

Of mice and men and macbeth conflict



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Texts that deal with the theme of conflict make us think. Conflict is the centre of all dramatic development in the three texts I will be discussing. These are Macbeth, by William Shakespeare, of Mice and Men, by John Steinbeck, and O Brother Where Art Thou', directed by Joel Coen.

There are many forms of conflict expressed in these texts. These include both emotional and physical conflict. Conflict has been brought about in many ways throughout these texts. Most of which has been fuelled by inner discord.

However a person's inner conflict can often lead to violent activity. This demonstrates that both forms of conflict are indeed affiliated. OMAM tells the story of a sharp witted man and his simple friend who find work in California's Salinas Valley. They are driven by a shared dream, that one day they will own their own property and "live off the fatta the lan".

George serves as Lennie's protector, as Lennie is mentally retarded. "He's awright, just aint bright" Lennie's fetish for soft things and his ignorant behaviour, often lands them both in trouble. Many of the characters in OMAM admit to suffering from profound loneliness and lost dreams. This is perhaps most effectively delivered through George.

At the end of the novel Lennie accidentally kills the wife of the boss' son while trying to comfort her. Although Lennie is afraid George will be angry and flees. The ranch hands rightly guess the culprit and they set out to find and kill him. As George realizes what Lennie has done, the painful mission that he must undertake becomes clear to him, a mission that will cause him great grief and inner conflict.

George knows that the murder of this girl could not be left unaddressed. Even if turning Lennie over to the police was a realistic option, being separated from George would have destabilized Lennie to a point that could have resulted in even greater tragedy. This internal conflict ripped George up inside, debating the right thing to do. It was more humane to end his life quickly, and George knew that if he truly loved Lennie, he would see to it that his death would be quick and merciful, in contrast to the fate that he would receive at the hands of the ranch hands.

The end of the novel (also Lennie death) is set in the same place which it began. The repetition of the setting binds the story together. Lennie associates this place with safety. " Hide in the bush till i come for you.

" The major irony of the novel is that George kills Lennie because he loves him. The irony is furthered as the pistol George steals to kill Lennie was earlier used to kill an old dog, in order to save it from suffering and misery. When the dog is killed, the ranch hands show compassion for the owner's loss, but when George experiences a similar plight, and perhaps a worse one, the ranch hands are unable to comprehend his loss and feel no sympathy. However a greatly respected ranch hand named Slim is the only one who notices the irony of the shooting and comforts George by telling him " you hadda.

.. I swear you hadda". The old dog and Lennie are also symbols that represent the fate of anyone that has outlived his or her purpose. Even though it causes him much inner turmoil, George kills Lennie to save him from a society that misunderstands him. Georges dream is an important

symbol in the book, as it represents the possibility of freedom and protection from the cruelties and expectations of the world.

After Lennie's death, George is lost and lonely, heartbroken at the loss of his friend. By killing Lennie, George not only sacrifices his only form of companionship but also his state of mind. George also knows that the death of Lennie marks the end of a beautiful dream he had been nurturing and is forced to accept that such untarnished happiness is not to be found in this world. George's inner conflict is rivalled only by Lennie's.

Due to his mental condition Lennie develops a complete dependence of George. Lennie experiences frequent internal conflict as he struggles with his retardation. Lennie is forever trying to prove to George that he can behave and that he won't do bad things. After he kills the woman Lennie is fearful that George will abandon him. This is also the reason he accidentally kills the woman, because he is afraid that George will hear her screams. In this scene Steinbeck presents an excellent example of inner conflict leading to physical conflict.

When the woman begins to scream in fear, Lennie begins to encounter internal conflict, because he is afraid that George will overhear her and be angry with him. Lennie wants to ignore this at all costs, because he so desperately wants the respect of George. Despite Lennie's tender and innocent nature Lennie begins to get frustrated and panics. He attempts to soothe her into stopping with words, " oh please don't do that, George'll be mad " but his efforts are futile and he resorts to stopping her the only way he knows how.

Lennie underestimates his own strength as he shakes her and breaks her neck. After Lennie's struggle is over, Steinbeck captures the stillness and suddenness of her death with the words " and then she was still or Lennie had broken her neck. " Lennie has always been fearful of this woman because he knew she was a temptation. After their first meeting he tells George that " don't like this place - I wanna get outa here.

