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# How to Threaten His Hegemony: The Nameless Women of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*

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How to Threaten His Hegemony: The Nameless Women of  
John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*

by

Celine Geary

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of The College at Brockport, State  
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June 20, 2012

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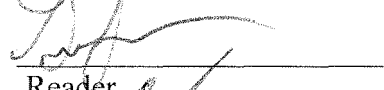
by

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## Abstract

Curley's wife in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and the girl in Meridel LeSueur's *The Girl* remain nameless throughout their stories, a problem here considered indicative of behavior against societal expectation and thus oppositional to the 1930s capitalist hegemony. The characters' alternative approaches to the conventionally public aspect that is work and the conventionally private facet that is sexuality are considered, two subjects that are customarily noted as important to these authors as integral to both identity and to the formation of community. The comparison shows that a more personal and private valuation of work and a more public appreciation of sexuality best challenges and attests as arbitrary the adverse conditions.

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## Introduction

According to Lacan in *Seminar II*, “It is the function of the name to secure the identity of the subject over time.” A name then serves the ego of the namer – the name serves as “identical” more than substitute – and stabilizes the existence of the named for the observer, and as such “Naming constitutes a pact by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognize the same object” (Lacan, *Seminar II*, qtd. in Butler 152). Thus, concludes Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter*, “The name, as part of a social pact and, indeed, a social system of signs, overrides the tenuousness of imaginary identity and confers on it a social durability and legitimacy” (152). Read another way namelessness suggests uncertainty and perhaps even crisis in the namer, and according to Butler these can also be opportunities to revise and redefine convention.

John Steinbeck and Meridel Le Sueur both wrote and set stories in 1930s United States, and in each a woman lacks a name as well as “social durability and legitimacy.” Steinbeck’s famed “is” thinking (his “non-teleological” intentions to represent the world as it “is”) and Le Sueur’s purposeful reportage style seem similar strategies with similar intentions: to record and mirror the unjust suffering of the oppressed for, as Steinbeck avowed in his Nobel acceptance speech, “purposes of improvement.” Steinbeck in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) argues for a more egalitarian world most obviously when his seemingly disparate characters echo each other’s sentiments. Le Sueur’s aesthetic style in *The Girl* (1972) ignores the standard of quotation marks to demarc dialogue, and without quotation marks these moments in the text serve to also emphasize not only connectedness but resemblance and even

correspondence. Without this punctuation, there are moments of uncertainty when the language seems to morph indistinctly from one character to another, and this confusion serves to not only multiply meaning but to erase boundaries between characters. Both use form in this way to deconstruct assumptions of opposition and to argue for the ideal that is not competition but instead community.

Steinbeck dedicated himself to reporting the life of the abject during the Depression. In 1938, after watching the stage production of *Of Mice and Men* Burton Rascoe wrote a review in which he admired the “Sophoclean manner” of Steinbeck which was “without poetic or rhetorical fault” (208). Rascoe was impressed that while Sophocles in his work used legends to communicate the heroic, Steinbeck was able to use a contemporary figure like Lennie and with success. Rascoe concluded after multiple readings of the novella that “Steinbeck’s thematic intention ... was, in a way, to expound the complete nonmorality of Nature in her physical aspects and of the morality of expediency that must necessarily arise from Nature’s blundering” (215). With *Of Mice and Men* Steinbeck worked to communicate the morality necessary to fully be human. But Alfred Kazin’s and Edwin Berry Burgum’s criticisms are famous for dismissing Steinbeck as sentimental. They are noted in John Ditsky’s *John Steinbeck and the Critics* which offers a survey of criticism on Steinbeck that Ditsky purports was, in 2000, “of late increasingly [voluminous]” (xii). Richard E. Hart, also considering Steinbeck in the twenty-first century, notes the “perennial charge[s] of sentimentality and moral simplicity” against Steinbeck in his introduction to *The Moral Philosophy of John Steinbeck* and also argues against them (61). Hart in his argument invokes Charlotte Cook Hadella’s charges of elitism

against Kazin and Burgum, and instead proposes that Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is not merely sentimental because it works. Hart argues that because with *Of Mice and Men* Steinbeck attempted to "present the 'truth' of a situation" and "make the reader think about life" it becomes instead a philosophical study of morality (63). Hart asserts that the novella allows the reader to imagine the life experiences of each character which allows a "holistic, integrated vision of humanity and nature in which all things are literally united" (63). And Hart finds this intention still very relevant.

Today Le Sueur's stories, based on her collection of personal accounts, are not only included in 1990s anthologies of American literature with titles like *The Oxford Book of Women's Writing* and *Women's Work*, but also collections of more purposefully progressive but still labeled as female "freethinkers" (*Women Without Superstition*) and "radicals" (*Three Radical Women Writers* and *Better Red*). Constance Coiner notes Le Sueur's creative answers to "orthodox proletarian realism" that include "images [that] move in circles" rather than linearly and characters that "insist on knowing and feeling" life for themselves as women. Le Sueur is both considered part of the literary Left of the 1930s and appreciated as a political activist. Le Sueur is also included in surveys of literature that are concerned with both homelessness and the working-class woman during the Depression. In 1994 James M. Boehnlein more specifically explored the "social rhetoric" of Le Sueur. Here he argues that Le Sueur's reportage style works to "form a telling commentary about the contestatory nature of identity." He uses Nancy Hartock's work on feminist theory to appreciate Le Sueur's reportage as "knowledge-making"; Le Sueur's style made it so that she not only reported conditions as they were but also



provided solutions and encouraged progressive behaviors that “acknowledge[ed] both uniqueness and connectedness” (Boehnlein 140).

Le Sueur is recognized for distinctively advocating that authentic literature be communal and continual. In 2009 Jane Greer appreciated Le Sueur as someone who attempted to “reconstruct ‘writer’ as [...] enmeshed in [...] relationships” and “refine textual products as [...] process” as vehicles of change (609). In this way, according to Greer, Le Sueur envisioned texts as “interactions [that] can help precipitate social interventions” (610). In her introduction to Le Sueur’s novel *The Girl* Linda Ray Pratt contends that Le Sueur worked to “give literary life to those who could not write their own world for us” (xi). The novel (written in 1939 but not published until 1977) considers issues that remain unresolved including what it means to be woman in relationship to man, a theme that may have roots in Genesis for traditional American culture but yet has not garnered equal attention in the literary canon, attention which would help make legitimate the nameless and impoverished women of the Depression.

Characters struggle to redefine community in both novels. Boehnlein appreciates Le Sueur’s use of reportage “where ideology, aesthetics, and rhetoric form a telling commentary about the contestatory nature of identity” (133). Whether people organize to form a more democratic community or to maintain a subjugating hierarchy is a regular and universal battle. In both novels characters struggle between the self-respect possible through the dignity of “work” and the shame of being exploited as labor. For the women of the novels the struggle to define feminine identity is against an individualistic economy of capitalism and more immediately

against a culture of power centered through patriarchy; but the women also seem to imagine a less traditional version of female selfhood which would include the freedom to express and gratify sexual desire.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler wonders “that the abjected come to make their claim through and against the discourses that have sought their repudiation” (224). To Butler power is in part only the repetition or miming of “the discursive gestures of power,” as only by citing the law a judge can wield authority (225). This “context of the chain of binding conventions” is not only what gives an act its meaning but is also what enables the existence of an “I.” In this way “it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak” (226). But Butler also notes the effect of a pejorative not only to shame a target but to in fact create or “produce [...] a subject through that shaming interpellation” (226). When we create taboo, the correlating labels inflict “shame” with an intention to destroy the people and behaviors resistant to the boundaries of society, and yet that process also highlights those borders, over which the system and its edges no longer apparently exist. Where Butler uses the “revisibility” of the epithet “queer” as her subject, here namelessness will be explored as a “site of resistance” (231), and further as representative of an opportunity or realm open to “democratize” and “rework” (230) the ideals of personhood for women. The paper will attempt to trace “At what expense and what purpose” women are subjugated in these worlds as well as notice what is “at stake” (229) when women choose to act against societal expectation, for not only the women but also for the society that continues to discount their alternatives. As “the question of subversion, of *working*

*the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation” (237) the conventionally public aspect that is work and the conventionally private that is sexuality will be considered, two subjects that are customarily noted as important to these authors and also integral to both identity and to the formation of community. In both novels money is the socially imagined means that transforms dream into reality, as “capitalist ethics shapes the imaginations of self and society” (Pratt xvii). The androcentric ideology of The American Dream also values independence and ownership and competition, each made more difficult as the capitalist system grows larger and more complicated, and thus belief in these “ideals” works ironically to keep the poor enslaved. Steinbeck’s nameless “girl,” Curley’s wife, has moved to a ranch in an effort to assert her self; Le Sueur’s nameless “girl” travels to the city in the 1930s in a similar effort to support herself in the world. Neither is given a more specific name in her story, and yet the nameless women in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Girl* effectively challenge the ideologies that define the “rearticulated” ideals by valuing interdependence; both nameless women refuse to “repeat loyally” or “to cooperate and purchase” (Butler 153) an identity, and as such both not only expose as existentially vulnerable but also as nihilistic the individualistically competitive and hierarchally organized society.

## 1. Women Who Work for Community

Curley's wife and the girl are both placed amongst the working class of the 1930s world. This chapter suggests that their namelessness is representative of their conflict with the system but also more importantly of the opportunity each examples for resistance and change for others as exemplars of Butler's bodies that matter: "For an occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used to abject a population can become the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political resignification" (231). The namelessness of Curley's wife and the girl can be viewed as emblematic of the insecurity and unease of others, and thus an opportunity for change or "subversion." Thus, if we focus on the women in a working class world that has traditionally been claimed by and for men, we can perhaps discover the edges at which to challenge injustices of that world. Both Steinbeck and Le Sueur are very interested in the "work" element of the working class and especially in confronting the threats and challenges of exploitation.

Steinbeck both worked for the pleasure it gave him and wrote of the pleasure of work, according to Patrick Dooley in "Human Dignity, the Need for Community, and 'The Duty of the Writer to Lift Up': Steinbeck's Philosophy of Work." Dooley argues that Steinbeck's philosophy of work is "radically humanistic," as for Steinbeck "future outcomes are in human hands. If we fail, humans suffer, but when we succeed, our victories improve, ameliorate, and enhance human dignity" (229). In *Of Mice and Men*, Sunday, the traditional day of "rest" from work, is the day derided with troubles. Because there is no work on Sunday, Saturday night is when the men

intend to “raise hell” in town, and those left on the ranch abuse each other as well. Crooks torments Lennie until Crooks sees “the danger” of a Lennie not focused on work. In the novel the day of forced idleness is both personally tormenting and publically destructive, demonstrating well Steinbeck’s “many layered” stance on the benefits of work that includes it as a source of both personal “vitality” and “enfranchised” community” (Dooley 224). However, the men who supply the physical work of the ranch in *Of Mice and Men* lack self-worth, respect, and even money, and only Curley’s wife seems to challenge the system that keeps the men trapped. Work has the potential to produce individual pride, but that individuality has to be protected against systemization that would exploit individuals as mere labor. Through Curley’s wife, Steinbeck keeps an emphasis on the individual and the immediate moment, because the quality of a community is dependent on both.

The men of *Of Mice and Men* look to “work” as source of self-esteem. For example, they are especially and simply impressed with Slim’s skills as “jerklime skinner.” Slim is “the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line” (Steinbeck 33), and their reverence seems a direct result of his efficiency in physically handling the animals. This is Steinbeck’s philosophy of work that Dooley relates, the “strenuous physical labor” that is truly “honorable” and integral to a “sense of self-worth” and “self-respect” (226). As Slim “move[s] with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen,” Steinbeck effectively conflates the two, sovereign and worker. Due to these particular and relevant physical skills, Slim’s “authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love” (33), subjects that do not particularly pertain to being a ranch hand.

The other ranch hands are impressed with his skill over their immediate world on the ranch and use it to measure not only personal mastery of the work but also of the self. In Steinbeck's hands, personal agency is a resultant of good work.

The famed dream of a ranch of their own also makes apparent that there is important personal value that makes work good. Neither George nor Candy nor even Lennie is as impressed with ownership of the land as is each awed by the possibility of himself. When "a carnival or a circus ... or ballgame" came "to town" each would have the self-agency to just go (60). The power of personal place is ultimately the power to refuse to labor like a beast in the rain, and it amazes them. Candy's entreaty to be included in the dream is a plea for a place in a self-referential world; he says, "I ain't much good, but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some," and he tags his plea with an anxious and timid "How'd that be?" (59). This is the same plea that Crooks later echoes, and neither is Crooks interested in money, as he is willing to be a "hand to work for nothing." He too desires the opportunity to be an individual with personal intention and choice when he asserts, "I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I want to" (76). The men are desperate for work that avows their existence. Their obsession with seeing a project through to the end underscores this truth as well. When George says, "An' when we'd put in a crop, why, we'd be there to take the crop up. We'd know what come of our planting" (58), his awed appreciation is of both the stability of existence and the personal capability evident in planting. When one is able to see work through to the end one knows a bit more where he or she ends. Work that is good is personally satisfying; it has the potential to support identity. This is Dooley's "mainspring of human dignity" that

defines Steinbeck's philosophy of work (227); rather than appropriated and exploited in capitalistic competition, work that is good serves the worker.

