sorrowful insights.

The argument will be developed in a number of phases. To begin with, it will determine the usefulness of the FRAN framework as a methodological framework. The analysis will then explore the different emotional worlds or Feelings of each man, the simmering frustration of George versus the simple devotion of Lennie. Their Relationship, which is asymmetric, where one side is the guardian and the other the ward, will then be discussed as an architecture that houses them. Their Deeds, those of George with his calculated plans, and of Lennie with his disastrous instincts, will be interpreted as the immediate, direct, and direct result of their personality. Lastly, their essence will be condensed into a discussion on the nature, and how, in a combination, the tired pragmatism of George and the innocence of the child Lennie create a compound image of man with all his strengths and weaknesses.

This organized analysis leads to this paper to postulate that George and Lennie are complimentary halves of a whole that cannot be separated. Their friendship is a shaky and yet rebelling protest against the seclusion which is the characteristic of their world, but the same differences which unite them are the doom of their existence. When writing this tragic irony, Steinbeck attains something greater than a time piece on the Great Depression. He renders a classic reflection on the weight of nurture, the contradictions of human dependence, and the tenuous, vital nourishment we extract out of communal fantasy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* has enjoyed a stable place in the American literary canon, since its publication in 1937, which has continued to attract and maintain a multi-faceted and multi-layered critical interpretation. The number of works devoted to this small novella is evidence of its multifacetedness. To manoeuvre around this contentious discussion we can cluster the available literature into a few interrelated, albeit different strands of inquiry. Mostly, the critics have concentrated on the social and thematic commentary in the work that is very powerful. With this, much has been given to the relationships among its characters, whereas other researchers have explored its painstaking structural and symbolic artistry. The survey of these academic paths does not only recapitulate previous research; it also serves to illuminate the perennial relevance of the novella and, most importantly, puts in strong focus the specific niche that this present study aims to fill.

The greatest line of criticism has been dedicated to the unzipping of the potentially deepest thematic layers of the novella, particularly its scathing critique of the American Dream and its scathing description of societal alienation. One of the main concerns here is the dream of joint ownership of land, a dream that George, Lennie, and then Candy cherished. The majority of commentators agree that this dream is not a practical ambition but a mental need a wobbly fiction that ultimately brings to the fore the economic realities of the 1930s that were oppressive.

The dream, as critic Louis Owens (1985) has persuasively argued, functions as a consolatory myth, a myth that serves to highlight the institutional obstacles that the itinerant worker does not have access to, the obstacles that deny them autonomy and dignity. This criticism of a dream gone wrong is inseparably connected with Steinbeck and his discussion of the loneliness concept which he does not describe as an exception but as a state of default in a temporary and brutally competitive world. John Timmerman (1986), to give an example, successfully examines the ranch setting as a microscopic reflection of a larger society, a place where weakness is easily exploited and genuine enduring connection is an exception, a delicate, vulnerable occurrence. This isolation is further complicated when examining such characters as the wife of Curley where the marginalization further extends the theme of loneliness to the idea of racial and gender discrimination and thus the theme is expanded by regarding it as a critique of the widespread social alienation.

In this strong thematic analysis, the connection between George Milton and Lennie Small is widely recognized as the moral balance and the emotional center of the story. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the scholarship that addresses these two characters is likely to take them as instruments of those larger themes or elements in a symbolic program. Indicatively, the connection between them is explored by Jackson J. Benson (1984) as one of a fundamental conflict between the human ideal of fraternity and the harsh, Darwinian laws of a predatory world. Allegorical directions have been pursued in other readings, that George is the overburdened mind, or conscience, and Lennie is the uncontrollable body, or primal instinct, which has been observed by other scholars such as Fontenrose (1963). As much as these interpretations can certainly be useful, they may at other times be in the effect of subordinating the complex, textual particularities of character formation to a prefigured symbolic or thematic discourse. Likewise, psychological descriptions, including those that Mimi Gladstein (2004) deals with, provide an understanding of the disability of Lennie and the role of a caretaker that is played by George, commonly in the context of mercy, responsibility, and even the meaning of being a human being in an inhuman world.

