Comparative Essay: John Steinbeck’s Novella “Of Mice And Men” And Jeremy Sim's Film “Last Cab To Darwin”

John Steinbeck’s novella “Of Mice and Men” set in 1937, and Jeremy Sims film “Last Cab to Darwin”, directed in 2015, were both created to explore the importance of friendships when characters face adversity and hardship throughout their journey. The value of companionship is displayed through two different time periods and settings, which highlight the arduous impact of loneliness on one’s mental health. When prejudice proves to be too immense to overcome, both texts exhibit how companionship builds resistance. Displacement is regularly presented to promote the need for friendship, while friendships commonly reveal the true beauty of life to both the audience and characters. Through the use of an abundance of themes and misfortunes the characters face, both Steinbeck and Sims remind the audience of the need for friendship and the beneficial influence it has.

Both Sims and Steinbeck adopts remote communities and isolated social conditions in their texts, presenting environments where it seems impossible for friendships to be nurtured. The tough political and economic downfall which occurred during the 1930’s, known as the Great Depression and the Crash of Wall Street, caused millions to be displaced, which is evidently reflected in Sim’s novella. Itinerant farm workers were seen travelling across the country in desperate search of work, and were referred to as “the loneliest guys in the world” and “hardly … travel(ed) around together.” Steinbeck even sets the novella in Soledad, which is the Spanish word for solitude, enforcing the ideology of loneliness and isolation. Upon arrival to the ranch, George and Lennie were sceptically interviewed by the Boss, supposing that George is “selling” something to Lennie to rob him off his pay, as George seems to be too generous. Similarly, a white masculine-dominated society displayed in “Last Cab to Darwin” promotes restrictive friendships in a dry and lonely setting. Jeremy Sims depicts a barren and empty wasteland where loneliness, which the main protagonist Rex experiences, is emphasised as he sits with “the boys” in the bar. Friendship is seen to be defined by extreme drinking, as Rex is not seen with them anywhere else. The community of Broken Hill is harsh and unforgiving, whereas the lonely outback streets are also “arid and dry”, forcing characters such as Polly to retreat into isolation. Consequently, the bitter social and physical settings of both texts allow both authors to demonstrate the difficulty of maintain companionship.

Racism and prejudice are commonly used by both Steinbeck and Sims to portray the detrimental effects it has on friendships. In “Of Mice and Men”, Crooks is a black stable buck who is seen desperate for attention and friendship, and is forced into isolation as he is not accepted in a white society. Racism is seen to cause Crooks to become “sick” and aggressive, also “going nuts” as he is isolated in a barn and forced to “read books” and “can’t play because [he’s] black.” However, he is ecstatic when Lenny decides to sit with him as he has someone to talk to, even though Lenny does not understand a single word he is saying. Similarly, Sims presents a white-dominated society where black people are affected by the ruthless theme of prejudice and racism. Polly, an aboriginal woman in love with Rex, is forced to hide their relationship from society’s judging eyes as “it doesn’t get any messier than a black woman holding a hand of a white fella.” Rex later calls to apologise, revealing it to be one of his biggest regrets as he “should’ve asked”. Tilly is also a victim who experiences the harmful effects of racism, where he is forced to show his “photo ID” even though he just wanted to book

a hotel room, evidently lowering his self-esteem. Prejudice is also seen to majorly affect his life, as it stops him from playing for Essendon and provide for his family, even though he is talented. Therefore, both texts explore how racism and prejudice causes loneliness and eventually regret, while also highlighting the benefits of friendships.

Through the stylistic elements utilised in both texts, Steinbeck's and Sims' messages which instil hope into their audiences are clear. John Steinbeck aims for the audience to understand that true friendship is a source of protection and comfort, while it is important to persist through adversity. Lennie proves to be an extreme inconvenience for George, and even though Lennie forces them to run from Weed and causes numerous deaths in Soledad, George never abandons him as he values companionship and cares for him. Steinbeck encourages his audience to overcome adversity and to remember to never abandon loved ones as they are motivation and provide "somebody to talk to". Comparatively, Sims invites the audience to understand how precious life is and how there is always a hope for a better tomorrow. Despite Rex experiencing a terminal illness, he is countlessly seen standing near the beach grasping the true beauty of life, as he has "never seen the sea before." The protagonist also understands the true importance of friendships, as he realises that he does have family and people who care about him, pulling out the injection seconds before his death. Consequently, the hopeful messages sent by both Steinbeck and Sims instil a sense of happiness in their audiences, as they highlight the importance of friendship.

Ultimately, both Steinbeck and sims explore the importance of friendships through different time periods and settings. In addition to the negative impacts discrimination has on characters, both authors explore racism and displacement which lead to outcomes such as separation and demise. Racial segregation and inequality are both highlighted throughout both texts, but hope is offered to both readers and viewers as friendship proves to be a safety net.