The liberating potential and dignity inherent to good work and private pride is conveyed through talk of "dreams" that stay dreams, and the plot of the novel exposes the loss and pain resultant when people are instead exploited as merely labor to serve a system full of obstruction. The capitalist paradigm depends on and encourages the conflation of labor with work. Steinbeck seems to emphasize and expose as bitterly ironic that in this capitalist world of 1930s America, the boss owns their work and all it generates despite the fact that neither he nor his son, who will inherit the ranch, possesses the physical expertise required to actually work it. They not only own the profits of the work, but they also own any man within this system who is desperate enough for work. As a ranch hand who has "been here a long time" (Steinbeck 75), Candy is representative of the end of the labor-arc for dependent ranch hands: first as young "bindle-stiffs" like George, next as seemingly ageless "skinners" like Slim, and finally old "swabbers" like Candy. Candy is still desperate to achieve ownership of his work, and he echoes George when he laments the litany of labor that "wasn't my crops" and "wasn't none of my harvest" (76). After a lifetime of serving this system he has yet to achieve an ownership in the bounty. Another precarious identity and existence on this ranch is Crooks, and the instability of his life is demonstrated through the description of the harness room where he sleeps. While he has been at the ranch for longer than most of the hands, what little Crooks has in this world has been determined by his job as blacksmith; his medicine is mingled with the horses' medicine, and his books are displayed alongside harnesses

“in the process of being mended” (66). Crooks too has sacrificed a portion of himself to the work that is to be done: his back is crooked because a horse kicked him and thus even his nickname is sourced from his utility as only part of a system. Dooley also relates that Steinbeck considered “strenuous physical labor [of] instrumental value as a means” to “provide for your family” (226). Both Candy and Crooks are left vulnerable and alone, disconnected from any family, despite having longest suffered the loss and pain of exploitation for their labor.

Yet even as men subjugated as labor rather than empowered by work, these migrant ranch “hands” competitively and destructively cooperate and perpetuate the hierarchal system that exploits them. For example, after George, Lennie, and Candy plan to pool their resources even they are paranoid; they worry “They li’ble to can us so we can’t make no stake,” and they promise each other not to tell (Steinbeck 61). Candy’s shame is evident in his additional apprehension that “They’ll can me purty soon. ...they’ll put me on the county,” and his desperation is evident in the promise that instead he might “be let to work on our own place” (60). Candy’s decrepit dog is the symbol of life gone wrong in this system; the dog can no longer contribute as the laboring sheep dog it once was. For these reasons Carlson insists the dog “ain’t no good” (44) and both Slim and Candy avow they “wisht somebody’d shoot” them when their lives become so void of usefulness. None of the men demand or imagine more allegiance than this; instead they accept and even in this way mimic the brutal system. The men cooperate with the system, dutifully and desperately waiting in the purgatory created by laboring and merely dreaming, because they consider themselves in hopeless bondage to it. Each is the “slave” de Beauvoir tells us we



must want “to be conscious of his servitude” (86). Although George complains that if he “was even a little bit smart” he would “be bringin’ in [his] own crops, ‘stead of doin’ all the work and not getting what comes up outa the ground” (Steinbeck 39), he never questions the predominant system. Instead, George dreams of running away to merely hide in his “own little place.” And Lennie’s obsession with tending the rabbits is even more representative of their plight. His insistent, repetitive cry, “But I get to tend ‘em [...] George says I get to tend ‘em. He promised” (75) makes evident his consummate identification of self with referential work. Lennie identifies with the rabbits that must be tended and fed, the aegis with which George is defined; Lennie fervently wants this potent version of self. But because of his simple desperation for any agency he is too repeatedly manipulated by George, as George and the rest of the ranchers are manipulated by the “boss.” Rather than empowering themselves, these men believe in and even profess a system that subjugates one human to another.

In “Moral Experience in *Of Mice and Men*,” this suppression is of special interest to ethical philosopher Hart, and he uses it to rationalize the behavior of Curley’s wife rather than entertain or actually credit the alternative promise of her behavior. Hart defines their dream of a place of their own as “largely about escape from an economic prison” but he is more interested in “the immorality of a dispossession and extreme poverty that restricts human freedom and opportunity” (64). Hart considers the characters victims of the system, and he argues that this lack of choice results in the stereotypical role that Curley’s wife is pressured toward; he philosophizes that the ugliness of her behavior, for example when she demoralizes a

Crooks tempted by the dream, is a direct consequence of that constriction. This reading argues that she is only of use sexually within this system, and as a result she must be lonely and defensive. Hart explains and pardons her as someone who “stands as a glaringly bitter and ironic illustration of the immorality of narrow minds and the social conditions that produce them” (67). Hart’s reading focuses on the response of each character to his or her suffering, and appreciates the suffering as consequence of circumstance. For Curley’s wife, Hart professes that it is the “depraved moral universe that [...] makes her into the spiteful bitch everyone expects” (69). If one cannot contend with Steinbeck’s famous letter to actor Claire Luce that insists Curley’s wife is “a nice, kind girl and not a floozy,” then Hart helpfully blames society, and its subjugation of her, for her behavior. But if we instead bestow the same personal expectation upon Curley’s wife that we traditionally do the male characters, she is able to offer more. The men of the ranch have prostitutes in town to be of use to them sexually, (although Whit seems to most appreciate their conversation). Curley’s wife deserves credit for her alternative position, and when considered through Butler’s lens of the outlier, we can appreciate the challenge and possibility that she poses.

By first re-placing the emphasis on the individual, both Curley’s wife’s existence and her intentions challenge the ideology of the bosses who rely on collectible and disposable labor. On this ranch there is a boss who rules, a son who will inherit, and laborers who are left wandering between jobs. Curley’s wife fits none of those categories. As the woman in Steinbeck’s microcosm of a ranch, Curley’s wife will not be a hired hand and as a result she will be excluded from the

bunkhouse. As a wife she is meant to occupy the space apart from the ranch hands and stay in the house. In this world the men perform the labor and the women are meant to service them yet Curley's wife importantly will not cooperate with this role. She instead curls her hair and decorates herself, emphasizing her difference while at the same time insisting that the men talk to her. She also compares interestingly to the only other women of the novel. She is not an active participant in the capitalist system as the labeled and named prostitutes Clara and Suzy are in town. Nor has she bred in support of the patriarchy on the ranch. She deems the world "full of mutts" yet she does not customarily take responsibility for them, unlike Lennie's "Aunt" Clara (and George). She does not occupy any of the preordained spaces that earn women the acceptance a name communicates. It is she alone whose "costume" even protests this world of labor, as de Beauvoir appreciates "costume": as the means by which people "tore themselves away from ... servile work, transcended their situation, and asserted themselves as men before the beasts of burden" (94). Curley's wife is the character who exists separate from labor by alone communicating an obvious exaltation of self. As a woman in a man's world, she has also not been indoctrinated to so basically and literally identify her selfhood with mere labor. It is important and fair to notice that for all the talk, Steinbeck ironically provides no actual moments of "work" for either Curley's wife or the men on the ranch. But Curley's nameless wife alone pays no heed to this narrow system of laborer and owner, and her bold step includes blatantly challenging both the generic and the competitive as she saunters about the ranch in red mules, "on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers" (Steinbeck 31). While George and

Lennie's dream is a ranch of their own in which to hide away, Curley's wife insists on a world in which she is immediately and readily recognized. By embracing the expectations and even exaggerating the conditions of womanhood, Curley's wife in effect "repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" that Butler argues is the "reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability" (225). Curley's wife inhabits the expectations of her world and "through the invocation of convention" and "in the context of a chain of binding conventions" (Butler 225) offers the opportunity and model for change by focusing existence on the individual. Her refusal to stay in the house and her adamancy that she be spoken to represent an insistence on being seen and heard, important precursors to her ultimate goal of belonging to a community.

Curley's wife's response to life is also exemplary because she demands her satisfaction most immediately. While George and Lennie admit to being "the loneliest guys in the world" (Steinbeck 13) they appease themselves with "someday" and "when we get a stake together." And of all the men on the ranch they are the only two with even that much prospect, imagined as it is. Their mantra "Hide in the brush till I come for you" (15) is allusive of the passive and defensive approach that so many have assumed to survive this life even though, as de Beauvoir asserts, "man fulfills himself with the transitory or not at all" (127). The hierarchal system that is capitalism creates peons who are subordinated yet appeased as they promise themselves that their turn will come. They also cooperate by assuming their suffering belies a lack of effort. Curley's wife does not acknowledge this sense of servitude. She has already rejected her mother's insistence that she stay home rather than "go

with that show.” In her insistence to “be” she left her established home; she “wasn’t gonna stay no place where [she] couldn’t get nowhere or make something of [her]self” (Steinbeck 88). She is married to the ranch owner’s son, but she puts no effort into pleasing him. While she at times enters both the bunkhouse and the barn, Curley is never allowed to “catch” his wife talking to another; Steinbeck never even puts them in the same scene. The ranch hands (and many readers) disparage her as frivolous, but her presence challenges their stoic and inhuman acceptance of their existence, and their denial of this oppression. In contrast to the male characters, Curley’s wife is a celebration of the Now – she insists that she be satisfied in the immediate. In this way she threatens the system that feeds on the lonely individualism and self-denial of competitive labor as she offers and attempts the enfranchisement that is relationship. A ranch full of men has plenty in common yet Curley’s wife is the only one so open and adamant and even relentless about the importance of connection.

As capially-driven men pretending independence and assuming rivalry, the ranch hands denigrate and ignore telling moments of relationship. On only the second page of the novel, before their names are known, identical work clothes communicate that George and Lennie are laborers who belong together: “Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons” (Steinbeck 2). Later, when Slim insists that he will tar the mule’s foot along with Crooks, it is so that we know he is a good guy, and that Good is a democratic worker who does not take advantage of those with less power. Later still, Whit feels a boost in his self-worth with his connection to a previous ranch hand who has perhaps had his letter published in a

magazine: “Bill and me worked in that patch of field peas. Run cultivators, both of us. Bill was a hell of a nice guy” (47). Whit’s identification with his work, so focused on the actual patch of peas, and so insistent that operating a machine in the same field as another is an important connection, ultimately contends that it is not time that bonds people together, nor is it work that creates independence. These men not only form relationship through work but in their moments of weakness tellingly fear the opposite. For example, the giant rabbit in Lennie’s mind torments him most in the end by taunting him with the opposite: “‘Tend rabbits,’ it said scornfully. ‘You crazy bastard. You ain’t fit to lick the boots of no rabbit. You’d forget ‘em and let ‘em go hungry. That’s what you’d do’” (102). This is Lennie’s nightmare of failing community. This abuse of labor and relationship is repeated through Crooks, a black man, and Candy, an old man, who only so far remain on the ranch despite debilitating injuries. They have earned this little allegiance because they were maimed on the job, but they will be “on the county” once they can labor no more. A genuine community would offer both home and support that lasts a lifetime.

Instead the men support this system of labor and exclude each other on the “ranch.” George especially is the one who seems most suspicious of Curley’s wife attempts at connection, even though it is he who says, “I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain’t no good. They don’t have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin’ to fight all the time” (41). Slim agrees that lonely ranch hands “get mean” (41), and later Crooks echoes, “I tell ya a guy gets too lonely and he gets sick” (73). Despite their direct knowledge, they are suspicious of those who travel together and ignore Whit when he would care about a man long moved on.

