

Synthesis essay of men and mice literature review examples

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



Loneliness is part of human condition

Steinback's novella *Of Men and Mice* is set in a grim economic dystopia of migrant workers on a Californian ranch where the two protagonists Lennie and George share the dream owning their own farm someday despite the meagre conditions they were subject to. The novella has been applauded as well as criticized for its staunch realism or what was portrayed as realism in cases of excessive sentimentality. In this paper, we shall compare and contrast the two main characters of Lennie and George in order to reflect on a theme that is relevant for each and every one of Steinback's characters: loneliness. In this novella, Steinback has portrayed loneliness as the driving force behind his characters' nuances as well as cruelties.

Lennie

Lennie is the least dynamic of all of Steinback's characters and in all probability, the flatness of Lennie's character is what makes the novella work. Lennie is a large round man, with a flat face and no discernible features. The extent of his stupidity is evident in the first scene itself when he snorts water from a pond like an animal. And when rebuked about drinking the scummy water, he smiles happily saying, "That's good. You drink some, George. You take a good big drink." (3; ch. 1) Lennie has a fatal weakness towards all things soft and cuddlesome. He often gets his friend George in trouble by his wilful childishness and low mental capabilities. He is manipulated by some of the other characters like Crooks and Curley's wife and is an easy prey. But his utter belief in his friend George and his efforts to be a worthy companion to him are endearing, but also gloomy. For example,

one truly feels for Lennie when George confides in Slim that he abused Lennie at instances for his own personal amusement. " But he was too dumb even to know he had a joke played on him. I had fun. Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him," Georges said (21; ch. 2). Lennie will never get from George what he is capable of giving him and the devotion is almost like a trade-off for the protection George offers. But one has to wonder, is it really protection that Lennie is after? Is it growth or stability or even a better financial status? The answer is none of those. And that pure innocence of his character maintained throughout the novels reflects a form of solitude and maybe even loneliness. In that regard, Lennie is no different from the other characters, the only difference being that he did not let the loneliness affect him in a negative way.

George

George is described by Steinback as a small and quick man, well defined in looks and actions, ethical, but short-tempered and at times harsh. He dutifully cares and protects his friend Lennie while also longing for freedom which he plans to enjoy with Lennie. " Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us," he would say to Lennie's utter delight (8; ch. 2). The companionship of Lennie and George sets them apart from rest of the drudging workers, but at the same time, the companionship throws a bigger picture on the entire theme of the novel, calling to question the true potential of caring for another person that can outlast many misfortunes.

Curley could see it in their first meeting itself. " Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is," he asks, suspiciously (12; ch 2). But ultimately, one has to look at the question as to why George is so dedicated to Lennie, why he chose to risk his own future many number of times when it is apparent that Lennie is incapable of change or even adding value to George's dreamed enterprise. The nature of George's care for pure and innocent Lennie is doomed ever since the beginning. At the same time Lennie was the man who was able to convince George of dreaming higher and actually looking at the farm as an eventual reality.

In a condition of harsh economic strain and drudgery, it seems that George is indeed dependent on Lennie, who is evidently mentally handicapped in order to be able to dream. His innocent childlike belief in George, not only keeps George's dream alive, but also resplendent and pure. Couldn't one say that it is because of the dreary loneliness that George felt that he found companionship in an unstable, impulsive, mentally feeble second-class character like Lennie? Moments before shooting Lennie in the back of his head, George says to him, " No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know." (52; ch. 6). And why would he be? Lennie had and would have always been inferior to George on so many levels, especially when it comes to intellect. The way he kills Lennie is no different to the way Carlson kills Candy's dog calling it an act of mercy. But in George's case, it is an act of finally accepting the loneliness and hopelessness that were always a part of his reality (the world of men).

