

Of Mice and Men: Steinbeck's style

Steinbeck's style is economic; he uses every word carefully. His descriptions are highly detailed, showing that he is an excellent observer, especially of natural things, such as landscapes and animals.

He creates the setting for each 'scene' with vivid description, and takes care to describe the atmosphere as well (eg '*The silence came in to the room and the silence lasted...*' (when describing the shooting of Candy's dog). Another example is after the death of Curley's wife: '*...a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment. Sound stopped and movement stopped...*') His style is simple and straightforward, with few long sentences. It is a combination of poetic and realistic.

His poetic style uses detailed description and striking, effective metaphors, similes and imagery: for example, the metaphor '*the heron jacked itself clear of the water*,' the similes '*in and out of the beam flies shot like rushing stars*' and '*...as silently as a creeping bear*' and the imagery on p105 '*the tops of the mountains seemed to blaze with increasing brightness*' when Steinbeck describes the sun setting, heralding the end for Lennie and a new dawn for George.

His more realistic style can be seen in his dialogue. The way the characters speak is naturalistic and counterbalances the poetic description. For example: '*What the hell kind of bed you giving us anyways? We don't want no pants rabbits.*' This quotation conveys just how the ranch hand would have spoken, using slang (*pants rabbits*), double negatives (*don't want no*) and missing out words (*bed you giving us?*).

Like his poetic description, Steinbeck's dialogue is also economical; he does not waste any words. He also uses the dialogue as it would be used in a play – to move the action along, or to heighten the atmosphere, for example when Lennie says '*Let's get outa here. It's mean here.*'

This combination of poetic versus realistic style mirrors the themes of *dreams* versus *fate* (realism).

Steinbeck's style is also rooted very much in nature: Lennie is associated with animal images ('*covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with Terror*', and '*It's only a mouse George... a dead mouse...*'); this imagery highlights his simple and vulnerable nature.

Steinbeck also uses natural symbolism in the structure of the book. For example, one water snake escapes death at the beginning, but another gets eaten at the end of the novel. Steinbeck uses this idea to show the cruelty and unpredictability of nature and the natural cycle, and that fate also treats man in the same way.

Steinbeck also links images closely, and uses this to reinforce the idea of man being linked closely to nature (and fate), and being unable to escape. For example, Candy is linked to his dog... *'the ancient dog walked lamely in.. gazed about with mild, half-blind eyes'* ; and *'scratching his wrist and looking blindly into the lighted room'*. Both show the pathos of old age, and reveal Steinbeck's compassion for the people he has chosen to write about.

Steinbeck uses one event to hint at another, building up tension and foreboding in the reader: the death of Candy's dog is mirrored by Lennie's death, and the succession of deaths starts with the mouse and leads up in size and seriousness to the death of Lennie himself.

Steinbeck, for the most part, is an invisible author; he generally talks through his characters or the action (the same gun is used in the same way to shoot the old dog and Lennie) but he can be seen more clearly in his description of Crooks (*...terrible protective dignity of the negro...*) which again shows Steinbeck's understanding of the characters he is writing about, and his compassion for them. His presence can also be felt in his description of Slim and in the description of the barn after the death of Curley's wife.

Steinbeck also uses irony: George says to Lennie: *'If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself.'* little realising that he will soon have to do just that; and *'somebody'd shoot you for a coyote if you was by yourself'*.