
Significant Themes in "Of Mice and Men" Novel

Every major religion states in its teachings that committing any sin would turn humanity away from their deity and invite only misfortune and strife. It is generally accepted that the act of sin is wrong and human society is designed in a manner that alienates those who sin. Yet why do people still sin? Why do we still continue to commit acts of treason against our own kind and ourselves? What is there to gain in sin? The novel *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck characterizes its characters with the act of sin and uses it to great extent to establish what the motivations of the characters are in the story. Along with an interesting plot and setting, as well as themes that tackle still prevalent issues, the novel is worthy of the luster and recognition it has retained throughout the decades.

In the novel, we see a common trait in the characters: sin. We see the major characters commit acts that can be considered unacceptable to the prying eyes of society. We see Curley attack Lennie in a fit of rage, Curley's wife seducing the ranch workers, Lennie's murder of Curley's wife, and George ending Lennie's life with a bullet at the back of the head. With their sins in mind we may ask to ourselves: why did they commit such grievous crimes? Why did they sin? I do believe that it is conceited for me to answer this question in behalf of all humanity, but I will still answer this question. I do believe that humans sin to attain one thing: happiness. We all commit sins to please ourselves or others, to bring forth change in our situations, to avoid shame or embarrassment, to eliminate all that bother us, to minimize damage from our faults and mistakes, and to preserve what we love and avoid sacrifice. These reasons all have one thing in common: they stem from happiness. Though the fruits of sin usually lead to grief or torment, the reasoning behind them is pure and innocent. Curley attacks Lennie due to his insecurity. He is aware of his own weaknesses such as his small stature and immediately dislikes Lennie due to his fear of his wife being stolen from him by someone larger and sturdier. Curley's wife flirts and seduces with the ranch workers due to her persisting loneliness which has developed from her husband's lack of attention on her brought about by his own jealousy and due to her failure in attaining her dreams. We see in the novel of how she mistreats Crooks due to his race. During the time of the Great Depression, people with darker skin and of African descent were looked down upon and are considered ugly. Curley's wife may despise Crooks due to her own insecurity, similar to her husband. Due to her failure in attaining her dream of becoming a movie star, she may be self-conscious about her appearance and uses Crooks as a medium to vent her frustration. Lennie murdered Curley's wife but not intentionally. He was born mentally challenged, but it is compensated with his immense strength. Despite his immense strength, he adores soft objects and often pets and caresses them which results in the destruction of said object. As a man of limited mental capacity, his thinking is one based on sudden urges, not longtime plans. When he wants something, he will proceed to obtain it. He murdered Curley's wife due to his desire for soft objects. When he caressed her hair, Curley's wife did not expect the astounding strength he possessed and promptly panicked, which resulted in Lennie accidentally snapping her neck. George killed Lennie not because of hate or fear but out of love. He ended Lennie's life to save him from the painful death that awaited him. These instances of human nature through sin is what makes this novel fascinating. The author has given the characters life not limited to dialogue only but also in actions. Observation of these characters reveal that they have their own desires and motivations, as well as flaws and blunders that make them human.

The author uses quite a bit of foreshadowing in his writing style and it is superbly written. In my first reading, I did not notice the signs and merely thought of it as world building. I failed to realize that world building is ineffective in a novel of measly length and that world building to this extent is unnecessary for novels with a historical setting. The author's use of foreshadowing is disguised and subtle which makes it impossible for it to serve as a spoiler and instead further supplements the already brilliantly written characters. The author followed an important principle in writing known as Chekhov's gun. Chekhov's gun states that anything memorable or noteworthy event, character, or object must be relevant to the story. Some instances of foreshadowing include George telling Lennie where to go when he is in trouble and the tale of Candy's dog, which was shot in the head by Carlson. The first instance foreshadows the location where George finds Lennie after Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife and the second instance foreshadows Lennie's death at the hands of George. There are, however, several controversies regarding John Steinbeck's usage of words and vocabulary in the novel. The novel has been criticized and repeatedly censored by various organizations due its use of language considered "offensive". I personally did not find the author's choice of words degrading and offensive. In fact, I appreciated it. The author's choice of words accurately reflects the vernacular and consensus of the time (the novel was first published on 1937). This made the book feel more personal and intimate which made the book more effective in delivering its intended impact to the readers. Despite this, I understand the concerns of those who want the book censored. Yes, the novel uses racial slurs and words that may offend certain individuals. Yes, this novel may promote racism. However, it does not sugarcoat. It does not hide the reality of the time behind a veil of deceptions. The act of banning this book obscures from the general public the injustices that have occurred during days past. Humans possess the capability of learning from mistakes but what if they are not aware of their mistakes? What if their mistakes were hidden away, leaving no trace of its existence?

