Colin Quinn

Prof. Levecq

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WR 5 and 6 Questions

Hugh decides to keep the money stolen because he feels like everyone deserves a chance in their life, and this was his chance to make a change. After being convicted, Hugh’s mental decline gets the best of him and he takes his life. He does so because he sees his life as a failure overall, and in the process stole from someone, tarnishing his name. Wolfe’s guilt was eating him from the inside, out. The moon reference explains that with every darkness, there is light coming ahead. For without the darkness, we would not know to appreciate the light.

“Life in the Iron Mills” Questions

* “That to him, a true life was one of full development rather than self-restraint?” (2551). This quote shows that he believes a life is best lived when the individual is allowed to make moves that they want to and not be held back by the restraints of responsibility or money. Society tries to keep people in their respective place in the hierarchy and Wolfe believes against that, which is the ultimate influence in his decision to keep the money.
* “’Them irons will need a crow bar beside your tine, before you can open ‘em’ Wolfe laughed, too, in a senseless way. ‘I think I’ll get out,’ he said” (2445). This is foreshadowing to his plans to commit suicide. Wolfe knows that it is unlikely to make it out with the sentence he has and is not in a very good mental state as is. These two main factors of helplessness and guilt convince him that the best way out is to commit suicide.
* Self-reliance is a term that means one is able to support themselves. They do not require another person to assist in their success as a person, nor do they rely on others to take initiative, as they will on their own. Someone who is self-reliant takes care of themselves and their loved ones through any means necessary. Whether it be their work-ethic or their vast knowledge of life skills, they are able to thrive without needing much assistance from others.
* In this story, Davis is saying that the idea of being self-reliant is just that, an idea. Through the story, everyone believes that they are self-reliant because they can provide for themselves through work, while in actuality, they all rely on the people in the social classes above them for their success. Self-reliance in this time was essentially scraping by with what opportunity your employer gave you, and not this grand gesture of solely providing for one’s self and family. It was just a scheme to keep people working harder than they should have been for less than what they deserved.
* Hugh Wolfe is the epitome of the idea of self-reliance at this time. A big dreamer who worked hard for what he had, and when given a shot at achieving something greater, was shot down by those socially above him. “That meant death, distant, lingering:” (2554). This sums up the aura of being self-reliant, as it is something that in theory seems perfect, and as one comes closer to it, such as Hugh, they are simply left to suffer. Not many people of this time came to such a realization that true self-reliance was to not just survive, but to thrive; and those who did realize this, died in the wait of thriving.

“We Always Stood on Out Own Two Feet” Questions

* The main argument is that self-reliance in the usual sense of one person supporting themselves is a myth, although it is very important to a community’s well-being. Coontz argues that self-reliance is more dedicated toward the community as the self, rather than one person relying on themselves for everything. It is essentially explaining the benefits of an assembly line, where if each person builds their own car, it takes far longer and has less overall quality; but if each person were to master one aspect that contributes to the whole, then everyone becomes more productive.
* Her grandfather is a good example of a person that can support himself in numerous circumstances. He believed that people should essentially grow up and “just go get a job” to support themselves as if it were often that simple these days. He believed that anyone should be able to support themselves should they need to and those who do not are nothing more than the “dependent poor” who should grow with the times.
* The pioneers have very little outside support, as they would live on vast farms and very distant from other families. A family was essentially responsible for their own well-being and was otherwise left alone unless they required the assistance of the community. These people were very community and family driven, as that is basically all that they had available to them.
* The suburbanites of the baby-boom era received many instances of assist from the banking system and government. The demand for homes was skyrocketing and the amount of debt that people would accrue grew almost faster. Almost everything that people would buy would not be with their own money, but of money that they will have in the future, making them very reliant on not just the community’s success, but the success of the entire nation.
* The example with her grandfather mentioning that although help was not often denied, it was not relied on for survival either. A family that can support themselves was the best way to be. Where nothing is ever expected of others, but many are willing to help, that is what the grandparents believe to be the ideal societal norm. They believe that society has shifted too much towards one that relies on government assistance with the introduction of welfare-type offerings, which allow people to not provide to the common good, and actually be taking from the general population as well.
* The myth of self-reliance is one that keeps people motivated to do their work to commit to the greater being of the whole. Without this ideal, many people would not take as much pride in what they have accomplished over their lives and be left to strive for nothing. This is important because it allows the society that we live in to thrive off of the accomplishments of everyone, much like an assembly line. If I am able to focus my time on one aspect of a greater good, then I will be very effective in that unit, while others can aid me should I need help outside of my expertise.