

Of Mice and Men
Text analysis

The title of the story. How does the title help to grasp the main idea of the text?

“Of Mice and Men” is a quote from a Robert Burns poem:

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men
Gang aft agley
And leave us nought but grief and pain
For promised joy.”

This quote tells the reader that plans always go wrong – no matter how well they have been planned out. We can see the connection between the book and the poem written by Robert Burns. George, Lennie and Candy had a dream of being independent, happy and of “living of the fatta the land”. George even knew where the little ranch was and for how much money they could buy it. However one problem followed the other and it became quite clear to everyone that the dream had absolutely nothing to do with the harsh reality of living in the country, the economy of which was nearly at the point of collapse, where hundreds of industries became bankrupt.

Subject matter of the story

There are many themes in the story and all of them are connected in one way or another. By introducing the various themes, the author describes the problems which existed at the time when the book was being written.

The main theme is loneliness. Everyone in the story is very lonely. It seems like Lennie is the only blissful person in the story but that is probably because of his condition and even he, always dreaming about rabbits, feels guilty at the end of the story and needs George to be with him. Even though George has a companion, he is lonely. He and Lennie believe that having their own place is going to solve everything. But George knows it isn’t about to happen and having to retell it so many times to Lennie just depresses him.

Candy, unlike the other “hands”, used to have a dog, who had always followed him and made him less lonely. But the dog was killed by Carlson, who, being forsaken himself, wanted to deprive the others of that happiness.

Everyone on the ranch is lonely. All the men in the bunkhouse are single and very independent, however this independence is not pleasant as it turns into hatred and jealousy (Carlson kills Candy’s precious dog). Even though the men spend a lot of time at “Susy’s Place” it doesn’t stop them from being lonesome. Slim admires the way George and Lennie travel around together because most of the workers split up and go off in their own direction. The workers have nothing to look forward to in life at all, except work for the rest of their lives. Also George plays solitaire in the bunkhouse and it is actually very significant because solitaire is a game for one person.

Crooks is probably the loneliest person on the ranch, he even lives in his own little barn exiled from all the others mainly because he is black. Crooks is so used to loneliness that when Lennie paid him a rather friendly visit, he saw it as aggression and wanted Lennie to leave because he was scared of Lennie hurting him. Even though it looks like Crooks prefers solitude, it is very unlikely to be so because everyone wants company and friends.

Curley is the only person in the story who has a family: a father and a wife. But his marriage is unsuccessful: throughout the whole story Curley is “looking” for his wife and she is “looking” for him. But they only meet in the barn and Curley’s wife is dead. Even then Curley

doesn't come up to her to feel her pulse to check whether she is alive or not. At that point of the story Curley doesn't feel sorrow for his wife but wants revenge for his hand.

Curley's wife is not happy living in the father-in-law's house She thinks she has missed various opportunities by living at first with her mother and later with Curley. She thinks she could have become a very successful film star because a strange man at a fun fair told her so. But she blames her failure on her mother, who hid the letter from the girl. Curley's wife tries to get a bit of companionship on the ranch by flirting with the men.

Another theme in the book is being always doomed to failure. There are many things in the book that are doomed. One of them is the loving relationship between men and women. Curley and his wife are NOT a happy newlywed couple. Also Lennie never seems to be understood by any women in the story. His will to touch everything nice might be his way of sharing love with everyone. Racial harmony is also doomed. A black man, Crooks, is made to live in the little barn outside of the bunkhouse because he is black. No one knows if he is a nice man because nobody has ever tried talking to him and all because of his color. Any dream had by anyone is doomed. A dream of having their own little place, made George depressed and Lennie cheerful but even though the dream was definitely doomed. Quality of life was doomed. America was at the point of poverty at that time. Many industries became bankrupt and poor.

Lennie is often violent. This violence is often unintended because he is a bit sick on the head and often doesn't know what he is doing. But this violence gets into a lot trouble, for example holding the girl's dress in Weed or killing Curley's wife. However Lennie is not as innocent as George often says he is. Lennie sometimes has sudden fits of anger, for example when he threw a puppy to the other side of the barn because he was angry at the puppy dying. Also Lennie gets into trouble because he is silly. When Curley came into the barn and Lennie was smiling, the man thought he was laughing at him and fought with Lennie. So we can see that Lennie is doomed in every possible way.

George is pretty smart and he understands that trouble is inevitable. He gets tired of retelling the dream over and over again because he knows that it isn't going to come true. When he saw Curley's wife lying dead in the barn, he said : "I think I knowed from the very first" that the dream would never come true. He was always telling Lennie to keep his mouth shut because he probably knew that Lennie was always the start of trouble. He foresees trouble and makes an arrangement with Lennie to meet at the pool in case of an emergency. George is wary of Curley's wife from the very beginning because he knows she will be involved somehow.