They bully Candy into allowing his dog, his long-time companion, to be shot. It must be too painful for them to admit these vulnerabilities openly; they are too tired and too poor to acknowledge that the system is rigged against them and that they will never have enough capital to become ranch owners. In moments of quiet they admit a need for connection, yet their habitual support for the system of private, individual ownership, and the work cards and migrant labor that sustain it, does not waiver. It is only in a “darkening bunk house,” its “corners [...] still in dusk,” that George is able to confess to a Slim “moved back [...] so the light was not on his face,” that “When [Lennie’s] Aunt Clara died, Lennie just come along with me out workin’” (40). The “workin’” began the association of which the other characters, especially the boss, are so suspiciously jealous. Slim had already admitted, “It’s a lot nicer to go around with a guy you know” (35). Yet in the daylight George is publically scornful of Curley’s wife’s presence on the ranch, calling her a “bitch” and a “rattrap” as if her utility as a ranch hand or as a whore is her only value. Curley’s wife’s presence seems especially painful to George, as if she indeed highlights his own disappointments. George’s frustration in himself is evident in his disclaimer to Slim: “If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I’d have my own little place” (39). Here George asserts the capitalist model that ownership and independence are ideal, contrary to the fact that his continual games of solitaire give him no pleasure. Within the system as it exists George will only be allowed the privilege of a wife if he is ever able to save enough money for a ranch of his own, and according to the patterning of Candy and Slim, George will never accumulate that money. This system controls that basic human need for companionship, and George’s resentment for Curley’s wife and other

“tarts” like her more truly indicates the damage a lack of female companionship causes him. His hostility is a measure of his pain and fear. When George recites their prayer-like promise of a place of their own one last time to Lennie he knows the dream will be sacrificed. “His voice was monotonous, had no emphasis,” and when he says, “I could get a job an’ not have no mess” (103) we know he is devastated. Like Slim and Candy before him, without the company that Lennie had brought him George will suffer as only a laborer. Yet he will also continue to support the system that abuses labor and land with elite and restricted ownership.

Curley’s wife resists the American ideology that insists it is heroic to be alone, and is instead blatant in her attempts for connection. Her dream that energizes her agitation, of being in the movies, spotlights and underscores relationship. Curley’s wife may prance about the ranch when she is looking for someone to talk to, but it is only this sense of community that could combat the terror that they all suffer from, of being alone. Like George, Curley’s wife tried to rescue her self by uniting to another, and she married Curley. Yet George, who best knows the importance of companionship, hypocritically asserts that a “Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain’t no place for a girl, specially like her” (Steinbeck 51). Curley’s wife belies this isolationist strategy to survive her pain; her strategy is to look publicly for others with whom to connect. She too is lonely and she communicates her envy of even their pitiable community when she projects status onto them, accusing the “bindle stiffs” who “think [they are] so damn good” that they will not talk to her. And she admits to being lonely when she adds that she is “likin’ it” (78). She refutes the system of silent stasis, beginning with her appearance that demands attention but including



actively and openly seeking relationship as an immediate response to suffering. Uniting the disenfranchised, the disappointed, and the dissatisfied is very dangerous to the capitalist system that demands competition, the competition that allows some may have but many more will have not. But while the men destroy themselves and each other through competition, Curley's wife attempts assembly.

Work plus "democratic participation," according to Steinbeck's philosophy, are the "mainspring[s] of human dignity" (Dooley 227). Though the capitalist paradigm insists that laboring is a necessary sacrifice, the Depression limited opportunities for work. The characters of these novels suffer the angst of not having jobs to fill their days, and their anxiety culminates in feelings of shame. The traditional masculine and competitive cultural code prescribes shunning the weak, and as a result the men speciously distort and corrupt the redeeming path towards community throughout the story. Candy turns to the wall when his dog is killed, and Curley chooses silent indignity rather than public justice when Lennie crushes his "hand." Yet only the girl and Curley's wife seem to appreciate an existential existence that suggests there lies something capable of reaching beyond the everyday distraction of mere occupation. In *Of Mice and Men*, while the novella presents men waiting in the bunk house between shifts in the field, Curley's wife exists un-tethered; she is neither one of those women available in town on Saturday night nor will she remain in the house. Curley's wife highlights their culpability; while they steadfastly wait for improved circumstances, she agitates. She insists that she is not the problem but they are: "If I catch any one man, and he's alone, I get along fine with him" (Steinbeck 77). This implies that away from their Darwinian social codes each is able

to be with her, to more honestly admit vulnerability and relate more compassionately. Alone each is capable of this change, but as a group they maintain the lie. The men in fact live a communal life: they work together in the field; they sleep together in the bunkhouse; and on Saturday nights they go together to the whorehouse. But they profess and pretend an individualism that avows the corrupt hierarchal system. Curley's wife is outside this grouping of labor, and she calls it flawed and models an alternate way through the ensnarement. When she is killed by a Lennie desperate for silence, George's pitiable attempt at community is destroyed, symbolically exposed as impossible under their present system. Work is a precious commodity for its ability to empower individuals who could in turn create strong and nurturing communities, but the opportunities are squandered in both novels.

*In Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture* Constance Coiner writes that "On the Communist Left, 'proletarian' and 'manly' were nearly synonymous" citing "the worker-protagonist in proletarian literature 'almost by definition was male; proletarian prose and criticism tended to flex their muscles with a particularly masculinist pride'" (145). Meridel Le Sueur challenges that tradition by giving voice to those interested in more than machismo, and by creating protagonists who are courageous and emotional and female. The experiences of women who occupy the outer position in a man's world can be exemplary of an existence most separate from some threats of that world. For example, in 1930s America a dearth of self-supporting work was a great challenge for many. A healthy society depends on work for its progress, but individuals who depend on others for a source of work become

vulnerable to that system. Through the girl, Le Sueur too defines good work as immediately and existentially empowering to the individual, in order to best form a strong community.

The potential of work that is good and individually empowering is made clear in *The Girl* as the girl, new to the city, celebrates her success in acquiring a job two times on the very first page of the novel. In contrast, forced idleness is synonymous with suffering throughout the novel. For example, “Sunday is a voodoo day” according to Belle, and the “entrance into hell” (Le Sueur 19). Even Mrs. Rose, who has curtailed her expectations to “You eat and you sleep,” twice repeats “Sunday is awful” (152). For both men and women, Sunday seems the day existence is surreally immured until work and life can begin again on Monday.

Le Sueur uses the girl first as witness to this broken world full of people lost for a want of good work. A “cornerstone of Marxist theory” that Roberts defines in her Introduction is that “labor is exploited in the abstract in its commodity form as human labor power” (7), and common proletarian literature modeled a heroic individual who opposed that exploitation. But Le Sueur is now appreciated for portraying the alienation of collective labor, and instead focusing on these workers for whom “mystery, uncertainty, and fear prevail” (Coiner 152).

In her novel Le Sueur parades every distortion of ethical work — welfare, “scabbing,” robbery, luck, prostitution — until it is shown that too many public transactions are exploitive and nihilistic. For example, the girl bears witness as the welfare system is exposed to be farcical and corrupt; this system provides an expensive Christmas tree when the men and women huddled around it would be

grateful for a hot coffee instead. The girl suffers as the system employs people who only prescribe “milk and oranges” rather than provide any actual sustenance. The system is exposed as a nostrum and façade, yet the girl is the only one indignant at the choreographed police raid of the restaurant, after which “half the customers trooped back in” (Le Sueur 9), and she is the only one horrified by the police officers who, “investigating” Bill’s death, “kept coming in and drinking [...] beer free” until rigor mortis set in (32). After she is physically raped she is the one who recognizes that the interviews in the welfare offices between government employee and applicant also and again molest the most vulnerable until “their knees stuck together” and “their tongues swelled in their mouths to be telling what you never tell anyone” (158). A desperation for fulfilling work creates a vulnerability that is then perversely and cruelly violated by a system of welfare that not only assaults and molests the working class, but never actually offers work.

This system instead positions people against one other, and not only when it provides the National Guard to protect the “scabs” willing to labor at the plant. It also pays citizens to stalk and traitorously report on each other, until the girl worries one will “take the food right out of [her] mouth” (Le Sueur 155). The men in *The Girl* claim cognizance of the unjust system with comments like “Those big guys they eat the little guys like us” (22) and “Everybody stools on somebody else” (23) yet they still attempt a bank robbery, scheming only to make someone else a “patsy.” The girl again and again bears witness to the exploitation and corruption, until, when she is waiting behind the wheel of the getaway car, a man walking down the street who she assumes is on his way to work “struck [her] like a blow” (114). Work that is good

results in personal dignity; it does not promote the traitorous and thus fatalistic continuation of the oppressive “relief” system nor would it promote the equally nihilistic system of competition invoked by “scabbing” and robbery.

Also contrary to the personally empowering tenet of good work is Butch’s appeal to future luck. As an individual contending to achieve in the world Butch’s onerous attempts at success by “luck” fail especially. While he may be willing to labor, his plan to see “a fellow who knows a fellow’s going to loan [him] some to lease this here service station” (Le Sueur 56) does not recognize that the scheme indebts him in multiple directions – not only will he be borrowing money in an attempt to borrow a “station” in life, but he will be laboring to “service” his customers in an effort to pay his creditors. Later the girl and Butch meet a man who is leasing a gas station, and he helps Butch to perceive that “leasing a gas station is just another form of capitalist peonage” (Markels 61). The girl is bewildered by his plans to mortgage his present in an effort to game his future.

Throughout the novel Butch primarily appeals to luck to satisfy his combative desire “to beat everybody in the world” (Le Sueur 19), and the girl is puzzled by this attitude overall. Butch’s baseball metaphor insists life is a game in which “you pray, those balls come over on the inside and connect” (20). He claims “Muscle and prayer and who can stop you? Luck’s got to be with you and a girl too” (20). He admits that life was truly fine when “he worked assembling snow plows for seventy cents an hour and [he] got to put together a whole machine and see it work and everything” (21). When he is drunk and so lost that he strikes her the night before the planned robbery that evidently terrifies him, he is only appeased when the girl assures him that he is

“a good mechanic, [...] the best” (105). Le Sueur seems to suggest that to be truly satisfied skill and talent must be affirmed. Now, only depending on garnering enough “luck” to beat the system, he is lost.

The girl feels his error and embodies the opportunity for change. Butch is willing to act, but he is ignorant about what constitutes nobility. Unlike another who decided he had “better die fighting than be a scab or live like a rat” (Le Sueur 66), Butch finally only concedes to feeling disenfranchised. His death monologue is a litany of the places he has labored – Le Sueur crafts the life that flashes before his eyes as constructed by his work. But his understanding is left incomplete. As a man of his times immured in capitalism he thought the purpose of work was to compete to earn money; he does not appreciate it as a point of construction of an honorable life. The girl insists on the moment rather than the promise and pretense of an imagined future. Her focus is on the present as she “rubbed him all over slow, his feet, his thighs, his neck and shoulders.” This seems the “benevolent ‘essence’” of Le Sueur’s particular feminism that Roberts discusses. Roberts argues Le Sueur’s is a “feminism pegged more to an extolling of woman’s benevolent ‘essence’ than to a championing of woman’s potentially productive place in society” (61). The girl makes the moment immediate and personal with her insistence that “His body had been good to me” (Le Sueur 129). She is the witness when he bemoans, “All my life there --- what in hell was I doing? Who said anything? What happened?” (131). Butch’s reliance on “luck” and “game” are ultimately countered by the girl’s actions of physicality and honesty, until he almost understands he has been mistaken.

Another of the girl's companions, Clara, contests the system with the illegal labor of prostitution; she too is defeated, as she, like Butch, ultimately appeals to outside sources for power rather than her self. The clichés that she spouts are always inane, and sometimes even insipid; for example, when Butch and Bill insist that “beating’s everything, everything there is,” Clara responds with “Every cloud has a silver lining” (Le Sueur 7). Her clichés work to make tragedy of both her self-negating character and of the other, male characters who are attempting to “beat” the capitalist system by participating in it. Her dreams of belonging to the Book-of-the-Month Club, of a pool in Florida, and of Irish lace become self-hypnotizing and pathetic when juxtaposed with the women's common desperation for milk. Her insistence that “it ain't nothing if you are always looking for something better” (54) and always “looking to a bright future and peace” (4) belies the truth that she has been writing fake letters to herself and imagining a story line that subjugates her real life to one that does not exist. Her conformity is thus trance-like, and dangerous, and the inanity that the American dream has become is effectively satirized. The storied promise of “milk and oranges” that the social “workers” use to appease the impoverished becomes especially horrific when downtrodden Clara is willing to embrace the pretense and practice it on her self. The girl remains cogent and reports it all.

Le Sueur uses the girl first to witness and feel and report this world full of people desperate for good work. For the exemplar of good work in *The Girl*, work that empowers the individual, time must be flashed backward, as it was achieved by the girl's mother when the girl was much younger. The girl's mother “wove a rug and

[...] took it to the butcher on the sand bar and he traded with [her] for a whole sheep” (Le Sueur 50). Even years later in the retelling, her mother remembers the personal happiness that made her “put [her] hand on [her] mouth to keep from smiling,” and when she “felt like laughing and singing” (50). The satisfaction and joy her mother earns from working for “the beautiful sheep” that fed her family was a moment of triumph, emphasized by her effort in collecting discarded overalls with which to make the rug. Overalls seem a symbolic uniform of the male worker, which she is effectively appropriating. Recycling materials is a cyclical process, and as such it denies the linear hierarchy negotiated for traditional capitalist success as nothing new was purchased and consumed in the process. Roberts imagines Le Sueur’s overarching view as a writer as constructed around a “trust in the beneficence of such natural forces as a nurturing land and the fecundity of woman’s reproductive cycle” (Roberts 53). The moment of “the beautiful sheep” seems to celebrate both nature and a desperate woman’s appreciation of succession. By harvesting those overalls and then trading that work directly for bounty, her mother’s feat demonstrates that it is natural and fundamental for humans to work and reap the benefits of that work, and her success and personal pride emphasize the private value of that work.

