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The Underlying Fear

He looked at Lennie, blood dripped from his face, and sweat mixed with dirt in an embassy of smells. Lennie was captivated in a crippling look of fear. The shouts of men faded into oblivion and he stood there as time stretched on.

"Get him Lennie!" he shouted. His heart broke at the decision he had just made.

In this tale of two men, Lennie and George migrate around California from job to job striving to get enough money to live the American dream. Although they barely stay long enough in a place to give them a reassurance of their next few meals. John Steinbeck does an amazing job of showing fear in *Of Mice and Men* through loneliness, dreams, and discrimination

Fear is shown in *Of Mice and Men* through loneliness. Lennie came into Crooks room and Crooks started bullying Lennie about something bad happening to George, "Who hurt George? He demanded" (70). Lennie was getting angry at the thought of George being in danger. It is noted the way he is demanding it making it an urgency. When something is urgent there is panic or distress because something is not going to plan. Although Lennie is not much of a planner, he just always assumes George is going to be there. When he talks about the little house, it is always "we" meaning Lennie and George. If something happened to George it would just be Lennie, and he would not know what to do. George always took care of him and Lennie is dependent on him, trusting that he will continue to lead him. Lennie does not want to be alone for the fact that he would have nobody, that is the only thing that keeps him different from the

other guys. Everyone has a need for companionship. There is no worth in anything that excludes other people. Although some may argue Lennie was not afraid of being lonely because he had such a childlike attitude, It could be said that he was afraid of being lonely because of the fact that he thinks he is such a nuisance so nobody else would stay with him if George left. Lennie is not the only one who is lonesome. When Crooks, Lennie, and Candy were talking George suddenly arrived. The conversation took a turn for the worst as Crooks became defensive of why they were there but George asked, "well why'nt you kick'em out?" (91). George notices that Crooks acted like he did not want anyone in his room. Yet Crooks never made Lennie or Candy leave. Almost like he enjoyed their company. If he really wanted them gone he could have put more effort or be more protective of his space. Though he never had people to be protective towards of space since he was separated from others first. He mentions that there were no other black family for miles, there is no one of the same ethnicity for miles he is isolated. Isolation is lonesome with nobody to relate or confide in. The first opportunity Crooks is granted to trust and confide in someone his need for companionship overrules the territorial mask he hides in. That could only happen if he was already living his fear and was given a solution. Fear of loneliness is present in everyone whether they know it or not. This is only one of the spectrum of fears man must conquer.

Again fear is present in *Of Mice and Men* although this time through dreams. Afraid, Lennie refuses to have a conversation with the woman. Finally she becomes frustrated and opens up her feelings to him. "I tell you I aint use to livin like this. I could've made something of myself... He says he was gonna put me in the movies says I was a natural" (88). The woman is nostalgic about what could have been. She looks at the positions she is in consistently at the ranch with other people. She longs to do more than approach and be rejected, and sent away.

This dream of living big and being in movies masks her fear of being useless. As a woman and a "possession" she like a old antique put on the shelf only to look at, separated from everyone else. If she was in the movies people would long for her to act and be more than a pretty face. Another way that dreams are shown is when earnestly Candy both pleads and bargains acceptance into trying to get the little house. He is giddy at the thought, "...You'll let me hoe the garden even after I aint no good at it" (66). Candy wants to be helpful for George and Lennie to have a reason to let him in. When he describes even after he is not any good at it he is promising to put in all the energy and effort he has. As he ages more there will be less energy an less effort therefore the quality of his work will not be as good as a young person. Candy sees this and would rather put his future time and energy with people who will not replace him. Later in the book he is always going back to the plan, the dream he has. The more time passes the braver he gets about standing up to authority. For he knows that they do not have the power to take everything from him anymore. He uses this dream to fight off his fears. Everyone does this, when there is the security and safety that this hope is real. Fear does not measure up to the possibility of the future. In the end, whether this fear ends up dominating over the dreams or not depends on the bravery to fight for this dream, to make it reality.

Most of all humanity shows fear with the discrimination of others. George and Slim are talking about how Lennie and George look after each other. Slim wonders why nobody else is like that and concludes that, " Maybe everybody in the whole damn world is scared of each other" (35). People are afraid of each other. If they become unafraid of each other they will be too trusting. Everyone is scared of each other because no one wants their weaknesses to be known and at advantage of to others. So they prey on the weak to ensure that if the weak are vulnerable, then others will not try to hurt them. Dominance makes them feel more superior than

their fears. It causes them to feel like they have it in control, also making them feel smart to be able to cause a distraction from anyone thinking that they are the weak ones. Even though some might argue that discrimination has never been about fear, it can be thoroughly expressed that countless number of times in the world and in *Of Mice and Men* discrimination is about the fear of that person dominating. Even those who look invincible quake with fear. When Curley came to look for his dad he noticed the two new workers, " He stiffened and went into a slight crouch. His glance was at once calculating and pugnacious " (25). Curley just met the new workers and already he sizes them up, heading straight for Lennie to prove dominance over him. He chooses Lennie because out of him and George, Lennie is bigger and more intimidating seemingly the leader of the two. If Lennie gets intimidated by Curley, then Curley thinks it will win over the submission of George. Curley lacks of self confidence, so he uses intimidation as a weapon to appear powerful. Even though he is the boss's son he does not have the leadership like Slim has. Unfortunately he cannot have both intimidation and leadership. Leadership comes with respect, but people are not afraid to confront those who posses leadership with friendliness. He chooses intimidation to put a greater difference in rank of those around him, because good leaders consider themselves no greater than their group. Pushing others down does not dominate the fear of them. In fact their point of intolerance is what will make the dominators fear come true.

In *Of Mice and Men* fear is shown through loneliness, dreams, and discrimination. Everyone is afraid of being alone. If Lennie loses George then he would be lost and have to be dependent on his own thinking. Quite the opposite, Crooks is always alone granted a single moment to confide without being afraid of taken granted for. Dreams are used to fight off, or mask fears. The woman deeply longing for acceptance dreams back to when someone chose her from the crowd. Pointed out the special qualities that make her different. Candy, the old man he

is, dreams of a small house to share with George and Lennie. No longer would he be un-purposeful and consuming of space. For once he would matter. Lastly those who are fearful of each other discriminate to acquire dominance. This dominance is used to have a sense of control over others finding out their weaknesses, like Curley and Slim. Curley has no power but needs to be of authority over others. Slim has authority and is very observant of the fact that people do not open up to anyone. Such opposites categorize many of the fears humanity possesses. Fear can be of being alone or staying alone as well as being scared to get hurt or be in low ranks. Those who are scared dream of the past and future to cling to a reason not to accept fear. The sliver of sun cascaded into the intertwining branches of the sycamore trees, and those trees shook at the mercy of the howling wind. There Lennie was looking into the distance. Slowly but gracefully the fearfulness that demanded attention contorted into a smile of excitement. Before George changed his mind he pulled the trigger and the bullet broke loose. Forever Lennie lay captivated by the rabbits with no fear of tomorrow.

Works Cited:

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. NY: Penguin Group, 1993.