What is the relationship between George and Lennie?

The relationship between Steinbeck’s protagonists – Lennie and George – is a complex one and cannot be reduced to a definition of a simple friendship. Their relationship is multi-layered and is muddled by the characters’ interdependence and George’s feelings of responsibility. It is for these reasons that their relationship could be described as a quasi-father & son relationship. However, further difficulties are met at this definition due to the fact that, at times, both characters adopt the varied roles. However, due to the fact that the father-son relationship seems the most logical and applicable one it shall be the issue that will be dealt with presently in this analysis.

The clear indication from the text is that George is the care-giver and mentor to his intellectually challenged companion Lennie. This is first indicated when George stops Lennie from drinking the water that he asserts “Looks kinda scummy.” This relationship is then further compounded by the fact that George holds the work cards and the bus tickets. As George rhetorically asks, ’’Think I’d let you carry your own work card?” However, it is not until the reader learns that George doesn’t allow Lennie to speak to the boss that the father-son relationship is solidified. George takes the responsibility for all of the adult matters as it were. He communicates with the employer, protects Lennie from disease and even holds Lennie’s documents for fear that Lennie might lose them. Therefore, George clearly takes on the role as the care-giver.

On the other hand, George’s short temper and often aggressive attitude towards Lennie does throw such an assertion into question. George’s derogatory language towards Lennie, such as, calling him a ‘crazy bastard’ and his threat to ‘sock’ Lennie for trying to conceal the dead mouse could lead the reader to reach the conclusion that the relationship was abusive. Although, when we learn that George acts only out of concern for Lennie – claiming ‘that mouse ’aint fresh’ – then it becomes clear that his actions are based on love and concern. Therefore, elucidating the paternal bond that George has with Lennie. Although, it would be naïve to simplify their relationship to just this; there are also clear overtones of mutual dependence joining the two characters.