In the novel work that is Good must be first personal, rather than degraded into collective laboring or corrupted with the artificial promises of capitalist dreams and religious paradises. Roberts goes further in her assertion that distinguishes Le Sueur as part of a group of writers who “were creating a vision of woman in an historical social context that suggests an individual feminist view that [moves] beyond that of the merely experiential, bordering on the essential, a discussion only



now in our own time finding an ear” (8). Read this way, *The Girl* offers an existential challenge to a capitalist world that is hierarchally organized and competitively focused on the future. The story is written and “reported” in the present tense, which emphasizes each of the girl’s experiences as well as her self as a product of the moment. In this way Le Sueur seems to be portraying good work as not only personally satisfying but even more immediate, existential.

The moments that are of the past are most often suspect moments. The girl, for example, travels to the city in a desperate effort to sustain her independent and unaided self. When she was only eleven the “welfare” had sent her to subsist in another house because her own family was struggling without enough food; there the girl labored eighteen hour days until “the old man was coming into [her] room every night, wanting to get in bed” with her (Le Sueur 38). When she leaves that house and her father, the representative of patriarchal authority, “didn’t say a thing” and instead quietly allows her home it is a testament of both her strength and his guilt. When the girl chooses to go to the city to find work despite the fact that “Her mama told her the city was a wicked place and she’d fall into hell” (3), she finds employment in a restaurant. In this present the work makes her strong: Butch insists that she “feel his muscle” right before she ironically carries away “five beers” herself (6). In this way Le Sueur’s teenage girl both refutes the power of the past and challenges the traditional standards of fealty and religion that would sacrifice and trap her as mere laborer rather than self-producing worker.

*The Girl* both offers an existential challenge and exposes the vulnerability of the established system every time the girl contends that she wants to just “be.”

Again, the girl first serves as witness when she listens to Butch's wonder and consternation as he remembers that as a child he delivered newspapers, and served that system with such fervor that he "didn't think they could get the paper out without [him]." He says, "Honest. I thought I was a public servant. I was a goof" (Le Sueur 126). The girl's earlier response to public servility displayed much more contempt for the system, as she exhibits more self-worth. Butch now has no job, no money, and no home, yet he is still obstinately and ignorantly intent on continuing the capitalistic battle. The girl's existential and uncompetitive response, "I like to be. I like to feel good that's what I like" (34) threatens and exposes the futility of that battle. The girl's desire to just "be" can be read as a refusal to make service to the system or possession of goods her goal, Butler's "opportune failure" to loyally repeat and perpetuate that system. The girl's desire is to "be," and as a result her guiding principles are self-centered and self-chosen.

In the girl's world that lacks opportunities for work, her solution that appreciates the satisfaction of "being" is astoundingly obvious and astoundingly ignored by the characters who in comparison just seem desperate to stay busy and distracted. For example, the girl's interests are never so literal as Belle's worry for a man's lack of tools. And Clara's mind is feverishly focused on imagining circumstances separate from her physical reality. Clara is frightening in her insistence that she be out walking the streets even when she is ill; in her gibberish she insists that it will enable her to "belong to a prominent family" or "meet a nice man who wants to marry [her] and take [her] to Norway" (Le Sueur 144). The futility of these strategies is underscored by the characters' escapist tendencies: "Belle was

drunk most of the time and Clara out of her head” (143). Belle and Clara have disastrously separated themselves from the immediacy of being. Le Sueur will instead amplify the girl’s existence by celebrating the “fecundity of a woman’s reproductive cycle” until the girl has a baby, whom she identifies with, “O girl” (182).

With *The Girl* Le Sueur especially illuminates that inherent to good work is the potential for a powerful community. Butch confounds the girl most when he insists on the very predictable and championed desire of capitalist America to compete and “beat” others more than he portrays a desire to live harmoniously and commune. The nameless girl evokes the possibility for this change by first remaining open to other choices. For example, she holds no prejudices against Clara for prostituting herself, and she even attempts a sexual transaction of her own. Ultimately the girl is unwilling to embrace prostitution for herself, but by first considering the proposition the girl provides the occasion also to imagine other versions for the term “girl” and “woman.” She embodies Butler’s opportunity “to extend range” and to “make us consider at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought” (229). For example, with her turn as a call *girl*, she “takes up or incites that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. ... [She] mimes and renders hyperbolic the discursive convention that [she] also reverses” (Butler 232). As Butler suggests, this “hyperbolic gesture” of the girl’s seems to both expose and deny the influence of others. For prostitution to be a choice she has to be able to first say yes as well as no. She tries but ultimately rejects both prostitution and robbery as substitutes for work.

The girl subverts terming while also modeling a tolerance for others; she neither adheres to identifying labels nor prior societal judgments in what seem initial yet essential efforts to reject conventions.

The girl is exceptional in her refusal to oppress or compete against others; again and again she unconditionally accepts the decisions that others make in their struggles. She does not disparage Clara's right to prostitution nor Belle's choices of abortion. In fact, she brings Butch a sandwich rather than argue with his preferences to "scab" or rob a bank or become inebriated the night before a job interview. With the girl, neither Butch nor anyone else is ever in danger, as de Beauvoir warns, of being "Reduced to pure facticity"; the girl never degrades Butch from a man to a "thing" (de Beauvoir 100). The girl's refusal to judge or oppress another is revolutionary; her existential ideology refutes even anonymity. But what seems most important to Le Sueur is that the girl's tolerance not only fosters respect for the individual but that it cultivates community.

Life for the girl is in all ways communal. She polled her companions for advice even on whether or not to have sexual relations with Butch, and openly accepted Clara's monetary sponsorship that paid for the very public hotel room. This friendship and the commonality of the restaurant where she works in the city binds her to the other women especially, but the girl is ultimately exceptional in her veneration of community. In his appreciation of Le Sueur's "rhetorical legacy," Boenheim describes Le Sueur's notion of "communal sensibility" as the connection between Nancy Fraser's "individual concrete other" and the "collective concrete other." Boenheim especially notes "Le Sueur's position that individual expression

reveals a ‘communal’ as well as a unique standpoint” (141). In *The Girl*, for example, the girl appreciates the verbal support and related experiences of Amelia and Belle, women who have also experienced relationship and pregnancy, but this girl will perform those feats without even acknowledging the additional barrier of a formal and institutionalized marriage to a man. She admires Clara’s beauty and self-supporting work ethic, but only chooses to have sexual relations with Butch, someone whom she chooses to care for exceptionally and stay attached to heroically. Like Sara the girl is pregnant, but the girl does not rely on religious adages for sustenance. Instead, she looks to and works with a community of other women to craft that support. The girl makes individual choices that highlight her devotion to a strong and varied community. Her work in the restaurant is the most powerful example of good work that has the potential to provide sustenance for herself and for her community, as demonstrated by the “Booya” that the women create when they come together, an “elegant stew of chicken and veal and beef and every kind of vegetable” (Le Sueur 2). When they gather in the kitchen each is able to “be,” including Butch’s demented mother, and a strong and supportive community is effectively demonstrated through this work.

When the girl’s mother showed her young daughter the bounty of food that her work accomplished, the young girl’s response was “A whole sheep?” But at the retelling, this older girl also asks “That was me?” (Le Sueur 50). As a child the girl was the one to literally marvel at her mother’s accomplishment. As a woman she also appreciates her mother’s work as good because it both identifies and characterizes her mother as capable and also produces intimacy and relationship between mother and

daughter. The moment seems to serve as a lovely example of the power of story, a “meditation” as an important part of Jane Greer’s summary of *Worker Writers*, that can become a “form of agency as writers consider the ‘scenes’ of their lives and assume power to rescript those scenes for various audiences and purposes” (Greer 615). The “rescripting” of this story includes the girl in its success until it is not clear which woman, the mother then or the girl now, is the “I” who puts her hand on her mouth “to keep from smiling” (Le Sueur 150). Because Good work creates a strong community.

Both Curley’s wife and the girl illustrate Butler’s “site of resistance,” and they represent her “possibility of an enabling social and political resignification” (231). Neither cooperate as labor. Instead they behave in ways contrary to the system that is obsessed with power and money and the hierarchal order that results. Both women have left their home, and both left in protest. Work is shown to be good when it provides opportunities for both pride in personal identity and community; real work has a self-efficacy to it. But this value of good work is too often sacrificed to a system that only exploits people as labor, as both authors show. This is highlighted by Curley’s wife and the girl, who each possess an existential self-efficacy, and support a much more socialist system. George and the other men are scattered from the bunk house and Butch dies cold and hungry and yet they proselytize the American Dream rather than protest. By inhabiting both the space of other and “being implicated in that which one opposes” these women “produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a ‘pure’ opposition, a

‘transcendence’ of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure” (Butler 241). These women offer opportunity for change; they work with what they have and they refuse to replicate it faithfully.

## 2. Women with Desire

In both *Of Mice and Men* and *The Girl* work is revered as essential to expressing independent agency, but it is made difficult to find during the Depression and especially so for women. Sexual desire, another mode of expressing identity, is also repressed as the system tries to commodify it as well. Here again the namelessness of Curley's wife and the girl can be read as representative of an opening and challenge. While both authors promote a concept of work that is more privately powerful they also seem to champion a version of sexuality that is more publically honest.

Steinbeck is interested in the suffering of the oppressed, and his story of George and Lennie and their dream is more than sentimental. Curley's wife is the most outspokenly frustrated character of the novel and the one most able to articulate her desire for freedom rather than mask it behind violence and segregation. As the only woman in the microcosm that is the ranch Curley's wife is a part of the "context" who refuses to be silenced or shamed; it is she who exposes the unsustainable hypocrisy and resultant inner conflict that the men suffer, and also the boundaries of outside limitations by which they are made pathetic.

Curley's wife is deemed as sexually dangerous in the novel as evidenced by a culture so uncomfortable with sexuality it is corrupted in its language. In *Of Mice and Men*, the disdain and the disrespect are apparent in the vernacular used to discuss Curley's wife when for example George rants, "These here jail baits is just set on the trigger of the hoosegow" (56). The diction of "jail" and "hoosegow" twice in one



sentence makes clear George's fear of his perceived sexual threat that she represents to his "freedom." And when Lennie "followed his words admiringly, and moved his lips a little to keep up" (56) the effect is to get lost in the lyrical sounds of this language, rather than try to find meaning in its nonsense. Whit refers to Curley's wife as a "looloo," claiming he does not "know what the hell she wants" (51). When George insists that a "Ranch with a bunch of guys ain't no place for a girl, especially like her" (51) her "especially" is the sexuality that she exudes that so threatens George and the other ranch hands. Candy and George get to know and test each other by insulting and denigrating her sexuality, labeling her a "tart." This language exposes an anxiety in the male characters that suggests vulnerability.

According to the patriarchal codes that the men honor Curley's wife could "cuckold" Curley, and their anxiety is a product of their belief in those conventions. Curley dresses like his father who wears "high-heeled boots and spurs to prove he was not a laboring man" (20), but what Curley really flaunts around the ranch is the "glove fulla vaseline" that he wears (27). Curley attempts to exploit his wife; he waves his gloved hand about the ranch as if it is evidence that he has won the competition for masculinity, as if he is embattled alone and against his world, even though this desperation for machismo is so destructive that, for one example, Lennie and the dream are sacrificed to it in the end. When Carlson taunts Curley with, "you're gonna have som'pin on your hands and you won't be able to do nothing about it" (62) he is not only taunting Curley's manhood but also revealing her secret agency. Even though he is the boss, Curley wants standing among the physical masculinity of the ranch hands, and he uses his wife to compete. Curley elevates

himself by insinuating that Slim is desirous of Curley's wife. Curley is so desperate to define and protect his manhood, and so confused, that he even challenges Lennie. That fight ends with Curley "white and shrunken," and "crying," and "looking in wonder at his crushed hand" (64). Their hands are measures of masculinity, Slim's "godlike," old Candy's amputated by and sacrificed to this system, and one of Curley's now in a sling. Curley's wife flees his gloved hand because it is not about her but an immediate anxiety that all suffer: the frustrated Curley, the ranch hands whom he abuses as a result, and the sympathetic reader who experiences the consequential tension.