Lennie foresees his downfall. After the woman's death Steinbeck stretches out the moment. " a moment - remained for much more than a moment. " This technique effectively expresses quite and still aftermath of the conflict. As a result of her death, Steinbeck speaks of her now innocent appearance, in contrast to the promiscuous character before her death.

Steinbeck seems to subtly imply that the only way for a woman to overcome that nature and restore her lost innocence is through death. Despite Lennie's unforgivable act, Lennie remains the naive and innocent character he has always been, however this event leaves Lennie in a state of utmost confusion and fear and signifies the height of Lennie's mental frustration and conflict. Macbeth is set in Scotland in the eleventh century. It tells the story of a brave nobleman named Macbeth, encouraged by the prophecies of the supernatural and a persuasive wife, murders the king of Scotland to seize the throne. After becoming king, Macbeth becomes a tyrant and begins to butcher all potential threats to his throne.

Macbeth is eventually brought to justice for his crimes by a nobleman named Macduff, and the throne is restored to Malcolm, the son of the original king. The most extreme form of conflict in the text revolves around Macbeth

himself. Macbeth experiences much inner conflict during the course of the play. At the beginning of the play, the witches prophesied that Macbeth would be king.

Macbeth told his wife, Lady Macbeth of these prophecies and her own ambition was born. As a once loyal soldier "for brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name" Macbeth is torn between his loyalty to Duncan and his ambition to fulfil the prophecies. His ambition spurs him to strive for power and on the other his conscious resists the urge. Pressured by Lady Macbeth, Macbeth agrees to proceed in the murdering of the King.

This is also personal and moral conflict because Macbeth knows that the king is his cousin and that it would be wrong to cause him harm. Soon after, Macbeth regrets his promise to his wife and tells her that "We shall proceed no longer in this business." She becomes angry and threatens his manhood "are you a man?" Macbeth admits defeat and continues with the deed. Ultimately he decides to abandon his morals so that his wife may not perceive him as a coward. Shakespeare makes good use of light and dark imagery to express the wrong and right desires of Macbeth.

It is also implied that darkness is necessary, in order for the murdering of Duncan to take place. This also shows that Macbeth needs the help of evil or dark forces to be immoral enough to commit these crimes that he wouldn't be able to if heaven were to "peep through the blanket of the dark." The social expectations of being a man induce Macbeth to commit these crimes. These are of course enforced by his wife. She suspects this will be his weak spot as she too is undoubtedly aware of the cultural expectations of the

time. After Macbeth does the deed, his guilt consumes him for some time, but he manages to beat it eventually.

He is left a corrupt and deranged man. Upon hearing further prophecies from the witches Macbeth comes to believe that he is invincible and confirms the reader's suspicions that Macbeth has indeed been driven into madness, when he states that " blood will have blood". He is not afraid to kill again. Lady Macbeth plays a significant role in the birth of Macbeth's ambition and therefore his downfall. Ironically this is also her own downfall, as her feelings of guilt from doing this consume her. This guilt causes her much inner conflict.

Lady Macbeth used her power over Macbeth to influence and spark his ambition. Although Lady Macbeth claims to initially doubt Macbeth, she is the one who feels the need to call upon spirits to aid her to do these deeds. " Come you spirits - Unsex me here - stop up the access and passage to remorse. " She is aware of her weakness, and despite her plea for assistance, her conflict gets the better of her " Out damned spot! Out I say! " says Lady Macbeth as she instinctively tries to wash the blood free from her hands. Lady Macbeth is eventually driven into complete madness " her eyes are open - but their sense is shut" She can never get the blood of King Duncan of her hands.

Shakespeare uses hyperbole to emphasise lady Macbeths suffering. " All the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten this little hand. " Shakespeare places great influence on her guilt and madness by speaking of it as if it is an

incurable disease. There is also another reference to light and dark in this scene. Lady Macbeth previously called upon darkness to surround her.

However, now that Lady Macbeth feels remorse she feels the need to stay in the light for fear that the dark might consume her with her guilt. This scene makes the audience feel pity towards Lady Macbeth, as she has admitted herself to remorse but it is too late. Lady Macbeth's power over Macbeth is very different to the power that George, from *Of Mice and Men*, has over Lennie. Lady Macbeth uses her power in a negative way, to control Macbeth for her own bidding, whereas George selflessly uses his power over Lennie to protect and guide him from misfortune. Lady Macbeth is introduced as strong and ambitious, but by the end of the play she is reduced to suicide, due to her feverish guilt.