Although this commentary is quite enriched, a certain and distinctive gap remains in the critical landscape. A criticism tendency, as Susan Shillinglaw (1994) has noted, is to see George-and-Lennie as a unit, as a whole, a fused unit, where one can derive thematic meaning. What is still wanting is a structural, comparative and systematic study of their respective character construction. We have many claims that they are opposites or complements, and fewer studies that analytically dissect how the narrative technique of Steinbeck, his selectivity in choosing word, his arrangement of events, his description, is painstaking in constructing this complementary dynamic scene scene by scene. How their unique characters are contrasted, combined, and eventually used to create the peculiar pathos and the tragic power of the story begs a more systematic research.

It is this gap in methodology that the current research aims to fill. In this way, it suggests the use of a systematic analytical device: the FRAN model, which classifies the study of character into the interdependent parts of the Feeling, Relationship, Actions, and Nature. The strength of this framework is the practical, as opposed to the rather theoretical, nature of it. It decomposes the unity of a character into small but connected aspects, allowing a transition to a more granular analysis than a more allegorical one. This enables us to follow, say, how the inner Feelings of frustration in George are the immediate cause of his Actions of protection, and how the inborn Nature in Lennie is the catalyst of the tragic course of the Relationship. This method is deeply rooted in one of the rules of literature which M.H. Abrams (1981) stated in a very clear manner, that character is demonstrated in the way internal character is expressed through the visible manifestations. Thus, though the FRAN acronym is the new synthesis toward the clarity of analytical understanding, the elements that it comprises are firmly embedded in the traditional narrative theory. Using this systematic prism on George and Lennie, the present paper argues that we may not just get a new and methodical interpretation of these legendary characters but also prove a reproducible

template of analysis of interdependence in other literary couples.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology to be applied in this work is the qualitative approach, which is deeply rooted in the school of literary analysis, and the close, critical reading of the main text by John Steinbeck is the key principle. My main aim is to carry out a methodological, comparative analysis of the description of George Milton and Lennie Small. To be more precise, the desired goal is to transcend the degree of thematic generalization that is oftentimes overwhelming the discourse on the novella. Rather, I am going to conduct a textual analysis that looks into the ways Steinbeck develops their identities in such a manner that they are simultaneously opposing and interdependent in a very deep way. I would say this is not an incidental construction but central to the way in which the novella develops its larger issues, the difficulties of friendship, the overwhelming burden of responsibility, the heartbreaking illusion of the American Dream in the context of systemic oppression.

To make this systematic comparison and provide a thorough dissection of the character, this analysis will make use of an organizational framework that I will refer to as the FRAN model. This model breaks the character study down into four interrelated analytic categories: Feelings (the internal emotional and psychological terrain), Relationships (the dynamics and power structures of the interaction with other people), Actions (the actions and choices that drive the story), and Nature (the innate, defining personality traits that make up the core of a character). It is necessary to explain that FRAN is not here a strict and alien theoretical imposition. Instead, I am making it an applied and heuristicalist lens a practical instrument that aims to introduce some uniformity and clarity to the analytical process. Its main advantage is to offer a stable vocabulary and a logical framework to deconstruct the narrative, therefore, allowing a comparison to be made that would be, otherwise, impressionist.

The very methodological procedure consisted of a conscious and intensive work on the novella. I started with determining critical textual scenes that are important to the comprehension of the two. This was not only comprised of scenes of direct contact and conversation between George and Lennie, but also of crucial scenes of solitary description, inner thoughts, and what other characters are saying about them. The passages were chosen on purpose because they demonstrated character through the abilities of Steinbeck, through subtext in dialogue, through an important narrative action, and through descriptive poetry. A layered analysis of each of the selected passages was then performed using the four lenses of the FRAN framework. As an illustration, one emotional encounter in the first chapter would be analyzed to isolate the Feelings it expresses (the outburst of frustration in George and the neurotic bewilderment in Lennie). This makes a direct revelation to the Relationship dynamic at work (the frustration of the guardian with his ward). Such emotions and that relationship strain, in their turn, are reflected in particular Actions (George scolding Lennie off and then calming him down with a story, Lennie fleeing physically and verbally). Taken together, this sequence provides a peep hole into their primitive Nature (the basically pragmatic but nurturing soul of George, the innocent and naive soul of Lennie). The repetition and categorical use of this method throughout the text creates a cumulative portrait of each man based on evidence.