George's anxiety is also displayed in his disgust at Curley's use of Vaseline, raw eggs, or products from "patent medicine houses" (32), and if sexual bounty defines a man then George has lost. Vagrant and laboring men like George must publicly define masculinity instead through sweat and the loneliness revered as "independence" as well as satiate themselves with a dream, or admit that they have no land and no family. George is threatened and frustrated by Curley's wife's sexuality, and he abusively stokes his fear of her into Lennie. He may be talking to himself when he rails at Lennie, "Listen to me, you crazy bastard [...] Don't you even take a look at that bitch. I don't care what she says and what she does. I seen 'em poison before, but I never seen no piece of jailbait worse than her. You leave her be" (32). George's visceral response could be soliloquy as it communicates the tragic effect she has on him. Charlotte Cook Hadella posits Curley's wife as George's "anima," his inner self that "sparks intensely negative reaction from him" (56). Accordingly, George's rage reflects his desperation to suppress the desires that Curley's wife

embodies rather than admit his inability to satisfy them, and thus he is hypocritically culpable in sustaining the corrupt system that would have it so. Mark Spilka goes so far as to hold George culpable for the tragedy in the end: he blames “George’s manipulations in bringing about [...] releases” of Lennie’s strength. George has stoked Lennie with his own paranoia and desire and too often shared his “powerful resentment” with Lennie, someone so incapable of comprehension yet so literal a weapon of revenge. George’s fierce reaction to her also belies the pretense that she is absurd. Instead his reaction suggests that she is a great threat who must be kept unmentionable, the aegis by which he would have to acknowledge his servitude. More important then is not that Curley’s wife is a “tart” but that these men are miserable and dangerous in their denial of their own sexuality.

In contrast, Steinbeck portrays in Curley’s wife a physical insistence that her sexuality not be denied or even dimmed: “She had full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her fingernails were red. Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages”(31). The kewpie doll lamp that Whit is so suspicious of at Clara’s seems to echo Curley’s wife. And like Clara, Curley’s wife is not always welcoming; she chooses to exert her own will and thus threatens his. Her sexuality is cultivated with make-up and curlers, and also void of any jewelry demarking ownership. Her identity is not only expressed because she wears dresses in this microcosm of men but by the consciousness with which she accentuates this self. They censure her speech and continuously chase her away because they can only pretend to ignore her; she threatens the men on the ranch as her physical appearance most basically challenges those desperate to remain numb.

Curley's wife is also exceptional in that she does not participate accordingly within the boundaries of this system: as she is neither farmhouse wife nor whore her less predictable trajectory best foils the men of ranch who are serving a system with boundaries that limit them, including the hierarchal system of patriarchy. Their use of his name to mark her, their attempt to confine her and erase her with the label "Curley's wife," is evidence of their desperation and fear. Again and again she is at the intersection of their battle for "manhood." Theoretically, her power to have an affair with a laborer would threaten the hierarchal system of patriarchy that hoards and passes the inheritance from one generation of a family to the next, as the boss will pass this ranch to his son, Curley. If she chooses to have no child at all, to run off to Hollywood perhaps, she also abrogates the entire system. Their dependence on the desperate masculinity of patriarchy to maintain the order of individualistic possession creates a nihilistic and Darwinian battle for survival. The patriarchal standard of competition does not honor the importance of community, and all are lonely without actually being alone. She does have power; if she refuses to stay devoted to Curley, according to this patriarchal culture it will be Curley's loss first but they all are apparently invested in maintaining this order.

The prostitutes in *Of Mice and Men* also evidence the limitations and boundaries within the hierarchal capitalist system. They are supportive of the system and they are also more traditionally assigned names that Curley's wife is not. Whit, their great advocate, is a "young laboring man" who walks "as though he carried the invisible grain bag," and as it is not just "a" grain bag but "the" grain bag, he is very apparently meant to represent the average man. His bombastic pronouncements of the

merits of Susy's house of prostitution versus Clara's make clear the virtues of never talking "dirty," of "nice chairs," and of not "rushin' guys through and kickin' 'em out if they don't want a flop" (52). Clara, in contrast, allegedly charges more for both "cracks" at the women and shots of whiskey, does not "crack" jokes, but does allow Asians to patronize her establishment. According to Whit's monologue, Susy seems to earn their allegiance by actively and regularly denigrating Clara's business and by charging less for the services. So, for a woman to earn a name in this capitalistically appropriated and distorted sexuality, she must have a competitive spirit, offer an economical choice, support a segregation which includes racism, and have a deferential sense of humor. Curley's wife instead promotes a sexuality that continuously desires attention and commitment rather than just capitalistic appropriation in two week intervals. Because she too lives on the ranch it becomes defensively easier for the men to just label her "Curley's wife" than to admit to a sexuality that is constant and human and starved; it is much easier to pick up the deck of cards as George does to numb himself with a solitaire "lay." The prostitutes do not threaten but rather promote the roles and stratification of a capitalistic hegemony.

Capitalism also encourages the mortgaging of the present to implied promises and dreams of a storied later. The presumption that these migrant men do not achieve their dreams of property because they "blow their jack" in a whorehouse is a lie; the reality is that George and Lennie are physically able and even strong, and yet although they have been "bucking grain bags [and] bustin' a gut" working (8), they have "ten bucks between [them]" (59). These men struggle to deny their servitude to the hierarchal and capitalistic system even though the future is not open to them. The

men concede and cooperate within a system that even delineates and limits their sexual experiences; rather than finding satisfaction and fulfillment in the present they sacrifice for imaginary promises of the future.

Curley's wife's open and purposeful sexuality evidences a more ideally human and unified existence. She lives most immediately, insisting that she be seen and heard in the present and in public as she exhibits the fundamental importance of sexuality to both identity and community. By refusing the farmhouse as well as the whorehouse, she challenges the puritanical view that also wants to keep people segregated. When Curley's wife and other characters are made to vocally echo each others' sentiments, it makes clear the absurdity of alleging separation, and singularity espoused by a reverence for individualism is exposed as illusion. When Curley's wife is left behind on a Saturday night when her husband and other ranch hands go into town she speaks to the three men -- a black man, a mentally stunted man, and an old man -- who have also been left behind. When they refuse to speak to her, she proclaims in frustration, "You're all scared of each other, that's what. Ever' one of you's scared the rest is goin' to get something on you" (77). And although she is a young woman, perhaps still in her teens, her words here echo Slim's, the "ageless" jerkline skinner whose "word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love" (33) who also declared, "Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other" (35). Her next protests, "Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a awhile? Think I like to stick in that house alla time?" (77) are sentiments that were also spoken moments ago by Crooks, an old, black stable hand who tends the horses and sleeps in the barn: "A guy needs somebody -- to be near him" he whines, "A guy

goes nuts if he ain't got nobody" (72). And the next day, when she is alone in the barn with Lennie, she confesses, "I get lonely" and assumes, "You can talk to people, but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else he gets mad. How'd you like not to talk to anybody?" (87). The dramatic irony is stunning, as the entire novel George has bullied Lennie into keeping his "damn mouth shut."

Curley's wife, so seemingly ridiculous in her yet carefully chosen garb, is absolute repudiation as she highlights connection through duplication of activity as well. By threatening Lennie's verbal expression, George, an impoverished migrant worker, behaves in the same way as privileged landowner and boss's son, Curley. Lennie, a giant in denim, is treated similarly to Curley's wife, a "tart" in red mules with ostrich feathers. Curley's wife makes connectivity clear; she is a threat to their habituated ideologies of competition and independence. Despite their desperate attempts to cast her as Other, she relates to them on multiple levels. Her dreams for herself (which include going to shows, as George and Lennie's and eventually Candy's dreams do) are as detailed as George's and Lennie's and ultimately shared personal mantra. She and Lennie have in the past both prized pieces of velvet. And when Lennie strangles her, "her body flopped like a fish" (91), just as Curley's had when Lennie held him. In this novel, the name "Clara" links nurturing aunt and stern prostitute. All are merged, making mockery of the hierarchally organized culture that insists they be segregated and competitive. All the characters are reflective of each other until any singularity espoused by a reverence of individualism is illusion. For the male characters, labeling her "Curley's wife" represents this attempt to mark her as out of bounds and separate, and thus it ironically and effectively mocks their

desperation for relief from the competition. By eliciting community she, someone so necessary to their battle yet contrary to it, demonstrates that independence is illusion.

The ideology of separateness is challenged as the title *Of Mice and Men* alludes to Robert Burns's poem "To a Mouse Upon Turning Up Her Nest with a Plow," and remarks on the interconnectedness of life. Alone, George will not achieve his simple dream even though his dream only depended on someone as simple and reliant as Lennie. In *Of Mice and Men* the revered American dream of land and riches is exposed as illusion, even delusion, as the notion of independence that is its foundation is so flawed. Whit publically reveres the detachment that is Susy's whorehouse yet he is desperate not to miss his regular visit. Curley's wife most vulnerably exposes that while Americans may tell tales of independence, our lives are made meaningful through community. Her pose in the bunkhouse doorway, her smile, and her flirtatious "Nobody can't blame a person for lookin'" (31) are invitations to acknowledge her. The fields are for labor, and yet the bunkhouse where the men congregate is used only to quarrel or kill time. Because Curley's wife does not cooperate with the capitalist model of woman, available for hire on a requested basis, they refuse to speak to her. And because it is the point where the men become vile, it must be a point of great loss and pain. Each man must ignore her or admit his very public failure of honoring himself. Curley's wife is dangerous to the status quo because rather than deny sexuality and support alienation she espouses a more self aware and honest physicality and connection.

As Curley's wife flirts and does not behave as "wife," this generic epithet they use to protect themselves is ultimately exposed as sham. Most other characters



George and Lennie meet on the ranch are given names that merely denote physical appearance: Curley, Slim, Crooks, and Whitey. Only Curley's wife and the boss are given terms that connote relationship. And although she and the bosses all wear high-heeled footwear, she directly opposes them on this ranch where the patriarchy is represented so literally. Her sexuality empowers her, she implodes the term "Curley's wife," and as Butler asserts "troubles" society's expectations for her. By refusing to "repeat loyally" she opens the possibilities for the re-signifying that Butler alleges. Despite their best efforts at bullying, Curley's wife refuses to cooperate and "purchase" her identity "through subjection to and subjectivation by the patronym" (Butler 153). She does not protect her status on the ranch with pregnancy nor does she cooperatively stay in the house. And she does not "clear out for twenty bucks" (30) as George would allege. Instead she moves about the ranch, defying their expectations for a rancher's wife; to their world of hierarchy she is a threat who must be contained, and thus she is forbiddenly nameless. Her dreams must be mocked and thwarted, her agency ignored, and her insignificance pretended or the lie of independence that fuels cultural claims of patriarchy and relatable economic claims of capitalism could not be denied. Her sexuality suggests an equality that exists above these traditional and limiting choices, one that realizes connection and community.

In *Of Mice and Men*, independence is exposed as delusion; the men suffer unsustainable personal hypocrisy, as well as the frustrations inherent to systematic limitation, yet they ignorantly promote the methods that contribute to this misery. This system maintains a fearful aura around sexuality, and as a consequence of that

fear their lives are more violent and hateful. Curley's wife more heroically embraces sexuality as a powerful source of identity.

Both Curley's wife and the girl are deemed as sexually dangerous in the novels although both women seem sincere in their goals of personal fulfillment. Le Sueur also chronicles a culture so uncomfortable with sexuality it is masked in its language. For example in *The Girl* references to sexual activity are most frequently euphemized with the terminology of a baseball game. After Butch and the girl leave the hotel room, the girl asks, "Had Butch won, struck a foul, thrown a home run, made the bases or struck out? How could you ever know? Who would tell you, or say anything, or maybe laugh?" (64). Her sardonic questions expose not only the absurdities of the euphemism but also the fear-filled disconnect within the culture. This system maintains a fearful aura around sexuality, a personal expression, because personal expression threatens the established hierarchy. By challenging assumptions that other characters espouse both Curley's wife and the girl become advocates for sexual desire as a powerful source of identity. Both Curley's wife and the girl are dangerous to the status quo because rather than deny sexuality and support alienation they espouse honest physicality and gain personal agency.

The capitalist system represented in *The Girl* has not missed the opportunity to commodify sex especially by controlling female sexuality. The "hell" that Belle refers to when she says, "[W]e are in hell right now and there isn't a God who would make men and women wanting what they want and then stick them in hell after they've done it" (12) is systematically maintained by the "relief" agencies.

