

OF MICE AND MEN

The novel 'Of Mice and Men' is a tale of friendship, hope and tragedy. Set on a ranch in Salinas, California, it follows two friends, George and Lennie as they strive for a better life.

My first impression of the book was its excellent use of description. Steinbeck has a way of making ordinary things seem beautiful, such as making a sycamore tree's branches 'mottled, white, recumbent limbs'. Usually, when a person sees a tree, they just see an everyday object, and move on. Yet in just one - hundred and six pages, time is taken to let us visualise each scene and its contents. This level of detail is carried on throughout the novel, creating an image in our mind of what is going on.

The characters in the book are introduced seamlessly, either within a conversation or by a firsthand experience from George or Lennie. Every person, (or in one case, an animal) is proven to be important, and not just there to fill up space. Personally, my favourite character was Lennie. His hope and optimism never falters, and his everlasting faith in George shows what true loyalty is. Almost like a pet, he follows his friend around, willing to do whatever he is told. In one scene, George tells Lennie to say nothing when speaking to the boss on the ranch. Lennie obeys, and when asked his name, he waits for his companion to answer. He may be simple, but he knows how to follow orders, especially those coming from someone familiar.

A book is not a book without a story, and Of Mice And Men is not short of that! I tend not to read books unless I feel I can't put it down, a 'one more page' type of thing. This novel may have a basic plot to begin with, but once you delve further into it, a complex and intriguing tale is revealed, and the fate of the two men is threatened. They both want one thing, their dream, to 'live off the fatta the lan'. Set in the Great Depression of the 1930's, this dream seems impossible, how could these guys earn enough to buy a house, pigs, chickens and rabbits? I don't want to ruin the book, so I'll just say it all becomes more likely later on. The gripping nature of this novel comes from this possibility, and the 'Grand Finale' does not disappoint.

What, though, is the real selling point of this novel? The friendship. An unlikely pairing; a gentle giant and an intelligent, short tempered man. The strange thing is, it works! To quote their own words 'I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you', they need each other. Perhaps Lennie more than George, but they need each other nonetheless. This bond is stretched to the limit on various occasions, but never breaks.

The only real (minor) downfall of the book was some details left out. We are never given a name for Curley (the boss' son)'s wife, and the boss himself is mentioned once, then forgotten. Steinbeck may have done this intentionally, and it doesn't bother me too much, so I wouldn't let that put you off.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone with even a slight interest in reading, as it doesn't take long to get into, the plot is enjoyable and the writing on display is almost impeccable. I have read a number of books, and Of Mice And Men would probably have a spot in my top ten, if not five favourites. As tempting as it is to give away the conclusion, in the words of Lennie 'I ... I ain't gonna ... say a word.'

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