Mixing It Up – Unit 1

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Abstract

In this essay, the theme of loyalty within the characters is shown and examined as a major role within “Billy Budd” by Herman Melville, “Of Mice and Men” by John Steinbeck and lastly “The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka. Using quotes and citations from within the texts, this essay discusses how the main characters of the stories use loyalty as the reason for the things that they do or are doing. Through the combination of selected stories, one will be able to understand the theme of using loyalty as a reason for doing something, whether that something be for good or evil.

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Loyalty; It is something that everybody has even if they do not use it. Some people will define it as a bond or brotherhood that keeps people together as they know they can trust one another. The true definition of loyalty is the feeling of faithfulness or allegiance. Loyalty can be defined as something different by ever person. Someone may use loyalty to help others as they are loyal to a cause or that person or group. While others will use loyalty to cause havoc as they are loyal to something that means to create destruction. Many narratives use the tool of being loyal as a major theme throughout the story. “Billy Budd” by Herman Melville, “Of Mice and Men” by John Steinbeck, and “The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka, all use the theme of being loyal as major contribution to the overall story.

In “Billy Budd” by Herman Melville, the theme of loyalty contributes to the overall theme of the story, by providing a reason for which the characters actions take place. Within the naval world of the story, there is almost nothing more important than the camaraderie among the sailors of the same ship and their loyalty to their captain. During the time that Billy Budd takes place, is right after a period of time for which the British navy had experienced a high number of mutinies, including the large-scale Nore Mutiny. Captain Vere is very careful as to not have any kind of disloyal mutiny upon his ship, that he wouldn’t even allow Claggart to name Nore Mutiny when he accused Billy of plotting against the captain. The captain was afraid that one person being disloyal might cause the spread of mutiny throughout the ship. The whole time throughout the story, it is actually Claggart who is the disloyal one, as he lied to the captain and spread false rumors; though he makes it seem as if he is doing it to show his loyalty to the captain. Billy is loyal to Captain Vere, but his act of striking Claggart is in contradiction with his duty as a sailor. In deciding judgment upon Billy, Captain Vere is also forced to make a difficult decision involving loyalty and duty. Sentencing Billy to death is, in a sense, turning his back on his comrade, the innocent sailor that he truly does like. Captain Vere does what he has to in order to make sure that there is no more chance of mutiny and to make sure everyone stays loyal to him. Captain Vere even tries to scare his shipmates so they wouldn’t cause any uproar or mutiny on his ship. This quote shows how Captain Vere tries to keep his ship under his control, “As to Budd, cite me an act or spoken word of his confirmatory of what you in general charge against him. Stay," drawing nearer to him; "heed what you speak. Just now, and in a case like this, there is a yardarm-end for the false witness." (Melville 1924) Given the danger of being a false witness, one could understand why not many people would step forward to announce a rising mutiny.

Loyalty is the main bond that keeps the main characters together in “Of Mice and Men” by John Steinbeck. This loyalty is shown in the story through the character of George. He is an intelligent man that would have no problem making a successful living for himself should he have been on his own; instead he chooses to stay with his friend Lennie. The first job that George and Lennie have together goes well until Lennie ruined everything that was going good for them. Lennie made the mistake of going up to a girl wearing a “pretty” dress and grabs said dress to feel the nice fabric. This scares the girl, who then tells the boss; soon the whole town was after Lennie. This would be the perfect time for George to go out on his own and start a new life for himself, but due to his loyalty to Lennie, he chose to help him escape from the town. George is essentially Lennie’s only shot of surviving, and that is what propels George to make the sacrifices that he does. George has to do the impossible after Lennie accidentally kills Curley’s wife. In order to make sure that Lennie doesn’t do anything stupid again or take the risk of the inevitable happening, George shoots Lennie painlessly in the back of the head. He does this with love as Lennie dies with the happy thought of the dream of the farm they want to own someday. George truly loves Lennie through thick and thin; he protects him, he guides him, and he ultimately saves him from misery. George sacrificed a better life for himself in the name of loyalty for a friend. Steinbeck shows that loyalty and sacrifice between friends will make people do whatever they can for a friend. ‘“No,” said George. “No, Lennie. I ain’t mad. I never been mad, an’ I ain’t now. That’s a thing I want ya to know.” The voices came close now. George raised the gun and listened to the voices. Lennie begged, “Le’s do it now. Le’s get that place now.” “Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta.” And George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie’s head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger.” (Steinbeck 1937) By adding the actions that George did before finally shooting Lennie, Steinbeck showed how hard it truly was for George to do what he had to in order to help his friend one last time.

Loyalty in “The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka is the form of staying true to oneself. In the story The Hunger Artist has never been appreciated or understood yet he still performs as if nothing changes. People will come and watch The Hunger Artist perform his act, at first they are all amazed, but after a while they began to turn and try to say that the act is fake and that he is actually eating. The whole time The Hunger Artist continues his show to prove that he is not faking. The Hunger Artist knows what people believe and that’s what causes him to quit doing the live acts in the middle of towns and go join the circus. The whole time he hopes that people will believe his act and truly see it as a form of art like he does. At least that’s the way he makes it look; in all actuality the only reason he does his act is because he has never been able to find any kind of food that he truly enjoys. The Hunger Artist stays loyal to his art form in order to satisfy himself, but also to hopefully have the people that watch him enjoy it. “…the starvation artist had never, under any circumstances, even under compulsion, taken in even the slightest morsel: the honor of his art forbade such an action.” (Kafka 1922) The Hunger Artist never took any food in order to stay loyal and true to what he considered an art form.

Loyalty is something that some people will chose whether or not to acquire or even use to their advantage. Loyalty is also the basis upon which some authors will write their stories around. The theme of loyalty is one of the main themes in each story written by Herman Melville, John Steinbeck, and Franz Kafka. In “Billy Budd” by Herman Melville, the loyalty theme is revolved around the characters actions in what and why they do them. In “Of Mice and Men” by John Steinbeck, loyalty is embodied within the main character George in the way that he is always helping Lennie, even though he has chances to start a better life for himself. In “The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka, the theme of loyalty is shown through the way that The Hunger Artist never gives up on his art form even though he is aware that his form of art has faded away.

Works Cited

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