Although the acronym FRAN is a new synthesis due to the need to develop a clear methodology, it is important to mention that its conceptual elements are entrenched in the old traditions of narrative theory and character analysis. The main accent of the framework, which is the dynamic interaction of internal condition (Feelings, Nature) and external expression (Relationships, Actions), is the direct reflection of the basic literary rule, which is expressed by such critics as M.H. Abrams (1981) that character is created and shown through signs that can be interpreted in the text. Moreover, the holistic approach which the framework takes to character as an unified process where the inner drives stimulate the outer behavior in the context of defining relationships where all of this leads to a stable nature, is familiar to larger psycho-social conceptions of personality. It resonates, for example, with the idea of Erich Fromm of relational bonds as dynamic practices, active and not passive, which include care, responsibility and knowledge.

Thus, this methodology is deliberately created to fill the particular gap that was determined in the current body of literature. The systematic comparative analysis presented in this work provides the textual construction mechanism as a priority and is based on the structured, replicable framework of FRAN. It attempts to show how a careful, category-based close reading might help to understand the unique narrative strategies the dialogue, the ordered actions, the descriptive decisions that contribute to creating such a strong and tragic symbiosis between George and Lennie. The final intention is to offer a new, subtle, understanding of one of the most conclusive, and the most pain-laden characterizations of American literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The application of FRAN framework to *Of Mice and Men* is not merely a way to systematize observations, but an opening of a systematic way into the very core of the Steinbeck characterization. Our analysis can go beyond general thematic statements about loneliness and dreams by systematically going through the prisms of Feelings, Relationship, Actions and Nature. Rather we reach an accurate grasp of the textual mechanics which Steinbeck uses to construct George Milton and Lennie Small. What stands out in this close scrutiny is a strong argument that they are not made as mere opposites, but rather, complementary elements of one unit. They are dependent on one another, not merely a characteristic of their friendship, but the tragic essence of the novella, and the physical expression of the major philosophical tensions of the novella, that is, between freedom and responsibility, between society and the individual, and between hope and an unforgiving, cold reality.

4.1. Feelings: The Dialectic of Frustration and Devotion.

When we commence to tap the inner emotional worlds of these two men we discover that the main dialectic upon which they are all set is that of a perpetual, low grade, tension between on the one hand the enforced responsibility, and on the other side the pure, trusting dependence. This relationship runs on their sentiments.

George has a very deep, draining emotional life. His constant and violent outbursts of frustration, when he says, God a'mighty, if I were alone I could live so easy (Steinbeck, 1937, p. 11), hardly indicate hatred. Instead, they are read like verbal ventilations, letting out the steam of a gigantic and secluded burden. What is important though is what continuously undermines this annoyance. Virtually each complaint is soon followed by a protective act or word. Just a few seconds after the above exclamation, his voice breaks out in alarm: I want you to be with me, Lennie. Jesus Christ, some body would shoot you a coyote, when you were alone" (p. 13). This abrupt change speaks volumes; it indicates that George is frustrated essentially out of care, a gut reaction to the susceptibility of the very individual that makes his life difficult. It is in the last chapter that his emotional arc is blindly crucified. In this case, frustration is gone, instead of it being replaced by a tragic and merciful love. His last words of comfort- No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never was nor am I now, an' I say it, is said like a benediction (p. 106). It is more than irritation or weight, and is an empathetic sympathy so wretched and dreadful that it requires a dreadful deed of defence. At this point, the emotion experienced by George is changed, as it is not a mere companionship anymore but a tortured and painful love.