The plot is lackluster compared to the characters, but is interesting nonetheless. The plot also has a historical basis, which make it more believable which in turn makes the characters seem more human and makes the reader empathize more with them. The plot is based on a real occurrence known as the Great Depression, which crippled the world's economies from 1929 until the genesis of World War II. This event devastated the livelihood of millions of citizens worldwide which led to starvation and desperation. What is interesting to note about stories with a historical setting is that they do not need to put much effort in world building as the world is already described in much detail in history books. Stories with settings unfamiliar to the readers must put quite a bit of effort and time to describe to the readers what the setting of the story looks like and how it impacts and affects the story. The setting of *Of Mice and Men* affects the story by being the main motivator of the character's primary wants and desires. George and Lennie struggle to survive during times of economic turmoil and desire to own their own farm to profit more and to ensure their survival. The plot lacks plot twists of incredible magnitude and is rather predictable, but it is unnecessary. To summarize the plot, it is simply just a pair of friends attempting to attain their dreams and how their plans are foiled by the machinations of fate. If a plot twist of massive magnitude is inserted into the story (examples: George being Curley's missing cousin, Lennie being The Boss's illegitimate son, aliens appear to annihilate mankind, etc.), then the plot will deviate so much from the original theme that the impact and morality that made the story a classic would be lost. I do believe that the plot is not as interesting as the characters, but that is fine in its own right. It is the simplicity of the plot that gives the characters emphasis.

The story tackles a variety of different themes: friendship, euthanasia (mercy killing), neglect,

discrimination, poverty, and fate. Friendship is seen on the relationship of George and Lennie. Despite of George's constant caretaking and irritation at Lennie, he still continues to pamper and take care of him. He even decides to purchase a homestead not only for himself but also for Lenny. His murder of Lenny is not one based on malice or hatred; he murdered Lennie out of love. Euthanasia or mercy killing is seen on George's murder of Lennie. This is a sensitive theme, however, and is still debated by numerous parties up to this day. One side would argue that murder is an affront to God and that humanity lacks the authority to take away His gift. One side would argue that if they truly cared for another person, then they would not tolerate seeing them suffer for any longer. One side would say that arguing is foolish and that the freedom to choose life or death lies on the afflicted person and their families, and that science and religion should not take part in their decision. With numerous other arguments presented, I do believe it is best to leave this topic alone to avoid unnecessary arguments and debates. Neglect is seen on the story most noticeably on Curley's wife. With barely any interaction from her husband, she becomes deprived of love and consequentially sought attention through immoral or perverse means. George also neglects Lennie when he leaves to go out with his fellow workers, and without George watching him, Lennie commits a grave mistake through the murder of Curley's wife. Discrimination can be seen on the interaction of Curley's wife and Crooks. With intense racism rampant during the time, Crooks is forced to tolerate unjust name calling and hate speech on a daily basis. Lennie's mental illness can also be a source of discrimination, though not obvious in the story. In the beginning of the story, it was mentioned that George and Lennie had to leave from their previous occupation due to Lennie's desire for soft objects. Lennie had grabbed onto a woman's clothes which was misunderstood as attempted rape. George and Lennie were chased out of town afterwards. In this scenario, one can infer that George must have attempted to appeal to the mob that chased them out of town about Lennie's mental deficiencies and how Lennie meant no harm. Yet, they were still chased out of town. The mob must have ignored George's appeal to their humanity and must have acted in hate, even with full knowledge of Lennie's state of mind, though this is merely speculation and lacks conclusive evidence. Poverty is rampant throughout the entire novel. With a historic background of economic turmoil, the need for money and the urgency of survival serves as one of the main motivators of the characters. Fate is shown in the story as the inevitable turn of events. The theme of fate shows that even the most innocent and earnest people are still subject to it, and their plans are nothing more than pebbles in the bulldozer of fate. With various themes and interpretations in place, it is no surprise that *Of Mice and Men* is still a required read in many educational institutions worldwide. Though the book is many years old, the themes in it are still relevant to today's society and reading the book may open the reader's eyes to various topics and issues the world is currently facing.

With brilliant characters, an interesting plot, continued relevance, and a fascinating writing style, *Of Mice and Men* is truly deserving of the praise it has garnered. With the amount of literature being written every year that allows the reader to project themselves on it and dismiss their everyday life with unreal situations and idealistic, overpowered characters, *Of Mice and Men* serves as a grim reminder that we will forever be powerless against the machinations of fate and that we will always be slaves to our desires. May this remind us that with the continuous pursuit of desire comes the continuous prevalence of sin.