Representatives of these agencies both advocate and attempt to operate a puritanical control of the women they claim to serve and thus by extension their men. The social workers warn, again and again, “You can’t get any help if there are goings on with men” (170). When the girl goes to her caseworker for “relief” from her hunger and nutrition for her pregnant body, she first waits hours in a long line that makes it very clear how vast the need is and who holds the power over the desperate. Le Sueur exposes a system that demonizes intimacy between men and women yet lasciviously insists on being told every detail of it as hypocritical and thus false. When this agency has its way, the girl and other women also pregnant are literally imprisoned. The system dehumanizes them by warehousing them away from the rest of society, by insisting that they give birth alone and subjected, and then by sterilizing them. This is the nightmare that Le Sueur’s nameless hero visits and then flees.

Prostitution is another way that human desires are exploited in a capitalist society, another result of a puritanical distrust of human sexuality and another instance in which intimate human relationship is sacrificed. Clara is the stereotypical prostitute with a “heart of gold,” and as such she does not complicate the system. She uses the money she earns from prostitution to feed and protect both her self and the girl, but because prostitution is “illegal” her ability is limited and controlled by the state and she is in the end defenseless to the system. Although Clara at times exerts her independence and at times does not charge for a sexual experience she ultimately exemplifies the “crippling emotional effects on women” of “ensorious morality” that Elaine Hedges contends (13). Despite Clara’s personal knowledge of sexual pleasure she cooperates with the puritanical system and repeats to herself the cultural refrains

that insist she is damning her “immortal soul,” even threatening herself in the mirror: “You will fry in hell ... for doing it” (Le Sueur 68). Among Le Sueur’s intentions, according to Hedges, was the “desire to return to women a sense of the validity of their bodies” (136). Clara’s experience and enjoyment of sex achieves this purpose until she is destroyed when she doubts her own knowledge and instead substitutes it with the destructive judgments of others.

Clara claims to have considered suicide multiple times but she is distracted from it by very ordinary and very simple truths. Left to herself Clara does not require much to find satisfaction in being alive: “the only thing that kept her from [suicide] was on account of something interesting would be happening just as she was about to do it” (Le Sueur 30). The “interesting” distractions included a soldier walking across a bridge, leaves on the trees, and “some kids and some ducks” playing on the river (31). She has successfully survived by being a server and a prostitute, but she also has silently and expensively burdened herself with abortions rather than trouble the system. She knows by personal experience that sex is pleasurable but she ignores that truth and sacrifices it and herself. She assuages the induced guilt with the capitalist qualifier that “it ain’t nothing if you are always looking for something better” (53) and distracts herself with promises of a house and pool in Florida and Irish lace and church on Sunday, all capitalist clutter that defines its version of success. Le Sueur creates a named character who so desperately tries to make real the shibboleths of capitalism that she participates in the destruction of her self and others like her, all while promoting the erroneous system. Clara is ironically taken away and erased with

electric-shock therapy even though she was no threat to the system, and her bed is filled with letters to herself that prove it.

In *The Girl*, even Belle is an accomplice to this system. She not only cooks the Booya and serves the alcohol, but she also entertains and keeps the customers in the restaurant that she runs with her husband. She does so by exploiting human desire with titillating entendres, for example when she bawdily shouts “I like nuts” (3), maintaining sexual activity as something depraved. Belle’s thirteen abortions were a brutal but ultimately effective way for her to uphold her desire for sex and not procreation. And Le Sueur makes clear that undeniable good generates from this insistence. The girl notices that “[Y]ou could always feel it when they had it good together, as if some great rowdy light shone on us, and some love of the flesh had poured in to liven us all” (63). Through Belle, the powerful effects of sexual desire are there for others to benefit and emulate. But only the girl seems to appreciate this, and Belle is never the danger to the system that the girl threatens to be. Although at times Belle complains that the abortions made her infertile she more often numbs herself with alcohol. She complains but does nothing towards protest; her actions ultimately protect and work for the corrupt system of racketeering. She is ludic in revealing the “stool” to the girl, laughing at the girl’s inexperience while insisting that she and her husband Hoinck “couldn’t keep bootlegging after hours if it wasn’t for the protection Ganz gives” (24) and even encouraging the girl to prostitute herself to this protection as well. She not only knows that Ganz exploits Hoinck’s fear but she accepts it and the rest of the corrupt system of “stools” and “fall guys.” The system is organized and clear and her knowledge of it helps her navigate the world. But it is

not constructive; both Clara and Belle cooperate with and thus support a system that keeps them enslaved and impoverished.

Clara only becomes inconvenient to the system when she is too weak to support herself and when the split in her self becomes unsustainable. She prostitutes her body to support herself and the girl, but the society insists that she is evil for doing so, without offering a realistic alternative. She says, "Everybody can get along if they try" as if the insight is revolutionary, instead of fundamental (10). She dreams the dreams that the culture approves although they are so obviously unattainable imaginings of private residences in Florida with tablecloths and swimming pools, especially during the Depression. Le Sueur conveys a world for Clara that keeps her shivering (71). The letters she writes to herself are evidence of both her allegiance, her desperate attempt to maintain belief in the promises of capitalism, but also her destruction. The shock treatments burn away the evidence of this tumult that is her truth, and her ability to witness against it.

The girl's version of life instead insists on sexual freedom, on sex without repercussion, and thus best threatens the status quo. She is much less willing to concede ownership of her sexual desires and thus really does represent a threat to this system and an opportunity for change. The girl began her sojourn in the city fearfully believing that there was a right and wrong way to behave but ignorant of it. Her responses, void of seminal connection to her self, communicated her blank sense of self. Butch's insistence that he wants to win may be shallow, but her refrain of "I don't know" was more alarming in its vacuity. For the girl, Le Sueur communicates "a sense of the validity of [her body]" through sexual experience, which marks the

before and after version of the girl. Before her sexual experience with Butch the girl is not only fearful but her existence is nebulous; when Butch declares, “There’s plenty good things to want” her response is “What? ... What?” (7). But as she successfully survives she strengthens through an insistence and an obsession with knowing and feeling for herself. The girl has the sense that physical, sexual experience will improve her understanding of the world and that ease around men is a knowledge and a power that other women have that she lacks. She is conflicted, vacillating between the temptation to become physically intimate with Butch and embrace the “something” that kind of exploded in [her] eyes [when she] saw him” (5), and the impulse to “run, or be petrified, just standing in front of him like a zany” (12). So when she exclaims that she is “getting ready to live, to know someone, to touch someone” (55) it feels like wonderful progress. Because when she finally decides to honor that “the sight of him seemed to make [her] light up like a wick caught fire” (2) unlike Clara’s constant coldness, the girl is rewarded for honoring her feelings for him and thus herself. Clara also “made the hollowness of [her] flesh fill with people” (2) and the girl readily accepts and nurtures this relationship, too. Her fear of being with Butch belies the fear that she has been taught; both her mother, who maintains she is “too young to know,” and Clara, who declares “it don’t seem right” for “an angel” like the girl, remain repressively fearful for the girl. But the girl ultimately chooses sexual freedom over the sexual denial that the world seems to advocate.

It is after the girl acknowledges the pain her mother is in after her father’s death, despite his abusiveness, that she becomes a threat to the system. She goes to

her mother on the premise that her mother “knows something. She knows what it’s about” and that this knowledge is personal, as “[her mother] has felt something” (49). Her sister is glad their father is dead and swears that she will never marry, and this response does not challenge the contention between the sexes that serves as a distraction from the corruption of the system. But with “I couldn’t understand. I always thought papa was a failure and mean” (52) the girl comes to question this assumption of division. Her wonder becomes less question and more appreciation of the miracle when she repeats, “Mama had a secret. She let me feel it, let me know it” (54). When she asks her mother, “What is a man when he is good to you?” and her mother responds by shyly protesting that the girl is “too young to know” (51), she confirms cultural taboos but also alleges that knowledge is carnal. And so the girl is inspired, and as this knowledge is personal she decides “I knew I had to jump, be in it like mama” (54). This realization is dangerous because from experience she will gain her own identity, unlike her sister who vows to stay distracted and restricted by codes made false with systemized generalizations. Neither has her mother, Emily, effectively broken free from the constraints of the puritanical culture: she confesses to the girl that as she prepared her husband’s body for burial she “looked at him naked” and worries “was it wicked? Was it a sin?” (52). When the girl consoles her mother with “You can marry again, mama, maybe” it is with an appreciation of how essential the knowing and the touching of another is, as Roberts asserts, “woman’s sexuality is a quality essential to her being” (Roberts 64). Her mother’s insistence that life is of the individual foremost is powerful. Even after she was made to “die it” suffering rape by her husband, her mother remains loyal to life, according to the carnal



knowledge that other sexual connection afforded her. The girl learns this from active research of her mother, and it empowers her.

The girl is so empowered that after surveying her mother and embracing her knowledge the girl decides she does want, and she does know what she wants, and it is received by the reader with a sense of relief. Despite previous emptiness the girl's new, empowered and frustrated monologue both echoes her mother and asserts her own desires as an individual: "Sure, Yes. I want everything. Sure. I got hungers. I want the earth. I feel rich. I feel heavy. I want meat, bread, children. I am starving. I am sitting here starving" (Le Sueur 59). Her desires are not only physical, like an animal's, but encompass with equality life in its entirety; the girl refuses to differentiate between physical and emotional needs. And with her insistence that "I've been promised by the earth the greatest feelings, haven't I" (59) she claims her place. Embracing her sexuality empowers the girl from within. For Le Sueur, sexual acknowledgement is personal acknowledgement.

The girl decides to exert the agency that her sexual desires enable in her after her visit with her mother; the girl cries, "I want everything," and she begins with Butch. When Butch lustfully insists that she is "so sweet [he] can't stand it," the girl "felt all my body open in little smiles" (56), and the smiles are reminiscent of "the little smiles [that] came out all over" her mother when she procured the sheep. Despite the impediments of money and privacy, barriers enforced by the capitalist system, she and Butch consummate their desire. Despite the capitalist system that would control access to intimacy the girl lives by engaging most fully with the world. For example, the girl both "didn't want to be away from the warm breast of Butch"

and “didn’t feel good.” She both knows she physically hurts and knows the truth that “Nobody can tell you” and “why mama always went back” (61). The new connection that she feels with the world is both communal: “I would know fruits and like cutting an apple open, and seeing the tiny brown little seeds lying together, asleep in the core,” and orgasmic: “I wouldn’t see us flat anymore but great burning balls of fire turning into each other, piercing, breaking, howling, singing, melting together and tearing apart” (62). And she knows this connection as both unifying and orgasmic at the same time: “the awful wonderful need to enter each other, not to be single, alone, hankering” (62). She knows that the system that works to supplant human desires for sexual connection with consumerist desires for split-level homes and hope chests is corrupt. Her emerged and received sexuality empowers her and now she is dangerous to the status quo: “I know I have some feelings and they are mine .... Now I know the whole city and the way it is and the way those in it can be together....Now I am at home with my own body and the bodies of others and I will do whatever there is to do” (140). The girl represents a threat to the system because her desires are personal but also because in her passion she embraces too her hunger for community and connection.

The girl is a woman and according to societal tradition should be less significant because of it. Her sex enslaves her. This is Butler’s “principle of the body’s cultural formation. It is in this sense that materialization can be described as the sedimenting effect of a regulated iterability” (Butler 252). Cultural practices of submission and place fashion women for this lesser role and women repeat it by looking to and imitating one another. *Le Sueur* complicates and subverts this

inevitable phenomenon by celebrating it. Curley's wife and the girl are symbolically not "materialized" with a name. The girl has surveyed the women in her life looking for answers on how to live. For the girl, sexual desire is the vehicle through which she comes to know her self, and what is important to her is that it is shared knowledge that others have and have had before her. Sexual awakening is limned in *The Girl* as a metaphor for an undeniable connection to humanity, regardless of claims of independence or freedom. Sexuality creates a hunger because it creates knowledge that connection in fact exists. The capitalist culture strives to regulate and commodify sexuality as the puritanical element of that culture works to deny and forbid it. The girl's desire for connection threatens both. She is now willing to "connect" with Butch any time, even before marriage, and any where, even "in the grass right beside the street, with the street car going by ten feet away and nobody seeing us deep in the grass, right beneath the capitol" (Le Sueur 60); she is not willing to have her desire privatized as much as she is not willing to be ashamed of it. And she insists that others know this truth, too. Through seeking to fulfill her sexual urges she has learned that everyone is scared, and every one desires – that these are in fact conditions of being most ideally human. In the world as Le Sueur reports it the girl is left nameless to celebrate her truth that disproves capitalist dreams of happiness through possession.