The emotions of Lennie, in sharp contrast, are stipulated by the single, childish innocence. His emotional terrain is not complex or dynamic; it is a stable land rotating completely around two poles a passionate love to George and a primal fear of being abandoned. His interpretation of their relationship, which is summarized in his mantra that he keeps repeating, I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you (p. 14), is a simple but deep understanding of the mutual need. His emotions are made most clearly clear by his pining longing to be approved. We can observe it when he smiles to himself repeating the praise of George: "Strong as a bull" (p. 22). This is not merely the remembrance, but the relishing of a precious gift of love. His emotional concentration does not alter even in the face of death, but is still more on how to gratify George and ensure his spot in their mutual dream: "An' I can still do the rabbits, George? (p. 105). The emotion of Lennie is unchanging, unvarying, and

absolute, which forms a dramatic and dramatic emotional contrast of George with his disorderly, conflicted, and shifting interiority.

4.2. Connection: Architecture of Interdependence.

Based on these differences in emotional grounds, a relationship that can be termed as asymmetric interdependence emerges. This relationship is the architecture of their life, the architecture that works simultaneously as an escape of the loneliness of the world and the inevitable generator of their downfall.

In the eyes of George, the relationship is an imposed obligation, a position which is a combination of a guardian, parent, and strategic manager. He consciously controls their communication with the world, which he well describes in his terse teaching at the ranch: You just stand there and say nothing (p. 19). This is not an association of equals, but a rationalized system of protection. However, to consider this only as a burden is a point that is overlooked. This association provides George with something necessary. It also gives him a sense of purpose, which deliberately makes him stick out among the lonely guys in the world (pp. 13-14) he talks about. His is not just another expendable worker on the migrant workforce; he is the custodian of Lennie, which is what gives him a distinct identity and moral weight albeit at the cost of severely limiting his freedom. In such a way, the connection turns out to be his contradiction of the first order: it is his greatest burden but, at the same time, the only place where he can find a genuine contact with a person.

To Lennie the relationship is the totality of that which he knows. He views it through the prism of innocent equality, with a complete lack of understanding of the managerial pressure and the ever-calculating nature it entails on George. His faith is unconditional and unquestioning, which he shows with heart-rending clarity by his perfect obedience to the safety measures which George trains into him: Hide in the brush till you come to me (p. 30). This relationship makes Lennie extremely susceptible to the literal existence of George. However, in an inverted symmetry, he turns out to be the humanizing element of George as well. It is thus symbiotic in the purest sense: George supplies the survival strategy and direction, and Lennie supplies an unconditional loyalty and need which keeps George alive to the spiritual emptiness of the itinerant life. This interdependence is the strongest argument of connection that Steinbeck provides to the story that is full of isolation, when the plot of the story carefully demonstrates its tragic frailty.

4.3. Actions: Agency, Instinct, and the Way to Tragedy.

The above-discussed feelings and relationship dynamics do not appear in a vacuum but directly translate into the Actions of the characters, which is what becomes the literal forces that push the plot toward the inevitable conclusion. In this instance, the difference is deliberate agency and catastrophic instinct, which establishes their destiny.

George is always, and wearily, strategic. All actions are tuned to find their way in the world of hostileness. This goes as far as the micro-management of survival in the day-to-day life, such as you never should drink water when it isn't running, Lennie (p. 6), and the macro-level management of how to ensure and sustain their precarious jobs. He is, first and foremost, a survivor who is practical and calculative in all his decisions in a bid to maintain their delicate balance. This life-long cycle of self-defense leads to his ultimate and ruinous choice. The murder of Lennie is not a violent outburst. It is, heart-wrenchingly, the final line of defense, a hideous decision on behalf of love to preclude a much more cruel and painful death at the hands of the lynch mob of Curley. It is the rational, tragic culmination of a life of protecting Lennie, a time when George is changed into an agent of protection one day into an agent of mercy in one kind, loving act.

