
Critical Review Of Mice and Men

In the realistically dismal novella *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck sympathizes with poverty-stricken characters that are stuck working towards the hopeless American Dream. He portrays the men and women as human beasts, stranded in a world of limited social roles, intolerance, and endless labor. Steinbeck juxtaposes this realistic depiction of daily life with the character's focus on a dream world that includes freedom, individuality, wealth, success, and loyalty. His straightforward writing style allowed the story to be widely understood by those caught in the Great Depression's soul-sucking grasp at the time of publishing, and by anyone from teenagers to adults today. By making a connection with the audience, presenting strong symbolism, and utilizing vernacular diction, Steinbeck subtly argues that the common dreams of people in this time period were unattainable and led only to a miserable cycle of work and tragedy while informing the reader of the true societal conditions of the 1930's working class.

Steinbeck evokes the reader's affections by having them sympathize with George and Lennie's situation and breaks their hearts by presenting the men's complex relationship that ended with a depressing death. By utilizing vivid imagery, Steinbeck has the reader appalled at the living situation the men are facing. At the very beginning of the book, the reader feels sorry as George and Lennie only have beans to eat for dinner, and is later disgusted when George discovers a can at the bunk house that says "...positively kills lice, roaches and other scourges" (Page 18). Through his supportive tone, Steinbeck illustrates how main character George has to be strict at times with the mentally impaired Lennie, gets mad at him sometimes, but softens up because he can't bear to see him upset. On page 32, George screams and cusses at Lennie, "Listen to me, you crazy bastard...don't you even look at that bitch" (Page 32) in an effort to save Lennie from possible conflict. Once the climax of the novel, Lennie's death, rolls around, the reader is heavily invested in the character's relationship and feels hatred towards George as he selfishly murders the handicapped man to try and keep his own job and future wealth. By getting them attached to the story, Steinbeck proves to the reader that the people of the 1920s and 1930s suffered through less than ideal living conditions, gave up friendships and accepted brutal tragedy in the name of the American Dream.

Steinbeck presents multiple motifs throughout the book that support his argument, and a notable form of this symbolism is the use of settings as symbols. At the very beginning of the book, Steinbeck introduces the pool and brush by the river. This pool represents safety, freedom, and seclusion. The characters enjoy the separation from society; when Lennie asks why they're sleeping near the pool George replies "Tomorra we're gonna go to work...Tonight I'm gonna lay right here and look up. I like it" (Page 8). Steinbeck continues to tie in this oasis later on in the story; Lennie flees to the "deep green...quiet pool" (Page 99) after his crime,

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expecting George to meet him there. Steinbeck expertly uses symbolism to depict the unattainable American Dream by contrasting idyllic settings with depressing tragedies; the place that Lennie imagined to be his safe haven turned out to be his death bed.

To ensnare the reader and allow them to truly understand the character's, Steinbeck expertly utilizes vernacular diction. This diction depicts exactly how the working class of California talked and acted in the 1930s; a characteristic of literary realism known as regionalism. Straying from the formal, clean writing of his predecessors, Steinbeck wastes no time in showing the reader that George and Lennie had to walk "...[A] God damn near four miles," because their truck driver was "Too God damn lazy to pull up" (Page 4). This use of cuss words, of how the men really talked, allows the reader to not only better understand what Californian working life was really like but how George truly feels. Steinbeck never makes the reader guess at how a character feels, instead using straightforward adverbs to show the character's current emotions. For example, during a bunk room conversation, "Carlson said casually 'Curley been in yet?...Whit said sarcastically 'He spends half his time lookin' for her, and the rest of the time she's lookin' for him'" (Page 53). Steinbeck uses words and spellings that are not classically considered correct in order to portray how working life really was and to give the reader insight into the true feelings of 1930s citizens.

Of Mice and Men informs the reader of the harsh reality of 1930s working life while conveying the message that the obsession with the American dreams of wealth and autonomy led to needless tragedies and broken relationships. Steinbeck's supportive but straightforward and honest tone allows the readers to understand exactly what he is trying to say. Through the use of literary devices, including emotional appeals, powerful symbolism, and regionalistic word choice, Steinbeck achieves his goals of revealing the lives of 1930s working men and shaming their fascination with the American Dream.

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