Curley's wife and the girl exhibit the fundamental importance of sexual desire, to both identity and community. As a result the girl becomes one who knows what it is to "feel each other near just as flesh as warmth as some kind of reaching into each other, on the other side of accidents and tearing apart and beating and collision and

running into each other and blaming” (Le Sueur 61). Sexual connection is to reach the reward of being human. Sexual desire is a source of this personal knowledge and of connection and community. Unfortunately for the girl, her desire at first relies on Butch, a personal ambassador and saboteur from the patriarchy. She is vulnerable to his extortions, for example when he claims, “You be good to me and I’ll go places, nothing can stop me. We can have everything” (21), and his scape-goating, when he vents his frustrations by beating her. “Everything” for Butch is victory and winning and desperate attempts to scab his way, yet sexual relations with him enable the girl to most fully experience existence. As Roberts asserts, “woman’s sexuality is a quality essential to her being” and the girl is willing to embrace that quality and “be ... love to be ...” (100). Rather than pragmatically cooperate within the delineated system, Curley’s wife also lives more immediately, insisting that she be seen and heard in the present and in public. Capitalism claims that those who work within its system will accumulate its rewards in time, as does the patriarchal system for the succession of men. They both require a sacrifice of the present and belief in some future ideal. These women are outside the system because they are women in the 1930s United States, but also because they challenge it with their insistence on finding satisfaction and fulfillment in the present rather than sacrificing that for some promises of the future.

In *The Girl* there exists great anxiety about parturition. In *The Girl*, unmarried, pregnant women under the systematic control of the state are swept out of view and institutionalized; deemed “morally unfit,” they will also be sterilized. As exemplar of the patriarchal sphere, the girl’s father takes proprietary pride in his wife’s ability to

give birth, but he is even more impressed by the “supper” she can serve so soon after. In this world there is no milk nor oranges for pregnant women and no “head of lettuce when you want it” (152). To this lament Belle responds, “you’ll just have to make a baby,” as if only the creation of a new world will challenge the old. As every child’s birth jeopardizes the existing tableau, childbirth is important and that this identity is communal is important to both Le Sueur and Steinbeck; both use parturition to expose the American ideal of independence as self-destructive illusion.

In *The Girl* the girl’s journey culminates into a communal identity, celebrated with childbirth, though the challenges that the birth presents first aid in personal knowledge of her physiological self. The girl began her sojourn in the city, according to Clara, marked as “a virgin from the country scared of her shadow” (3). Being fearful and being sexually inexperienced are conflated for the girl. She is aware of a lack of knowing what other people seem already to know, and the exclusion and emptiness are excruciating for her. When Butch promised he would “knock the shit out” of her it makes her “shake and tremble” but she claims “it was better than being a husk full of suffering and not knowing why” (12). She was fearful, as her personal song attests: “*O mama, what can I do? / O mama, you told me it would be dangerous. / O mama, I’m scared ... what did you do?*” (35). She fears and doubts and also recognizes others have experienced what she is experiencing.

Progress towards a more solid identity is made evident once she is pregnant; the girl proclaims to “feel in body so good ... so good and so strong” and she repeats, “I feel so wonderful” (94). This makes her unwilling to abort her pregnancy as Clara advises, to forfeit this certainty of her self. The girl’s reverent sentiment is

reminiscent of her mother's prayer-like advice that guided the girl toward a sexual relationship with Butch; her mother promised "O it's good to live .... To know each other, touch, sing, feel it in your breast and throat. You have to live it and die it and then you know it. Nobody can tell you anything .... You have to live it and sometimes you have to die it and then it's in you and you always know it" (52). The physicality of "touch," "sing," "breast," and "throat" is personal but also expressive and thus communal. The girl's knowledge is especially dangerous because she is cognizant that she is following an existent path, a path promised by Amelia and her mother, other custodians of this knowledge. And in this way the girl's experience promises and validates the existence of a community.

Thus the girl is neither as alone nor as vulnerable as some would have her believe. The systems in place, especially the men in her life, have tried to scare her away from taking personal pride in her life and from celebrating her pregnancy with satisfaction and a sense of personal agency. Her father insists that a woman will get up off the floor and make supper after giving birth. Rather than celebration the girl and other women are made to suffer the "screams from someone in labor" (160) during the nights they are confined in the relief maternity home. Butch claims knowledge of the metaphysical vulnerability of being a parent: "Why do you want to have kids? Look, in a war they'll be shot to hell and get crazy. What's the good in it?" (56). The girl's choice to stay pregnant defies their pessimism, authoritative as it is. Their desperate attempts to negate her power by focusing on individual vulnerability rather than admitting collective strength belie their ideology of independence, and its faults. The girl comes to appreciate her bravery and strength: "It makes you shake to

come from your own loneliness and death. It makes you shake all over, but you've got to do it. You've got to take the chance to do it" (176). The girl comprehends an existence beyond the lonely suffering of the individual.

The novel concludes with the birth of the girl's child, "an event that becomes the occasion for the women to renew their commitment to life and to the future" (Hedges 12). This is only possible after the girl makes the decision to have her baby despite almost all other advice, including that from Belle and Clara who each aborted pregnancies multiple times. But the girl is also distinguished from her mother and Amelia, both married before having children. Instead, she is the progression as well as the link between them all, the proof of progress through undeniable community. The girl has bonds with Belle and Clara who both fed her and consoled her and touched her out of the exact sympathy each could feel for the other while challenging the traditional definition of family. And like Amelia and her mother the girl has come to know that the answers lie in both loyalty and commitment to the future. As the link between them, the girl especially represents how each has put feelings of compassion for another human. The espousal of loyalty directly challenges delusions of success through independence. The girl's insistence on having her baby contends that real power is in community.

Childbirth is also used in the novel to refute the capitalist notion that status be recognized through monetary measures. In *The Girl* the people who are conferred with status in this system are exposed as inane and immoral. Pregnant women lack the milk necessary to "build strong bones" and as a result landlords who use rent monies to vacation in Mexico or Europe are exposed as not only absurd but as

traitorously lacking any allegiance. “Mrs. Hearst’s milk fund” is equally deficient and untrue. The “relief” agency that as a result seems to have unchallenged power over indigent women is too made ridiculous. The girl’s caseworker, as the immediate representative of government-sponsored systems, uses false yet obviously frequently repeated language when she prescribes “sterilization advisable” along with lessons in “poise” (Le Sueur 158). That the hegemony would attempt to move the focus from parturition to deportment belies the threat it is. That parturition is not noticed nor respected as a component of land, labor, capital or entrepreneurship that constitutes the capitalist system speaks to the system’s vulnerability and fault.

The corrupt system instead affords status to, for example, the men police officers. Le Sueur exposes them as arbitrary as they use their uniforms to drink free beer while “investigating” Bill’s death, which emphasizes the absurdly choreographed and corrupt charade of their previous raids on the bootleggers. The unmerited status that the girl’s father is given in his household as the representing member of the patriarchy is imploded as well. He shamefully operates “in the dark.” He attacks his wife in the dark when he demands she “take [her] medicine” and he attacks Joe in the dark, “like an animal” (45). He ignorantly blames his family for his problems. Again and again, representatives of the system that would divide society into hierarchy and alleged individualism are exposed as irrational by the loyal and uniting presence of the girl whose pregnancy is testament to community.

The feat that is parturition is used especially to high-light the praiseworthiness of the girl and other pregnant women. The girl does not need the ambulance that the system promised but did not provide access to because she has Amelia, who has



“delivered a hundred babies and would deliver a hundred more” (180). Amelia also does the real work that the system only promises when she struggles to actually allot milk to pregnant women. Because of her “those bureaucrats, like rats” yet bestowed with important status in society, “pour[ed] out of the building” (179) in attempts to escape her organized protest. Amelia’s inspirational note to the girl, declaring “U are a maker now” (161), makes clear who should garner the respect of status in the world.

The girl, too, has the sense that the commitment she has made is revolutionary. She re-appropriates the terms of the bank robbery, a capitalistic society’s temple of worth, to her self. She exalts in wonder: “I had already robbed the bank. I had stolen the seed. I had it on deposit. It was cached. It was safe” and “I had to laugh. It was in a safe. I had the key” (105). Her pun of “cached” implies the power that she has redeemed and thus claimed. Amelia repeatedly laments that women “Can’t make bones out of water” but the girl evidently *has*. She is “the Treasure” (165) and she is worthy of the status so ignorantly afforded pretenders and pawns. And this understanding is never exclusively personal. During her labor the girl remembers that “Amelia said once, I tell you when I like it, when there is something to it, when there’s something doing, when you can see it, put your face in it, and double up your fist for it” and the girl responds to her self, “I had my teeth in it now” and “I liked it” (177). In *The Girl* parturition is both a valuing of self and community, and an insistence towards being heard, a demand to be acknowledged rather than silenced; personal identity is fundamentally and ultimately insistent of community.

Amy Gentry in “Hungry Realism” notes the repeated “mouth” images meant to signify the desperate deprivation in the novel. But childbirth is an act of production rather than consumption, and a bold act: “[U]nder conditions that threaten to resemble class extermination, the choice to have a baby despite society’s judgment that one is unfit to reproduce may easily look like a radical gesture [...] having the child that nobody wants is a way of refusing to capitulate with society’s wish for one’s historical nonexistence” (Gentry). The young women at the “relief maternity home” are feisty and contest the system that works to keep them hidden. Alice may be vocally mute, but childbirth is another form of communication as are her and the other young women’s resistances and refusals to be quashed, their “beds drawn close together,” the “girls laughing and whispering” (Le Sueur 160), and their communal huddle against the matrons and the “stool,” which includes a secret language that enables them to “talk together on their fingers, clasped behind their backs” (162). As revolutionaries, they are almost all ready to “pop” (159). Alice “pretended she was singing” in front of the matrons (162) but in reality recruited for the Worker’s Alliance. Many of the young women in the relief maternity home may be sterilized once they give birth, but their resistance makes clear that they have not yet been defeated.

In contrast, Belle’s thirteen abortions are representative of a fatalistic ideology. She insists that because the world is “covered in slime” she “wouldn’t bring up no kids in it” (12) and in this attitude she sterilizes herself and her husband, Hoinck. Hoinck’s attitude also denigrates her sacrifice; when he deems her “some woman” it is not regarding the abortions that avert further deprivations but because

she took the “rap for him once when he forged a check” (14). Her sacrifice is further silenced when he admires her stamina in having thirteen abortions by insisting on the punch line that the “spoonful of turpentine with sugar” is to his credit for administering it to her and by using this to entertain others (14). But the girl “never thought any of Hoinck’s stories were funny” (14).

Once the girl knows she is pregnant she is certain and sarcastic against regressive attitudes that suggest everyone “better be hiding ... better be running, better be on the lam, better fade away” (81). Ganz, with his “terrible eyes [...] snake-eyes,” fails to notice her sarcasm and literally agrees. Ganz is both exploiter and exploited, Butler’s “subject who repeats and mimes the legitimizing norms by which it itself has been degraded” (131). Ganz is a pathetic piece of this system who feeds it with graft yet is left hungry and conniving. In contrast, when the girl gives birth baby Clara is indeed covered in “slime,” and the slime is re-appropriated as life force. Ganz’s and Belle and Hoinck’s activities nihilistically support the system that denigrates them, but no characters are so desperately self-destructive, and as willingly and furiously deny the power of parturition, as Clara and Butch.

Clara dies and is rhetorically silenced before the girl has her baby. And Clara had so desperately cooperated with the capitalistic dream. She not only embraced and absorbed the culturally provided and capitalist dreams of husband and split-level house and pool in Florida, but she silently and dutifully appeased her self with only pretend promises. For example, while Belle avows her thirteen abortions Clara sits nearby “very cheerful, cutting out pictures from the magazines showing elegant houses and drapes and furniture and stuff for the baby room and maid’s room, all the

best stuff" (12), contented to play a version of paper dolls, a game meant for children. She also tries to manage the gulf between the reality of her life and the life promised by cultural ideology by writing letters that imagine a world of pianos and suitors, shows and chocolates, and mothers appeased with "overstuffed" chairs, appeals for advice of rug color, and gossip. Clara and her clichés do not demand any more from the world than that. But this existence, so dependent on capitalist pretense, proves untenable and Clara is destroyed. The electric- shock therapy prescribed as "treatments [that] take away anxiety" (170) destroy her. She has been used by the system: like a good capitalist she cheerfully promotes its ideals and sells even access to her body; she never demands her share of the collective bounty; and she is willing to prostitute to help care for the girl, another citizen, rather than inconvenience society. And she agrees not to procreate. She becomes evidence that this duality is mentally as well as physically untenable, and is a sacrifice to it, never even having cried out. She dies without breast, without memory, and without the protest of parturition. Clara dies as if she has been all alone in the world.