The actions of Lennie, on the other hand, almost exist beyond the sphere of strategy or free will. They are controlled by a primal instinct and simple need of a child to enjoy comfort or assurance of his senses. His giant physical prowess does not depend on judgment ability or foresight. His defining moments, such as taking a mouse and petting it to death, crushing the hand of Curley and even caressing the hair of the wife of Curley, are all the results of an elementary desire of softness or the frightened response of being scared. He does not make decisions as George does, he is just responding to

immediate stimuli. His whiny post-murder cry, "I did a bad thing. I did another ill thing" (p. 91), shows a sense of morality that never comes before the irreparable deed, as the voice of George speaks to him in a far off manner. The unconscious actions of Lennie continually and methodically destroy the well-laid plans of George proving with horrible clarity that innocence, combined with uncontrollable strength, is an innocent killer. It is his actions that drive the story towards its crisis which in the end imposes on George the most defining and tragic action of all.

4.4. Nature: The Necessary Dichotomy.

Beneath the stratum of emotions, connections, and activities is the foundation of Nature the natural, characteristic characteristics that make up the core selves of George and Lennie. Here Steinbeck builds them up as opposites of elements, two natures that cannot be simultaneously compatible and inseparable, as is mind and body in one suffering organism.

George is a rational, prospective, worn-out pragmatist somehow checked by an idealistic instinct. He is the thinker of the two, the one who plans all the time, the negotiator of an antagonistic fate. The main weapons of survival in a world that does not give charity are his intelligence and street-smarts. However, it would be a mistake to define him as a realist alone. There is also in his character that old, smoldering spark of hope, in the bright, descriptive sight of the little place (p. 56) he spins for Lennie. It is this combination of hard, unsentimental realism mingled with a sweet, rather fervent idealism, which makes him an object of such moral complexity. He knows the harshness of the world in the most painfully accurate way but he still has a secret dream which is a contradiction and the core of his suffering humanity.

The opposite is the nature of Lennie: innocent and physical strength. Steinbeck repeatedly resorts to the imagery of animals to characterize him- his hand is a paw (p. 4) he walks like a bear- to point out that he is the embodiment of pure, unmediated instinct. His character is childlike in its naivete, in its wants and its fears. He has a primitive sense of morality (he knows a bad thing), but he has no ability whatsoever to steer with it or to guide the physical strength that betrays it. His power is not an instrument with which he controls things, it is an inborn quality, as natural and amoral as the weather, gigantic, here, and threatening exactly because it is not regulated by reason. He is the body to the mind of George, a beast of great power completely lacking the controlling mind to control it.

Synthesis: The Tragedy of Complementarity.

By drawing the FRAN strands together we are viewing a closed, self-perpetuating system a tragic circuit of cause and effect. The Ideas of responsibility and care are directly prompted by the vulnerable Nature of Lennie that George has. This in its turn establishes their Relationship as that of a guardian and ward. It is that relationship that determines the protective Actions of George and which are inevitably, ever destroyed by the instinctive Actions of Lennie, which are the direct product of his fundamental Nature. Their friendship is not merely a chance friendship; it is a circle of necessity, of necessity and of necessity.

This great complementary is the real origin of power and tragic movement of the novella. George and Lennie, as a team, represent a classic and touching image of the human condition the mind bogged down in the demands of the carnal and the dreamer confronted with dependence, the heart that breaks and breaks. It is not just the contrast of Steinbeck to bring out the differences between them, but the fact that he manages to intertwine the two so much that the destruction of one leads to the spiritual destruction of the other. He demonstrates to us that in the world of the novella such profound relationship is not only the most radical, rebellious kind of resistance to alienation, but also such that is most profoundly unsustainable. In offering a systematic deconstructing of this character structure the FRAN framework lets us see the fine workmanship that has gone into the tragedy--how Steinbeck is crafting a relationship using particular, gritty details of feeling, relationship, action, and nature to construct a conceptually rich, emotionally devastating relationship.

