

# The significance of lennie's death in john steinbecks

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



*Of Mice and Men* is the story of two strong companions: semi-retarded Lennie and his friend and carer George. Set against the backdrop of depression-era California, this is a story of friendship and loneliness, compassion and cruelty, dreams and the harsh reality of life and death. The novel culminates in the death of Lennie, which has relevance to the themes present in the book: death, weakness, loneliness and hopeless dreams. During the story, Lennie is surrounded by death. However, in his childish perspective of the world he misses out on the dark and permanent side of death, the only impact it makes on his life is that he is fearful of the repercussions on his life and how George may not let him tend and take care of rabbits. Such is the case when he accidentally kills his baby puppy: " Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice. Now I won't get to tend the rabbits. Now he won't let me" (Lennie, Page 90) and when he kills Curley's wife (Page 96-7). The only death in the novel that evokes a deep sense of loss, in both the reader and the characters, is the death of Lennie himself. These seemingly random and increasingly important deaths give extra significance to Lennie's demise, as they gently build up over the course of the text to a climax when George shoots Lennie to prevent his torture by the lynch mob. This act bears a direct resemblance to the apparently merciful killing of Candy's dog earlier in the novel. Candy's dog was old and useless, and was put out of a slow and painful death by Carlson. Lennie, as a wanted murderer, could no longer move on and work. He would be hunted down and killed horribly or put in jail. Thus, Lennie's death is significant because it is the most hard-hitting death in the novel and mirrors the merciful death of Candy's dog. Lennie is a quiet, simple but strong man with

the mind of a child. His whole life was, at first, under the care of his Aunt Clara and, later, under the care and control of his friend George. His death is significant as he was, in terms of emotional capacity and dominance, at the bottom of the food chain. Such instances when he has contact with people other than George (Talking with Curley the first time, Crooks torturing Lennie with the thought of losing George, Curley's wife talking down to him in Crook's bunkhouse, etc), he is bewildered and hopelessly dominated. Most of those characters who prey on others in the novel are merely the weak who attack the weaker. Curley, as a short man with problems with self image, often fights and intimidates the ranch workers as he is the boss's son and is almost above reprove. Curley's wife, once she revealed her broken dreams and vulnerability to Lennie, Candy and Crooks in Crook's bunkhouse, immediately went on the offensive, insulting the three men and threatening to get Crooks lynched. The only people who do not intimidate others are Slim (The strong, respected skinner) and, to a lesser extent, George. These men are self confident and see no need to actively establish their position. Lennie, as an innocent and intellectually limited man is unanimously seen as someone who is at the bottom of the heap and it is significant that in this position he met his demise. Lennie and George, as dedicated companions are a rare sight in the world of "of mice and men." The boss of the ranch expresses surprise when he learns of Lennie and George's companionship: "Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy." (Boss of the Ranch, Page 23). Lennie and George are also aware of their special relationship: "But not us! An' why? Because, because I got you to look after me and you got me to look after you, and that's why." (Lennie, Page 14).

Even though everyone else seems to be alone and mercenary, Lennie and George share a unique and special bond. Other, lonely characters in the novel seek companionship or basic human contact in desperate ways. The old swamper Candy, after losing his dog, is keen on joining Lennie and George in their plan of buying their own land and living free. Crooks, the misshaped and outcast Negro on the ranch lives a solitary life away from the white men who cast him out, but when Lennie and Candy come in to his shack to talk, "It was difficult for Crooks to conceal his pleasure with anger." (Page 79). Curley's wife, however, is the most proactive in seeking attention and companionship in others. She acts very promiscuous around the men of the ranch but this is not because of any sexual reasons, she merely wants the attention and anyone to confide in. Lennie's death is significant because the only thing made George unique was Lennie himself. Limited though he was, Lennie was a companion and George is now one of the many faceless, lonely ranch workers. At the time "Of Mice and Men" was set, unemployment was sky-high, many people had to sell their land to survive and most people lived by doing hard labour at ranches and factories. Lennie and George are such folk who travel around, looking for work. Unfortunately, due to Lennie's mishaps, they have to move around quite a lot. However, George and Lennie have a plan, they dream of buying a small piece of land for themselves, where they can do what they want and Lennie can tend the rabbits. This dream of the two ensnares Candy and, to a lesser extent, Crooks. Though tempted by the pair's dream, Crooks is pessimistic. He's seen many a man talk of dreams and land before, but he knows that this is only a device to see men through the day, a horizon to look at but never cross. Curley's wife also

had a dream, one of being an actress and appearing in films. The only way that Curley's Wife could justify her existence is this dream, even though she will never reach it. Such is the case for Lennie, his only purpose was to work towards the dream of owning land and tending rabbits with George. Due to Lennie's mishaps this dream was never to be achieved. Lennie's death is significant because it shows that these dreams are never a reality and all planning for them is doomed to fail. Lennie's death is the final culmination of many strong themes throughout the novel: death, weakness, loneliness and dreams that are doomed to fail. Set against the mercenary and dreary backdrop of depression-era California, the book evoked images of an uncaring world which gave no opportunities or comfort for anyone, especially someone as ill-equipped as Lennie. Thus, Lennie's death is a stark and moving example of the nature of the world as it was in the novel.