Butch, too, tries to live as if it is he alone in the world, even though his constant and intense pejorative against the girl is that she is just like his mother. When the girl "felt frightened and proud and blurted [her pregnancy] out" (95) to him, he argued against this denial of his independence in every way: "the river woman can get rid of it and cheap"; the girl must be "cracked up complete" to want to have a baby; she "ain't got the guts" to abort it; she does not have "the sense" to know what it requires to have a child; she was not "smart" enough to avoid pregnancy in the first place (96). His claims all focus on the girl, and thus recognize and admit

their interconnectedness, despite his assertions that he would prefer independence. When he is drunk his instincts are tellingly communal, and he sobs and accuses her of wanting to instead sever this bond: “You’ll do it ... you don’t care for it. You don’t want to have it.” Despite this knowledge, he “marched” and “pushed” her to the woman by the river, willing to be silenced. Butch associates with the baby as a version as himself, a boy who “would have made the big team. Pitcher for big time” yet he is willing to be silenced, insisting “my son, it was better for you not to be alive, it was better for you dead” (111). Like Clara, he willingly sacrifices himself and his child rather than protests the system.

Even later, Butch’s epiphany as he dies only reaches the understanding that “they” are some other who “own the earth and the sweet marrow of your body” (131). Yet he never acts in objection. Clara seems slightly more perceptive, perhaps mounting a small protest when she asks that the girl “name the baby Clara” (176), or perhaps still lost to her romanticized version of capitalism. The girl though insists “Clara you got to remember your mama,” and declares that her pregnancy is an assertion, “see they can’t wipe it out” (175). As she previously told Clara “We are growing, in a field that is cold, bitter, sour, and no chance for life,” her rhetoric both laments the hostile conditions of the world and praises the defiance that they have shown by “growing” despite it (71). The girl’s pregnancy reflects her motivation to prevail, and to prevail as part of a vibrant community.

As Belle and Clara and Butch cooperate with the system that would eradicate them, the girl will not “shut up”; in fact it is after she tells Butch to “shut up” that she decides to become sexually active with him, engendering her pregnancy. The girl

first desires to know, and then she uses the stimulus of parturition to be heard, to fully be. She contends to Butch that rather than abort the pregnancy, as Belle and Hoinck have done, they “cry our strong cry” (97). She declares that “nobody can shut [her] up” now. When the girl contends that “If it was just [her] it would be different” (139), her rhetoric references both her baby and her community. Belle estimates there are more than two thousand “hungry”; it is the girl who rues “it’s so still ... you can hear the snow falling” (140). She instead will choose childbirth, and use it to send notice of her self and her child and her community. Roberts notes, as “the child of the communal love of her and Butch, the child embodies Butch’s dreams, her mother’s and her own” (Roberts 71). Childbirth represents the girl’s choice to align her self with the “Great Mothers,” women like her “mama,” with the “same bend of back, the sagging belly, the look of sorrow, and of something else, something fierce, and the reason you have a child maybe” (179). Childbirth will not only be a demonstration of her loyalty to humanity, but she will also use it to shout out into the silence, and to demand acknowledgement of this community.

In *The Girl*, parturition in fact establishes and affirms that autonomy is illusion, making independence a particularly pitiable ideal. It is her mother’s loyalty to her family that empowers the girl. And it is the bond that she recognizes between her mother and Amelia that further encourages her: “I am thinking [Amelia] looks like mama, like she had carried a lot and fought a lot and endured a lot” (3). All three have bellies “full like live seeds” in them (66). When Belle sits, “spreading her legs” by the fire, the girl “wanted to know everything she remembered and all the dead and living in her coming up like out of a deep sea” (93); humanity has not only evolved

through but has been witnessed and recorded by women. When Amelia promises the girl “you aren’t alone now” (137) all of time is encompassed: through maternity, the girl is connected to past, present and future. Amelia also assures that with parturition the girl “will belong to the whole earth” (137) and the girl indeed lives this. The girl walks the city and feels “full” and “heavy.” Although she has no possession that is home, she embraces humanity; she stays “close to other women and men” and says, “I look, I feed off their faces. They feed me. I don’t feel scared when I am sitting there and it is warm and I am close to the bodies of others. I don’t know them but I know them all” (148). Pregnancy has afforded this knowledge of her self and of others – of herself as connected to others. Here is the “sedimentation” that Butler argues, the “construction” by which people are fixed to others, and to the past (Butler 245). Usually perceived only as absence of free will and acknowledged with lament, here it is celebrated by Le Sueur. The girl observes and rejoices in identity that is communal, and birth calls and congregates others to this cause. Rather than competitively and capitalistically insisting that people exploit or be exploited until death, and rather than measuring lives with violent and nihilistic events like the bank robbery, the girl perceives lives that are connected and prevailing, or as Nora Ruth Roberts suggests, “history [will be] carried and savored from womb to womb rather than from spear to gun” (Roberts 68). The girl’s appreciation of communal identity climaxes in childbirth; the novel climaxes at this moment, and Le Sueur renders the cyclical truth and connection of *all* life apparent. When the girl gives birth the event encompasses all. The new Clara and former, the girl, Amelia, Belle, and other women are there as well, women of their neighborhood and women of the

community, but also present are those not of this particular time and place. Butch and Hoinck, Butch's mother and the girl's - the birth assimilates them all.

The girl has been apprenticed to this understanding especially through Amelia, whose prescient "One dies, another is born" (Le Sueur 8) prepares us for the death of Clara that must occur for the repetition that is continuity and permanence. The girl also remembers a moment when she "put my hand on [Amelia's] belly which was still full like it had live seeds in it. Now I can feel the whole city and how we are together because we know the same. I feel my own little belly and I know the body of all women and even my mamma's ..." (66). Amelia is relevant even though her children are born and gone. She is "still full" because she has this knowledge of connectedness that surpasses ordinary experiences of hunger and robbery. It is Amelia who has authored the mantra that prepares the girl for this awareness as well: "the breasts of our women are deep with the awful and wonderful life that strikes and swarms and breaks from us" (140). Even the antithetical verbs "strike," "swarm," and "break" liberate.

Butch is part of this climactic moment, too, as the girl remembers his hurt, and responds to the question that he wondered before he died: "Do we belong to the human race?" (181). He was a force of life, and the girl "didn't want to be away from the warm breast of Butch" (61). But he was ensnared by the competitive system that is capitalism and stayed trapped by the ideal of "independence." Butch continually used baseball as a metaphor for his life, for his battle against his father for independence and his battle with the girl. The girl's brother Joe also sings of the "candy and crackerjacks" he will use to escape and not "care if we never come back"



(47). Both Butch and Joe revere America's game, an over-arching metaphor that japes at the play and absurdity that is competition, as Clara played house with pictures cut from magazines. Both Butch and Joe also defend themselves with the rhetorical question "Did we ask to be born?" This question pretends that responsibility belongs to a superior other and also pretends a freedom from accountability to community. Neither Butch nor Joe recognize these absurdities. During her labor, the girl revels in the knowledge "It ain't a ball game, honey" (180). The girl's calm connectivity through childbirth, and her laughter, the culmination of the choice she has made, makes her power indisputable. Butch was all wrong with his imagery of competition.

The contracting and expanding of childbirth also brings forth a communal cry in the girl. A "river" breaks in her and it is indistinguishable whether it is "[her] cry, the cry of the women, the cry of a child" (181). As Amelia had tutored, "You can't just cry for yourself. You got to cry for all. Some face has got to shine with every other face. We must know that our suffering is together... the same enemy after us ... the same mother over us" (165). In a world based on community all are legitimate and no one is left to ask why he was born. The child creates the village. So many entities are present when the girl gives birth because each birth is comprised of so much being. Butch's mother is there, wandering about the space, looking for her long-grown children; she is not disconnected by even the expanse of time. The girl exclaims to herself, and to him, and his mother, "O Butch, you didn't know what your mama knew, that little woman, door to you all" (180). She gave birth to him, and thus is also the conduit for this new life. The novel comes to an end with her insistence

that it is the umbilical cord that keeps children on “the road,” forever connected. It is Butch’s mother who asserts that the placenta that has provided life support for the baby is most full of “protein”; that the organ of physical connection between mother and child is literally evident of overarching truth. It is the marker of that “fierce feeling” that the girl’s mother spoke of for “husband and children,” that impulse to “feed them your body” (52). Mothers mirror each other in this novel; the girl sees her mother in Amelia and Belle, and Butch’s mother is as desperate to feed her children as was the girl’s. The world is a result of the procreations of the reflections, and any singularity espoused by a reverence of individualism is the illusion.

## Conclusion

According to the Book of Genesis, Adam names all the animals as they are paraded before him in an effort to find him one that is “fitting” and a “helper.” It is after all the fowl of the heavens and the “beasts” of the fields are named, but no “helper” is found, that God creates “Woman.” Later, as they are expelled from the garden and punished with work, desire, and the pain of childbirth, Adam asserts primacy as he finally names “the Woman” Eve. It is this act of naming, and the possession and approval that it signifies, that Curley’s wife and the girl have avoided. Other, named characters in the novels more complicitly cooperate with the morally corrupt systems of economics and culture shown to be ultimately destructive. With a focus on experience over idyllic conjecture, Steinbeck and Le Sueur employed forms of realistic reportage that also served the theme of this protest that reimagines the power and privilege of work, sexual desire, and parturition.

In *Of Mice and Men* the ranch hands are exploited by a system that consumes them as only labor, yet the men cooperate with and even perpetuate the status quo. Steinbeck shows how personally empowering good work could be while also exemplifying the abuse the men suffer impoverished to a system that exploits them as labor. The character of Curley’s wife stubbornly argues that the men have more choice than they admit. Her flamboyance first re-emphasizes the individual as one who would exalt self enough to demand a more immediate satisfaction, and who would also be honest enough to admit interest in social connection. Curley’s wife makes obvious that relationship matters, and that the heroism of the loner is ultimately tragedy.

In *The Girl*, Le Sueur more specifically incriminates the system that produces scabs, cheaters, and hapless dependents on luck. She limns a world full of skills and resources perversely wasted and dissatisfied, but also argues that it is a result of seeing and measuring the world against bankrupt standards. Le Sueur too begins her argument by refocusing on the individual and especially the feminine “essence.” But while exposing the system as based on suspect ambitions, she also exposes those objectives as arbitrary and changeable. The girl suggests that the clichés and very American stories we tell each other of individualism and consumerism are traps. As a most cogent and thoughtful reporter, the girl first exposes and then denies these influences. After considering life on the edges of a system that is failing so many, she uses her perspective to re-script the storylines we live by to more appreciate individual and varied purposes, in this way “enabling social and political resignification” (Butler 231) until each is equal and ultimately united with all.

Curley’s wife’s refusal to mask her dissatisfaction is a storyline that differs from the fierce stoicism that the ranch hands espouse to hide especially their sexual anxiety and repression. To mask their loneliness they instead perpetuate stories of independence and promises of future ownership. Curley’s wife bares proletariat behavior as competitive, stingy, segregationist, and shamefully obsequious, and thus false and as a result, vulnerable. Separation is exposed as pretense as characters echo each other in word and action, and as a result competition is exposed as nihilistic. American tales of independence are flawed stories when they could be instead of relationship. In this way, a more open and honest sexuality could result in a more egalitarian society.

Le Sueur too is critical of a world that accepts and perpetuates a corrupted and denied sexuality. Here too a more honest and experiential knowledge of self and others would create a more truthful identity, one much preferable to the puritanical fear of self and others. This passion in life would ideally create a passion for life, with an ensuing list of demands and more compelling claims on the world. And for Le Sueur those claims would be for connection; on the other side of this competitive existence of lonely suffering she envisions a loyalty to people and relationship rather than money. Le Sueur especially appreciates parturition as a powerful and rational commitment made out of the personal towards the communal. The girl's pregnancy is a refusal to be silenced, and in fact a "cry out" that challenges habitually selfish cultural ideology: a cry for all, a cry for loyalty, a cry against the silence, and a cry for community.

In both of the novels men blame women, as Adam did Eve, blind to their connections to each other, ignorant that selves are mirrored in each other, and competitively abusive of each other as a result. The girl and Curley's wife are women who not only revel in being freed from that "garden," but who also celebrate the knowledge acquired and absorbed. Curley's wife does not survive her story; she never leaves the space occupied and defined by the anxieties of the patriarchy. The girl does ultimately withdraw from traditional society into a small commune fashioned solely by women. The girl had proclaimed, "I had got desires now. It all broke on my tongue as if my bark was breaking.... I felt a great root springing down and a great blossom springing up" (Le Sueur 72). This humanistic response allows that it is human experience that creates identity; that personal pride comes with the

knowledge that experiences of work and sexuality provide; and that a sense of community, equal and uncensored, offers a sublime satisfaction. According to these authors we must first know and honor our selves in order to build a real community with each other, and then the simple and edenic pleasures of the “garden” could be integrated with the mature and experiential knowledge required to most fully possess it.

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