Structure

Nature starts and ends the novel. The story begins at the river with Lennie and George running from a posse and ends at the river with Lennie and George running from a posse. This represents the friends' futility in trying to move ahead in life. In chapter 2 Lennie gets a puppy and in chapter 5 he kills that puppy. As the story goes on the violence builds up. At first it was just touching the girl's dress, then killing mice, then killing a puppy and crushing Curley's hand and finally with Lennie being killed. John Steinbeck uses a circular plot structure in *Of Mice and Men* to show the dead end existence of working men during the Great Depression.

The whole novel contains very little narration. Instead, Steinbeck relies heavily on the words and actions of his characters. A careful study of each chapter reveals that, after the initial description of the setting, most pages contain almost all dialogue with very short introductory phrases. Steinbeck wants readers to draw their own conclusions about the characters and the themes from the action and words of the people, rather than from Steinbeck's opinions. Thus Steinbeck uses a technique that helps his novel translate easily to a staged production.

A final structural technique is the use of foreshadowing, or transitional connections or signals, to connect and make ideas more fluid. Throughout Steinbeck's novel, there is so much foreshadowing that some critics feel he has over used the technique. As an example, Candy's dog and the circumstances surrounding its death are later repeated in the death of Lennie. The same technique is used when George warns Lennie very early to go back to the

bushes by the pool if anything bad happens. This advice is repeated several times in other scenes, including Lennie's thoughts in the barn and later at the pool while waiting for George.

Characters

George's personality often reflects both anger and understanding. Of the two men, he is the one who thinks things through and considers how their goals can be reached. Once Candy makes the stake possible, George comes up with the details: where they will get the ranch, how long they must work to pay for it, and how they will have to keep a low profile in order to work for the next month. George also foresees possible complications and gives Lennie advice about what he must do in order to help their future. While George can be very rational and thoughtful, he also gets frustrated and angry with Lennie because the big man cannot control his strength or actions. George repeatedly gets angry, so much so that Lennie knows by heart what it means when George "gives him hell." But George's anger quickly fades when he remembers Lennie's innocence and his inability to remember or think clearly.

George has no control over his own life. The life on the road, moving from job to job has clearly affected him. He has to obey the others like the boss and Slim and that includes taking orders from people he doesn't respect. He's tied to Lennie and tied to the need to work.

Lennie is the central character. He's probably the most interesting character in the novel as well. Lennie's personality is like that of a child. He is innocent and mentally handicapped with no ability to understand abstract concepts like death. While he acts with great loyalty to George, he has no comprehension of the idea of "loyalty." For that reason, he often does not mean to do the things that get him into trouble, and once he does get into trouble, he has no conscience to define his actions in terms of guilt. Lennie only defines them in terms of consequences: "George is going to give me hell" or "George won't let me tend the rabbits." He is devoted to George like a dog is devoted to its master, and he tries to follow George's commands. There is a childlike wonder in Lennie that can be seen when he first sees the pool of water and slurps down huge gulps of water like a horse. Lennie's prodigious strength combined with his lack of intelligence and conscience make him dangerous, and he needs George to keep him out of trouble. George takes care of Lennie and makes the decisions for him. George also gives him advice and helps Lennie when overwhelming forces, like Curley, scare him. George keeps the dream out in front of the huge man as a goal: Their farm is a place where they can live together, have animals, grow their own crops and, in general, feel safe. Lennie has little memory, but the story of their dream is one he knows by heart. While George never really believes in this farm, Lennie embraces it with childlike enthusiasm. Every time he makes George tell their story, his enthusiasm excites George, too. Lennie's innocence keeps the dream alive, but his human imperfection makes the dream impossible to realize.

Slim is so respected and admired on the ranch that even Curley listens to him. When Lennie smashes Curley's hand, Slim is the one who intercedes and tells Curley he will not have George and Lennie fired. Slim understands Curley's fear of ridicule, and he uses that fear to help George and Lennie. Slim also inspires confidences because he is not judgmental. When George first meets Slim, George tells him about Lennie's troubles in Weed. George senses in Slim a person of intelligence and empathy who will not be mean to Lennie, make fun of him, or take advantage of him.

Characters in John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" such as Curley's Wife met her downfall in the book because of her own wrong action and decisions and consequences out of her reach. In a world where the strong overcome the weak and we lose all because of our own blind mistakes and circumstances out of our control this idea is not only reflected in real life but in "Of Mice and Men".