CONCLUSION

This research was initiated by the identification of a certain gap in the strong area of criticism of John

Steinbeck with his *Of Mice and Men*. Although the thematic structure of the novella has been meticulously charted out: its approach to the American Dream, isolation and societal breakdown, the systematic, comparative analysis of the two main characters has been truly secondary in many instances, implied in larger discourses, as opposed to being the main subject. This work attempted to make that its business, to expose the characters of George Milton and Lennie Small to a parallel analysis that gave the privilege of prioritizing the mechanics of their creation. The analysis has been in a position to transcend thematic generalization by utilizing the systematicized prism of the FRAN framework, which systematizes the investigation of the classes of Feelings, Relationship, Actions, and Nature. Rather, it has demarcated the exact textual methods Steinbeck employs to construct his heroes. The point that this close reading reveals is an intriguing confirmation, Steinbeck does not make George and Lennie stand as opposites, as they are not, but rather, in a very real sense, complementary to one another, and their interdependence is not a mere plot device. It is actually the moving force of the narrative and the most striking philosophical utterance in it.

Following every single part of the FRAN analysis one can see how every aspect of their existence is designed with this symbiosis. Their Emotions form the basic dialectic: the intricate, exhausting combination of frustration, loyalty, and eventually sacrificial love that George is in is in a direct, causal connection with the simple, undying obedience of Lennie. This emotional dependency then becomes solidified into the Relationship of asymmetric guardianship a relationship which, in a strange way, gives George his sole meaningful purpose and Lennie his sole hope of survival in a world that is based on individualistic isolation. Their Actions logically and tragically grow out of this set-up. George is a deliberately and protectively manipulative person whose instinctive and uncontrollable actions constantly interfere with his plans, an eventuality that sadly proves the powerlessness of innocence when coupled to brute power, as a force of fate. This is all, as it comes down to their very Nature, the feelings, the relationship, the actions. The opposition between the rational and tired pragmatism of George and the childish and instinctive simplicity of Lennie is not only a contrast, it is the necessary prerequisite that renders them two inseparable parts of the same fragile entity. It is impossible to exist in the story without the other outlining its lines.

Thus, this systematic analysis points to a harsh truth of the origin of the tragedy of the novella. The disaster is not caused only by the external social factors, the Depression, the inhumanity of Curley, the bias in the ranch. Though it is those forces that generate the deadly situation, the deadly stimulus is the beautiful and impossible contradiction inherent in the symbiotic relationship between George and Lennie itself. They are the greatest contradictions of the human condition in their union: the mind constantly overloaded with the demands of the body, the dream of freedom in the chains of responsibility, the need to connect desperately, non-negotiable. Steinbeck achieves a two-fold criticism through them. He exposes the dehumanizing alienation and mechanistic cruelty of a particular historical event, the Depression era America. But at the same time, and with the same impact, he makes their relationship assert the timeless, transcendent imperative of companionship, selfless care, and mutual meaning. The last, gracious act of George is the last manifestation of this paradox. It is neither a story resolution nor a convenient dramatic solution. It is the tragic, rational closure of a love that has been simply a matter of protection, of responsibility, of unacceptable, unblushing understanding of the world and its brutality--a love that could only be proved absolute by an act of annihilating sacrifice.

Altogether, the FRAN framework has been a powerful and explanatory analytical instrument in this study. It gave the consistent lexicon and methodical approach that was needed to break down the complex composition of Steinbeck characterization and enabled the discussion to shift to the level of insightful observation to a level of systematic, rigid analysis. This method provides a model that can be repeated in the literary studies, showing how a close reading with a strong focus and a category-driven approach can bring innovative information about the dynamics of character interdependence, which is a major characteristic of any story. *Of Mice and Men* has a lasting strength,

however, which is beyond methodology. It is somewhere in the uncompromising poetry of the friendship between George and Lennie, that wavering dream of a little place that is held up against odds that are overwhelming. This discussion has attempted to clarify the meticulous, thoughtful workmanship of that poetry, to draw aside the veil that Steinbeck is creating his shattering impact. Thus, it validates the fact that their narrative is an eternal examination of what we hold onto each other to find comfort and meaning, and what we are forced, with excruciating pain, at times to lose.

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