

Steinbeck's novella of mice and men

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Lennie is undoubtedly one of the most awful characters in Steinbeck's novella, *Of Mice and Men*. When considering if he is to blame for his ultimate death, we need to think about that he is bit more than a child psychologically. Much like the other ranch employees, he is probably damaged not through his own actions however because of the severe conditions of the society he lived in. Therefore, it is unfitting to declare that he is straight to blame for what takes place.

In examining this claim, a great place to start would be Steinbeck's usage of setting.

The reality that Lennie even goes into Crooks' space provides us a peek of his character. Scoundrels' room is described as, " a little shed that leaned off the side of the barn." There is an undetectable barrier that avoids Crooks from joining with the others- instead he is left by himself, separated from the camaraderie of the cattle ranch simply due to the fact that he is black.

Lennie can not view these racial tensions that were so common at the time. He is totally oblivious of truth, so for that reason we can not say what happened was his fault. Although he does many things that would be considered wrong in that society, he never deliberately sets out to harm anybody.

Elsewhere in the unique Steinbeck utilizes more settings to present Lennie. At the opening of the book we are informed that there were, " Willows fresh and green ... bring in their lower leaf points the debris of the winter's flooding." This could symbolise George and Lennie: they keep attempting to make a fresh start, but they will always be strained by the particles of the

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past. Lennie earnestly tries his finest not to trigger problem for George, he just can not help it. We can't say that he is to blame, as he is simply an innocent victim of his past when he was falsely accused in Weed.

Another essential description of setting that links to Lennie can be discovered near the culmination of the unique, where it mentions, " When a little bird stumbled upon the dry leaves behind him, he lifted his head." Through this Steinbeck presents Lennie as someone who is so sensitive that even a small bird can frighten him. This shows that he could not potentially have actually eliminated Curley's Partner in cold blood, it was an accident. Therefore he is not to blame.

Furthermore, another way we can examine Lennie is through Steinbeck's use of action. We are told that when Crooks begins to taunt Lennie about George not coming back, his reaction was, " Lennie reassured himself in a frightened voice." Here he is likened to a vulnerable child who has lost a parent, emphasising his juvenile mentality.

The fact that he talks to himself suggests an element of mental instability, which is backed up elsewhere in the novel where, " from out of Lennie's head there came a little fat old woman." He hallucinates, a classic symptom of mental illness. We could not possibly blame him for what happened when he is clearly not fully in control of his own mind. Lennie needed help, not chastisement. Even when Curley is assaulting him in section three he, " retreats," rather than fighting back. Steinbeck presents him as someone who hates violence. The only reason he attacked Curley was fear, and because George told him to do it.

Moreover, the best way to decide whether Lennie was to blame for his actions is through his dialogue. Steinbeck arguably places more emphasis on dialogue than anything else in his novella. The characters speak with a mixture of phonetic spelling and slang terms. Lennie's speech is especially odd due to his learning difficulties. We see this in phrases such as, " Maybe George come back already." His incorrect syntax is somewhat of a linguistic shibboleth that proves how different he is from the rest of the men.

His dialogue expresses his absolute dependence on George, such as, " George wun't go away and leave me," and, " George gonna come back." The adverb that Steinbeck uses - " miserably" - suggests undertones of doubt in Lennie's dialogue. George has gone and left him for the night, and he genuinely fears he will never return. This again could point the finger at George rather than Lennie, because it proves that George did not keep watch over Lennie. Steinbeck presents Lennie as someone who constantly needs watched over, and George of all people should know this. It could be argued that all the tragedy in the novel would have been avoided if George didn't let Lennie go unaccompanied.

Surely George, the one that pulled the trigger on Lennie, should be to blame. After all, we read that, " Lennie... imitated George exactly." Many of Lennie's mannerisms come from observing George and Crooks states that if someone is alone, " he don't know whether it's right or not." Lennie needs George to tell him what is right and what is wrong. It could be argued that George should have set a better example for him.

Elsewhere in the novel Lennie's dialogue emphasises his innocence. He tells George that he, " didn't want no trouble," which backs up my previous assertions that Lennie never intended to harm anyone. Lennie also laments that, " I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing." Lennie expresses immediate guilt for what he has done. His actions, such as killing Curley's Wife, could almost be described as impulsive. He simply doesn't know his own strength. Therefore we cannot blame him for what happens.

However, it could be argued that Lennie is not totally innocent. Sometimes Steinbeck presents him as someone cleverer than most give him credit for. For example, in the first section we are told that he, " made an elaborate pantomime of innocence," when George accuses him of harbouring the dead mouse. Here he is presented as someone that would lie to his best friend to get his own way. Another key action to mention would be, " Lennie avoided the bait. He had sensed his advantage." Lennie can be manipulative when he wants to be, and knows when he has the upper hand in a conversation. Perhaps he is more intelligent than we realise. He plays on George's guilt, such as when he threatens to, " find a cave." Therefore Steinbeck conveys that he can be emotionally controlling.

To conclude, it would be inappropriate to blame a single person for what happens to Lennie. We could not possibly declare that Lennie is wholly at fault. It is a combination of things, such as the harsh society and his apparent mental illness. Steinbeck cleverly tells a story where not one person is innocent. Everybody on the ranch has a part to play in the tragedy

that unfolds. It conveys the utter despondency that plagued the itinerant workers of the 1930s.