Loneliness In Of Mice And Men

Loneliness is an inevitable fact of life that not even the strongest can avoid. In the novel, Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck illustrates the loneliness of California ranch life in the early 1930's. Throughout the story, the reader discovers the many sources of solitude, primarily being discrimination and prejudice, resulting in loneliness and isolation.

One of the most important things that are really needed is a friend. Without friends, people would suffer from loneliness and solitude. The characters in this novel are intrigued yet envious of the special friendship shared by George and Lennie because they do not have that in their life.

All the characters are extremely lonely and unhappy with their lives (except Slim, who is the only character that seems to be confident and happy with his life), and none of them can escape this unhappiness. Economic and social forces control them, and free will seems illusory.

To study the aspect of loneliness in Of Mice and Men, we will study George and Lennie's bittersweet friendship, as well as loneliness through 3 characters who are forced to locate their happiness elsewhere to fight off their loneliness—-in Crooks' childhood on the chicken farm, or Curley's wife's vision of Hollywood stardom, or George and Lennie's Eden-like dream of their own farm. And finally we will point out interesting similarities between certain characters.

The setting of the novel is destined for loneliness. Soledad is short for the town's full name, 'Nuestra Senora de Soledad' which means 'Our Lady of Loneliness'. This is the town that is closest to the ranch, a place that is already full of lonely, solitary people. The name of the closest town being Soledad, we understand that loneliness is some kind of vicious circle, because on the ranch they are already lonely, and going to town to fight that loneliness won't help since it's called “Soledad”.

“Guys like us, that live on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.” George means that if not for each other, then he and Lennie would be all alone, with no friends, like all the men like them, who are nomads working from ranch to ranch without making any friends, and living a lonely, solitary life. Clinging to each other in their loneliness and alienation, George and his simple-minded friend Lennie dream, as drifters will, of a place to call their own. But we can attribute another meaning to this sentence. George and Lennie are very different, physically as well as mentally, even though they talk to each other, we can sense that they are both on a different level. George is a smart, quick-witted man, who seems to need mental stimulation from a companion, which he cannot have in his relationship with Lennie. And Lennie doesn’t always understand what George is talking about, as Crooks points out “Sometimes he talks, and you don’t know what the hell he's talkin' about. Ain't that so ?...Jus' talks on, an' you don’t know what the hell it's all about?”. Even though they have each other, they are still both lonely at a certain level, but as Crooks also points outs “it don’t make no difference”; what he means that it’s not what’s being said that is important, nor that the interlocutor understands clearly what the others talking about, the important thing is human contact and being there together.

Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife all suffer injustices such as discrimination and prejudice, resulting in loneliness and isolation. They learn to cope with their loneliness through their interest in Lennie and George's friendship. In some ways they are even envious of the bond.

Crooks is a black man that experiences isolation because the society in which he resides is racist. The quote "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't matter no difference who the guy is, longs he with
you. I tell ya a guy gets too lonely and he gets sick” was his means of finding a personal connection to Lennie. Like Lennie, Crooks has a 'relationship' with loneliness. Crooks is rejected from every group of people and cannot socially interact with others, just like Lennie who can’t socially interact properly because of his mental-disability.

"Cause I'm black. They play cards in there, but I can't play because I'm Black. They say I stink. Well I tell you, you all stink to me!” Crooks loneliness results from rejection; others treat him unjust because he is different from them given that he is black. Crooks isn’t allowed to participate in daily events with white people such as card games. He is treated unfairly and therefore acts the same way toward the white people who have offended him

Crooks is fascinated by the strength of the friendship of Lennie and George, especially how close they are. Crooks said, "Well, s'pose, jus' s'pose he don't come back. What'll you do then?" Crooks asks these questions because he does not have any friends, and wouldn’t know how losing them unexpectedly would feel. He was curious and envious, about the friendship of Lennie and George, noticing that Lennie is retarded, he takes advantage of this situation to “torture” him mentally, to make him feel better and ease the pain of having other reject him, he also does this to ease his jealousy towards the friendship Lennie has, but that he, Crooks will probably never have. He wants the people to feel the way that he did when he was lonely, having nobody with them.

He is striving to achieve sympathy and understanding from others. Crooks would work for nothing if it meant communicating with others. He even offers his services to Candy to work on their “dream ranch” to join in on the friendship and dream shared by Lennie and George, in order to leave behind him his lonely life.

Candy, like Crooks is an outcast because his age and physical disability make him different from the rest of the men on the ranch, but he always tries to communicate with them as much as he can.

Candy has one true friend in the world, his dog, which he cannot even talk to. However, when his dog dies, he has to look elsewhere for friendship. He hopes that these friends can be George and Lennie.

Because of his age and disability, he has a feeling of uselessness “They’ll call me purty soon”. Candy thinks that nobody wants to be friends with him because of this disability. Eventually, he tries to find friendship by attempting to join the dream of George and Lennie. Candy offered his services to become a part of George and Lennie’s friendship and dream, this is one of Candy's desperate attempts to find a place in society and meaning in life by making himself useful to someone, by proposing the various things he could do to show that his is in fact useful and could bring a lot in the dream as well and the friendship "I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some" “you’ll let me hoe in the garden…An’ I’ll wash the dishes an’ little chicken stuff like that”.

