

# Dreams on of mice and men

Literature, Russian Literature



Dreams, although often cut off are always necessary to keep the hope of people alive to fight against the inadequacies of the economic and social perils of life. Dreams are one of the most freely experienced actions by humans, and still it is the most rigid and unrealistic thought process that is part of our lives. The dream of most American's at this time period surrounding the book " Of Mice and Men" was only a large cesspool of dying hopes that were kept alive by wishes and aspirations even without success. They often have no power fulfillment or credence to them even though we as humans put so much belief and effort in them. Joesph Fontenrose comments that the novel I about " the vanity of human wishes" (Fontenrose 375). Dreams and willpower are necessary to keep hope alive in people. What was once the land of opportunity was now the land of desperation. What was once the land of hope and optimism had become the land of despair. Sometimes these dreams become nightmares because of the hardships that are endured through the trials of life and society. Many immigrants from Europe coming to America in hope of prosperity and easy living found themselves in conditions that were paralleled by the conditions in the European slums of the inner city. Howard Levant made the statement after a critical reading of the novel that " the good life is impossible because humanity is flawed" (Owens 146). The horrors of the American Civil War and the growth of towns with slums as bad as those in Europe, and the corruption of the American political system led to many shattered dreams. For society as a whole the American dream ended with the stock market crash on Wall Street in 1929. This was the start of the Great Depression that would affect the whole world during the 1930's. However the dream kept some hopes

alive and could not be suppressed by the heartbreaking circumstances endured by all Americans. Many moved to the west in California to escape from their land in the mid west. Californians who lived through the 1920s and 1930s must have felt as though they were on a roller coaster. In a dizzying cycle of boom and bust, a decade of spectacular prosperity was followed by the worst economic collapse in the state's history. Ramshackle encampments, such as Pipe City in Oakland, filled with forlorn unemployed workers and their families. The crash of the Macon, a helium-filled dirigible, mirrored the collapsing fortunes of Californians everywhere. The hard times of the thirties contributed to a disturbing resurgence of nationalism. The farmers in the Dust Bowl area of the country were hurt by a severe drought and were forced to move to California to make any money at all, usually working as a hired hand on a large plantation with many other farmers. The resistance of the unemployed became a major factor in the political and social life of the decade. Beyond this, the movements of the jobless fueled the organizing of workers in industrial trade unions in the late 30s and 40s and created the political impetus for the welfare state of later decades. The Great Depression struck California hard, just as it did countless other states and nations. It also helped remake California, writes Kevin Starr in the fourth installment of his multivolume history of the state. " The Depression brought a massive influx of hopeful refugees to California from elsewhere in the United States, including 300, 000 new agricultural workers--the people of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. These newcomers worked in the fields and stores for fifteen cents an hour while Hollywood made movies about their lot, Woody Guthrie sang songs about them, and union organizers tried hard to

make a labor-based revolution. The fortunes of these " Okies" is just one of the sweeping topics that Starr, a fine writer and imaginative chronicler, takes on in this book."(Starr 1). Lennie is constantly recognized as having a dream of " livin off tha fatta tha lan" (Steinbeck 14). Joesph Fonenrose states concisely that " The central image is the earthly paradise.....It is a vision of Eden. (Fontenrose 372). Peter Lisca takes this perception further, nothing that" the world of Of Mice ans men is a fallen one, inhabited by sons of Cain, forever exiled from Eden the little farm of which they dream" (Lisca 368). There are no Edens in Steinbecks writing, only illusions of Eden, and in the wicked world of the Salinas valley the Promised land is an illusory and painful dream. Donald Pizer calls the predominant theme of the theme of loneliness, because the worldis populated with sons of Cain that are condemed to wander in solitude," the fear of apartness" (Pizer 54). In fact one of the major themes of the book is the fear of loneliness. The dream of George and Lennie represents a desire to defy the curse of Cain and the fallen man, this is done to counter the theme of Pizer by breaking the pattern of wandering and loneliness imposed by the outcasts and return to their perfect garden. The dream of the farm symbolizes their deep mutual commitment, a commitment that instantly is noticed by the other characters in the book. For if only a moment the mutual commitment of George and Lennie has made the other characters their brothers keeper and broke the grips of loneliness and solitude in the world they are apart of. The selection of the setting is perfect with the city of Los Angeles being the city of dreams, its close proximity to the Salinas river and the town of Soledad makes it evident that Steinbeck intentionally placed the novel here. With Soledad meaning solitude

or loneliness in English, the state of the characters was taken into consideration with the setting. This is the state where most people travel to in order to pursue their dreams and most times leave solitary and unfulfilled aspirations. There is a sharp contrast made between George and Lennie, and then other characters because they have each other. At one point in the story George comments that " We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us" (Steinbeck 120). the migration of thousands of jobless and dispossessed Americans from the Dust Bowl states to the so-called promised land of California evokes the hardships and despair of the Great Depression. Lennie, constantly getting into trouble, inadvertently causes the two of them to be run out of town and thus have to find new work regularly. George and Lennie's search for work in the hope of accomplishing their dream of a small farm of their own displays how futile realizing dreams can be. " The never-quite-realized, too often shattered dreams of men toward an ideal future of security, tranquility, ease, and contentment runs like a Greek choral chant throughout the novel and the play, infecting, enlivening, and ennobling not only George and Lennie, but the crippled, broken down ranch hand, Candy, and the twisted back Negro stable buck, Crooks, who begs to come in on the plan George has to buy a little farm"(Rascoe 337). Crooks says, " Nobody never gets to heaven and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talking about it, but it's jus' in their head"(Steinbeck 74). Lisca proposes, " It is while Lennie is caught up in this dream vision that George shoots him, so that on one level the vision is accomplished -- the dream never interrupted, the rabbits never crushed"(Lisca 343). After the accidental death of Curley's wife, George cancels the partnership with Candy that could

have made the dream a reality, because George needed Lennie as a rationalization for his failure (Lisca 345). " The dream of the farm originates with Lennie; and it is only through Lennie, who also makes it impossible, that the dream has any meaning for George"(Lisca 345). The plan has no meaning for George without Lennie (Fontenrose 351). " Steinbeck said that Lennie represents 'the inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men,' and referred to its scene as a microcosm, making it plain that this novel was meant to express the inevitable defeat and futility of all men's plans." (Steinbeck 45). Fontenrose concludes, " A dream of independence, usually remains a dream; and when it becomes a real plan, the plan is defeated"(Fontenrose 350). Fontenrose, Joseph. in his John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963, p. 150, in Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 75, edited by Thomas Votteler, Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1993, p. 350-351. Lisca, Peter. " Motif and Pattern in 'Of Mice and Men'," in Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. II, No. 4, Winter, 1956-57, pp. 228-34, in Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 75, edited by Thomas Votteler, Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1993, pp. 342-345. Rascoe, Burton. " John Steinbeck," in Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-Five Years, edited by E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, University of New Mexico Press, 1957, pp. 57-67, in Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 75, edited by Thomas Votteler, Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1993, pp. 336-339. Steinbeck, John. Of Mice and Men. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.