Outline

Although, it is a novella, *Of Mice and Men* has the essential structure of a five-act play. Each of the six chapters of the book occur at unique locations like the clearing, the bunkhouse, barn, brothel, etc. The first chapter (2) describes the two main characters Lennie and George and a sketch of the circumstances that led them to flee from their previous job. Also, their mutual dream of buying a farm and making a free living is visited in this chapter. In the second chapter (10), trouble makes an appearance in the form of the flirtatious and vapid Curley's wife which reveals itself to be the cause of major antagonism in the following chapters. As we progress to the third chapter (20) a state of aggravation is presented in the form of confrontation between Lennie and Curley with an additional tragic event of shooting Candy's dog. The thematic relevance of this event is realised later, although sympathy is derived in the immediate chapter, the fourth (33), when the second-class characters namely Crooks, Curley's wife, Candy and Lennie are presented with their softer or rather vulnerable side through a base circumstance. The fifth chapter (42) presents the reader with the climactic action on part of Lennie when he accidentally kills Curley's wife. The two have connected over the chapters four and five, but their simple connection was also a doomed one. In the sixth and last chapter (49), we see Lennie and George meeting for the last time when George is forced to make the difficult decision for his friend and killing him.

Quotations

- 1) " They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other." (2; ch. 1) This quotations speaks of George's character to lead and of Lennie's to follow.
- 2) "' That's good," he said, " You drink some, George. You take a good big drink." (3; ch. 1)
- 3) " Tried and tried," said Lennie, " but it didn't do no good. I remember about the rabbits, George." (3; ch 1) Lennie's fatal attraction to all things soft becomes evident in this initial dialogue.
- 4) " Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us." (8; ch 1)
- 5) " The red light dimmed on the coals. Up the hill from the river a coyote yammered, and a dog answered from the other side of the stream." (9; ch. 1) Steinback uses vivid imagery to convey his scene settings.
- 6) " George patted a wrinkle out of his bed, and sat down. ' Give the stable buck hell?' he asked. ' Sure. Ya see the stable buck's a nigger.' (11; ch. 2) Steinback's way of introducing characters is interesting to note. In this case, Crooks is first the nigger and then the rest of the character sketch.
- 7) " Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is." (12; ch 2) Curley asks George out of suspicion.
- 8) "'Ain't many guys travel around together,' he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'" (18; ch

2) Slim says to George.

9) " Although there was evening brightness showing through the windows of the bunk house, inside it was dusk." (20; ch 3)

10) "" But he was too dumb even to know he had a joke played on him. I had fun. Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him." (21; ch. 3)

11) " He don't give nobody else a chance to win--" (23; ch 3) Carlson speaks of his distaste for Crooks despite his obvious skill at work.

12) " Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive." (23; ch 3) The argument about Slim's dog is a candid reflection of the untold thoughts in George's mind at the end.

13) " George looked up. ' If that crazy bastard's foolin' around too much, jus' kick him out, Slim.'" (26; ch 3) George is short tempered, especially when it comes to Lennie. But it's evident that his affection leads to frustration.

14) " Want me to tell ya what'll happen? They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog." (35; ch 4)

15) " Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land." (36; ch 4)

16) " Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely." (43; ch. 5) Expression of loneliness among various characters make the reader sympathise with the obviously negative ones, in this case, Curley's wife.

17) " As happens sometimes, a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment. And sound stopped and movement stopped for much, much more than a moment." (46; ch. 5) Context: right after Curley's wife dies.

18) " An' I got you. We got each other, that's what, that gives a hoot in hell

about us," Lennie cried in triumph. (51; ch. 6) The beauty of this line is the childish excitement in Lennie's face every time he says it. After all, he could actually remember this one. But in this case, it was the last time he would ever say it.

19) " No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know." (52; ch. 6)

20) "' Never you mind,' said Slim. ' A guy got to sometimes.'" (52; ch. 6) Slim is the only person who can see the guilt that George has to carry on his shoulder.

Work Cited

Steinback, John. *Of Men and Mice*. New York: Covici Friede 1937. Print.