After Candy lost his dog, he felt much lonelier than he was before. The dog was something that Candy had owned and confided with within his years. Candy and his dog had the same relationship that George and Lennie had shared for so many years. He offers everything that he had to support the friendship including money; he offers the biggest share of money to realize the dream as well as services hoping that the pair will “let” him help out. An interesting sentence is “Maybe I can give you guys my money, you’ll let me hoe in the garden”, this sentence is ambivalent, in exchange of a financial contribution to the dream ranch, he can help out and work on the ranch, but the implicit meaning of the sentence is: in exchange for my money, we will have a close friendship; Candy tries to buy Lennie and Georges friendship, or at least a share of it, but money will never buy genuine friendship.
Curley's Wife's loneliness has a different source; her husband causes it.

Even though Curley's wife is mentioned frequently, nobody asks what her name is. Nobody wants to talk to her because people are afraid of Curley; he is jealous and would start a fight with anyone who tried approaching her. She does not like Curley, and furthermore he doesn’t talk to her at all, and there’s no one in her life with which she can share her feelings, and longs for companionship.

But because she is Curley's Wife, most of the ranchers avoid talking to her, and she notices that she is being rejected and ignored and asks them several times what is wrong with her, and why doesn't she have a right to communicate like everyone else does "What's the matter with me? Ain't I got a righ to talk to nobody?", and that no one cares about her "Seems like they ain't none of them cares how I gotta live".

She dresses the way she does (heavily made up, in flashy colors), to gain the attention of the ranchers and to soothe her loneliness. These acts give her a sense of relief and made her feel wanted so she can share her personal concerns and experiences, she notices that Lennie finds her “purty” and tries to talk to him and get close to him several times.

She is obviously very desperate if she wants to talk to someone as dumb as Lennie, "her words tumbled out" rushes when she talks to Lennie as though she were afraid that someone was going to take him away from her "she hurried before her listener could be taken away from her", thanks to this sentence we understand that she doesn't have the chance to talk to people often, and is trying to say as much as she can, about the emotions that have been building up inside of her "she went on with her story before she could be interrupted". She also makes sure that Lennie is listening to her when she speaks "You listenin?", since she is not used to talking to anyone, she wants to be sure that what she is saying is being heard attentively.

Her death could be thought of as a misfortune, but as a positive thing as well because it ended her suffering; being the only woman in the ranch and having married a man like Curley she was inevitably destined for loneliness. But now that she is dead, she will not have to worry about being lonely ever again. Curley's wife's case of loneliness was the most severe throughout the novel. She struggled in her society to find somebody that she could befriend in vain.

We can notice interesting parallels between certain characters in the novel.

We can draw a parallel between Candy and Crooks; both of these characters have a physical disability (Candy has a stump for an arm, and Crooks has a crooked back) both caused by an accident, as well as another factor Crooks’s color and Candy’s old age, those factors make both of them outcasts. Because of their situation, they are both destined to loneliness, each of them deals with it in their own way: Candy has his dog for companionship and makes conversation with the other men that work on the ranch, but Crooks turns towards books, and becomes hostile towards the other men on the ranch who have rejected him before because of his race. They are both fascinated and envious of the friendship shared by Lennie and George and offer their services and money to join in on the dream, hoping as well to join in on the friendship. To these characters who are outcasts because of a certain disability, we can add Lennie, who has a mental disability, thus making him part of “all the weak ones” that get left behind, as Curley's wife points out.

Another interesting parallel we can draw in the one between the relationship between George and Lennie, and Candy and his old dog. Both George and Candy and lonely, even though they have
companionship; Candy can’t talk to his dog, and George can’t have a really serious conversation with Lennie either. Even though they have companionship, they need something deeper and more meaningful. It is also interesting to notice the similar fate of Candy’s dog and Lennie who will both be shot in the back of the head unsuspicious of what is going to happen.

We can also draw a last parallel between two of the loneliest characters in the novel; Curley’s Wife and Lennie. As we’ve seen previously, Curley’s wife is the only woman in the novel, and her husband forbids her to talk to other men, and because of his jealousy, doesn’t let other men approach her or else he picks a fight with them. George also gives orders to Lennie and strictly forbids him several times “Don’t even take a look at that bitch. I don’t care what she says and what she does...you leave her be” “well, you keep away from her”, they aren’t allowed to talk to each other, that’s what makes the fatal scene in the barn so symbolical; Curley’s wife wanted to talk to someone so bad, that it drove her to her death.

Even if all people are miserable when they are lonely, the consequences of friendship can be even worse. When one of the members of a friendship is removed, it causes misery and pain; when Candy lost his dog, he kept thinking about him, and felt terrible because he kept thinking that he should have shot his dog himself, and looks for friendship elsewhere. When George had to shoot Lennie, he felt terrible, because he had just shot his best friend, his lifetime companion, his only friend in the world. Because of this, he has to live the rest of his life, in guilt, alone and knowing that he killed his only friend.

Human beings were made to live in society, thus all people are driven towards others, and is it a natural instinct to seek friendship and companionship. When they find it, they are the happiest people. The only downside to finding a friend is what happens when one of the friends is lost. This causes even more misery in the remaining friend, and forces the friend to start searching again, which is a hard process, because the person has taken the habit of his friend and being comfortable in his relationship, and opening towards others is harder.

One of the most important lessons we learn in Of Mice and Men is that Friendship and human interaction are two very valuable things, and that having them is as much as a right as it is a privilege, that we much treasure as it keeps us away from loneliness.