
The Main Recurring Ideas In Of Mice And Men, Travels With Charley And The Pearl

The Desire to Escape

One recurring theme that is displayed in *Of Mice and Men*, *Travels With Charley*, and *The Pearl* is the desire to escape, which causes the characters to venture to somewhere else in hopes of a better life, but something. In *The Pearl*, Kino wanted to leave La Paz, Mexico to go to a different town where pearl buyers could hopefully offer them a price that they “deserve”. In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie and George leave their old ranch to go to a new one because of Lennie’s actions and going to the new ranch could bring them closer to achieving their dream farm. In *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck notices that almost everyone he has spoken to throughout his journey had the desire to get away from the place that they currently are or something. He realized that this motivation was bigger than the desire to move toward something. Steinbeck shares the same thoughts because since he was a little boy, he always had the “urge to be someplace else”. People told him that one day, he won’t face it anymore and the urge will fade away, but it never did. This was a great motive that influenced him to take his journey. Not one state had a good thing to say for itself, since they all thought that their current home is worse than others. Since *Travels With Charley* is a nonfiction novel, the Steinbeck truly did have the desire to escape and also found it in other people, which is most likely why he decided to incorporate this life theme in two fiction novels he wrote. Steinbeck’s desire to escape his current state could be the explanation for the three wives he’s had throughout his life. His first wife was Carol Henning, who he cheated on with his second wife, Gwyn Conger, ending his first marriage. His marriage and ended with Gwyn after their love was killed by Cogner’s unfaithfulness and manipulation of Steinbeck. Hence, while Steinbeck portrays the desire to escape throughout his novels, it is also apparent that he had that desire knowing that he escaped two marriages since he wanted to get out of the state he was currently in.

Change is Negative

In all three books, Steinbeck regards change as something negative. In the beginning of *The Pearl*, when he was poor and had nothing but family, he felt full of life and happiness, since he was appreciating his family and living simply brought joy to him. When change occurs, which is when Kino and Juana find the pearl while pearl-fishing, the pearl brings evil and greed to the family and the family is torn apart from it. Once they try to move out of town to find a pearl buyer that will give them the money that they deserve and since the town is unsafe because everyone is jealous of their possession of the pearl, their pride and joy and what they lived for, which was their infant son Coyotito, died. Because of change they ended up losing all that they had. In *Of Mice and Men* changing ranches leads to Lennie killing a woman and being killed for killing that woman, which crushes George’s hopes of a dream farm, and made him lose his life companion, which makes him just like other farm workers-- lonely. Change cost George both a dream and a friend. In *Travels With Charley*, change in ways of life deemed negative and America was better before change occurred. When Steinbeck travels to the city of Bangor, Maine, he notices that most of the objects/furniture in his hotel room are artificial, which helps

him to observe the growth of sterility and artificiality in America, which serves as a detriment to America and the natural world. In Seattle, Washington, Steinbeck discovers the negative impact of industry on beautiful nature. He observes the intense traffic there and the yellow smoke. Steinbeck uses northern California to address the theme of change. He reunites with his old friends and family and observes how much they've changed, but realizes that he's the one that changed not them. This allows him to conclude that the American people refuse to see that they are not living in the Golden Age anymore, but instead continuing new and dangerous habits that threaten their well-being and the stability of the natural environment. Therefore, Steinbeck's opinion of change was most likely that it was negative, especially how America is changing for the worse in his eyes. Consequently, in John Steinbeck's later years, he was accused of conservatism, which is defined as commitment to traditional values and ideas with opposition to change or innovation, which makes it reasonable that he often writes about change being negative.

Characters Stand as Symbols or Serve as Themes

In the three novels, the characters stand as more than just characters, but symbols. In *The Pearl*, Juana, Kino's wife, symbolizes the angel on Kino's shoulder who is telling him to do what is best, which is throw the pearl out, since it is the source of all evil, which would prevent the the killing of their everything, Coyotito. However, the pearl, on the other hand is the devil, which brings evil to their family, but also symbolizes the hope of people in such a poor town to become wealthy. The doctor that refuses to help Kino because of his race and poverty, and only helps when he finds the pearl, representing the greediness that wealth brings and materialism to colonial society. He also attempted to steal the pearl at night when Kino and Juana were sleeping. The pearl buyers represents capitalism in its most corrupted, least functional form, since they told Kino that the pearl was worth much less than it really was, so they could cheat him. Coyotito, who is Kino and Juana's infant son, serves as a symbol of innocence, since he has to pay the price of Kino's foolishness. He shakes his sleeping box and reaches for the scorpion because he doesn't know it can hurt him. He was the center of Kino and Juana's life until the pearl was found. Hence, he also symbolizes happiness that can be brought by non materialistic things, like family. In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie symbolizes an obstacle that George must deal with, because of his mental retardation. Curley's wife symbolizes the temptation of females in a male-dominated environment. This is because she is the only women on the ranch and who roams around looking for men to talk to, but the migrant workers know better than to talk to her, so they won't get into trouble with Curley. Additionally, several characters are isolated from society including Crooks, the colored stable hand, for his skin color, Curley's wife for being a woman, and Candy, for being old and handicapped and symbolize loneliness. These social constraints keep the ranch workers from viewing and treating and viewing these people like everyone else, which causes them to be very lonely. In *Travels with Charley*, different characters symbolize the different types of people in America, their traits, and initiatives. The man on the submarine that he meets does his job just for its usefulness and financial benefits without caring for the fact that it is unethical, as he operates a nuclear armed submarine. Steinbeck notices a trend in a disregard for morals for financial gain throughout his journey. Also, a waitress in Maine symbolizes what Americans are becoming in Steinbeck's eyes, which are people who lack goals and purpose and do not believe in the "American Dream." Steinbeck also meets a dairy man who seems to be the happiest person on the journey and does not seem to want to go somewhere else. The milkman had an extremely education, with a Ph.D. in Mathematics. He represent the idea that people can choose to be happy, not matter their

situation. Additionally, Steinbeck encounters an unhappy father and son who disagree on nearly everything. His father wants him to be a common man who hunts and works hard, but he dreams of becoming a hairdresser and takes courses on hair styling. The disagreement between the two can be seen as conflict between the traditional and new value system developing in America. Therefore, it is evident of Steinbeck's works that he uses characters to symbolize the different kinds of people in life and use them to portray life lessons.

Consequently, they are also used to demonstrate reasons why people in real life act certain way and what are probable reasons. Hence, Steinbeck typically takes the lessons that he has learned throughout his own life experiences and incorporates them into his work. His novels reveal a lot about human nature and believed that the understanding of human nature was very significant: "Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love.'

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