

Of mice and men: an unexpected connection

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Lennie and Curley's wife come across as very different characters. They differ greatly in appearance, mentality, and personality. Despite their differences, though, Lennie and Curley's wife are surprisingly similar in the way they both constantly need to create physical connections. As a result, they are able to relate to each other, and when they are finally alone together they address each other's needs, which leads to a tragic end.

Lennie and Curley's wife are extremely different people, both externally and internally.

Lennie is "a huge man, shapeless of face, ...with wide, sloping shoulders," (2) while Curley's wife is a very "purty" (28) woman with "full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes" (31). Lennie has animalistic qualities and moves clumsily: "...he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws" (2). Contrastingly, Curley's wife is more graceful and moves very quietly, which is depicted when Candy says, "Jesus Christ, Curley's wife can move quiet" (82) after she had entered the stable on the way to Crooks' bunk without anyone hearing her.

Lennie suffers from an unknown mental illness – the other characters think he's "nuts" (74)— and as a result, he acts callow, imitating the behavior of certain animals: He drank from the pool "with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse," (3) and he "dabbled his big paw in the water and wiggled his fingers so the water arose in little splashes" (3). Lennie is "a nice fella" (40) who is very innocent, illustrated by how he interacts with the girl in the red dress in Weed: "...he reaches out to feel this red dress, ...he jus' wanted to touch that dress" (42).

He is also very tractable; "...he'd do any damn thing" (40) that George told him. In contrast, Curley's wife is mentally sharper and very observant; she notices all "them bruises" (80) on Lennie's face, which resulted from his fight with Curley, and realizes that he was the one who hurt Curley's hand, not a machine. Curley's wife is also very assertive, manipulative, and flirtatious. A clever lady, she knows how to get what she wants. The superiority of Curley's wife's qualities to those of Lennie later contributes to their tragic end.

Both Lennie and Curley's wife have to constantly create physical connections in their lives, but each for a different reason. Lennie has an obsession with petting soft things, which he reveals to Curley's wife: "I like to pet nice things with my fingers, sof' things" (90). His obsession, which he has had since he was a child - his Aunt Clara used to give him a piece of velvet to touch -- is depicted throughout the book. In the beginning of the book, Lennie finds a dead mouse and when asked why he keeps it, he answers, "I could pet it with my thumb wile we walked along," (6) expressing his desire to pet things, dead or alive.

He wants to pet things so badly that after George throws the mouse off into the distance to get rid of it, Lennie goes and retrieves it again. In Weed, when Lennie saw the girl in the red dress who he had never even met before, he reached out to touch it, just to feel the dress. George describes Lennie's obsession concerning Slim's pups: "He'll want to sleep right out in the barn with 'em. We'll have trouble keepin' him from getting right in the box with them pups" (38). Lennie "wants to pet them pups all the time" (42).

Furthermore, his dream to tend “furry” (16) rabbits results from his obsession.

Lennie has a longing to pet every soft thing he encounters in the book and each time he fulfills his craving something unfortunate happens, foreshadowing the book’s final events. He doesn’t know his own strength and can’t control his obsession. Similarly, Curley’s wife has a constant need to physically feel loved. She is someone who needs a lot of love and attention (her dream was to be an actress), which her husband will never give her. As a result, she tries to interact with any guy she can; in Crooks’ room when talking to Candy, Crooks, and Lennie, she admits, “...what am I doin’?

Standin’ here talkin’ to a bunch of bindle stiffs...an’ likin’ it because they ain’t nobody else” (78). Slim comments on her behavior: “She ain’t concealin’ nothing... She got the eye goin’ all the time on everybody... Seems like she can’t keep away from guys” (51). Although many of the ranchers view her as a “tart,” (28) I believe that Curley’s wife is a genuinely lonely person. She expresses her loneliness to Lennie: “I get lonely... You can talk to people, but I can’t talk to nobody but Curley” (87). Ironically, Lennie and Curley’s wife, who have nearly opposite qualities, can cater to each other’s need by responding to each other’s obsessions.

Purposely kept apart by the author through various characters for most of the book, when Lennie and Curley’s wife are alone together for the first time, the already existent chemistry between them is ostensible, and the extent of their needs is so great that neither can resist acting upon them. Leading up to this final scene, Lennie’s attraction to Curley’s wife is unequivocal. When

he first sees her, his eyes “[move] down over her body,” (31) and when she talks Lennie watches her with fascination.

Furthermore when George speaks negatively about Curley’s wife, Lennie “defensively” says, “ She’s purty” and then later repeats, “ Gosh, she was purty” after which he smiles “ admiringly” (32). Curley’s wife knows how to relate to Lennie and speak to him on his level. After Candy tells her that Curley’s hand was caught in a machine, she, knowing what really happened, speaks flirtatiously to Lennie: “ O. K. , Machine. I’ll talk to you later. I like machines” (80). In the final scene, Curley’s wife indicates to Lennie that she understands his obsession; when Lennie reveals that he likes to pet things, she responds “ Well, who don’t?...

Ever’body likes that. I like to feel silk an’ velvet. Do you like to feel velvet? ” (90). Lennie and Curley’s wife open up to each other, and as a result the reader learns the most about these characters from this scene; Lennie explains his obsession, while Curley’s wife explains her loneliness and need to feel loved. The reciprocal connection between them is so strong that Lennie disobeys George’s orders, risking his dream of tending the rabbits, and succumbs to the temptation of Curley’s wife.

Her loneliness is so great that Curley’s wife, aware of the consequences, “[takes] Lennie’s hand and [puts] it on her head” (90). Lennie’s obsession overpowers him, and he continuously strokes Curley’s wife’s hair harder and harder, making her scream in pain. Afraid that George “ ain’t gonna let [him] tend no rabbits,” (91) when Curley’s wife doesn’t stop screaming, Lennie shakes her while covering her mouth and accidentally kills her. Lennie’s

actions illustrate his lack of self-restraint, and he is therefore viewed as a threat to society. As a result, Lennie's killing of Curley's wife leads to the killing of Lennie.

The characters that seem the least alike in *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie and Curley's wife, ironically, share a common need that enables them to have one of the strongest connections in the book, both physically and emotionally. Knowing that they have the ability to satisfy each other's needs, Lennie and Curley's wife are in a very vulnerable situation that is full of temptation. Lennie can't control his obsession and accidentally kills Curley's wife, while trying to preserve his dream to tend rabbits that is based on his obsession. The physical connections that once gave them pleasure and happiness in life lead to each of their deaths.