

# Friendship and loneliness in John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

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**Público:** Bachillerato. **Materia:** Inglés. **Idioma:** Inglés.

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## Abstract

John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men is a powerful book, for its simplicity, for its moving quality and for many other reasons. This article will be focused on the kind of relationship George and Lennie share, the main protagonists, and the role their dream plays in their lives as a way to escape the society they live in. This need to escape will also be shared by other characters as well. This novel is a cry of freedom from those no longer valid individuals in such a restrictive society.

**Keywords:** Friendship, Loneliness, Dream, Relationship, Partnership

**Título:** La amistad y la soledad en De ratones y hombres de John Steinbeck.

## Resumen

De ratones y hombres de John Steinbeck es un libro poderoso por su sencillez, por su cualidad conmovedora y por diversas razones más. Este artículo analiza el tipo de relación que comparten George y Lennie, los protagonistas principales, y también describe el papel que su sueño juega en sus vidas como una vía de escape de la sociedad en la que viven. Esta necesidad de escapar también la comparten otros personajes. Esta novela es un grito a la libertad por parte de aquellos que no son válidos en una sociedad tan limitada.

**Palabras clave:** Amistad, Soledad, Sueño, Relación, Compañerismo.

Recibido 2016-01-18; Aceptado 2016-01-20; Publicado 2016-02-25; Código PD: 068052

Lennie is a simple-minded man, tall and big, with enormous strength and tender feelings, who accompanies George, a small and slender man, both in search of a farm work. These great differences between them would make people think that George is using Lennie for one reason or another. However, George's feelings towards Lennie are not malicious. Though sometimes George calls Lennie "bastard" or "son of a bitch", he loves him deeply.

The society in which they live is made by men, solitary and aggressive men. People do not share anything. There is no communication, no partnership among them. That is why the relationship between George and Lennie is so strange and odd, because they are not on their own. They need each other, they love each other, they trust each other, and they are aware of it. Lennie likes listening to George when he tells him about their friendship.

Sometimes George seems to miss the kind of life he could have without Lennie. But George needs Lennie just as much as Lennie needs him. There is a very close bond between them. They share a dream, a dream that means comfort. Lennie



Of Mice and Men theatre performance. (Source: <http://www.photosforclass.com/search/of%20mice%20and%20men/1>)

asks George to tell him the dream many times in a need for that safe song that is going to protect him. And when George repeats Lennie the dream, it becomes also the way for him to feel comfortable. It is a dream of independency, of privacy, of quietness, company and friendship. They wish to have a small ranch of their own, with cows, chickens and rabbits. This dream becomes a way to escape a society with suit only a few. This dream becomes the means to keep them going.

George and Lennie are not the only ones that need to escape their situation. Curley is the son of the boss. He is a small man, as Lennie, a product of nature, and he is rather aggressive, a behaviour which is after all a means to escape his smallness. He has a wife whose name is not given, as if she were non-important in this community composed of men. She is stereotyped and men in that society can only think of her as a wife or as a prostitute, but not just as a human being. She needs to have relationships with people, and to attain this she uses the only way she knows, that is her beauty and sexuality. She knows that men in a ranch are eager to be with a woman, and she takes advantage of this not to be alone. We notice that she is fed up with that style of live in which men form a community. She also complains that she is all alone and that she can only speak to Curley. She feels that she is nobody and remembers once when a show passed through Salinas as a lost chance in her life. She has expectations that cannot be fulfilled in the ranch and her life is hollow. But her dream is there. She finds in Lennie the only person she can talk to truly, and real human contact takes place in the barn.

Candy, the old swamper, also suffers in this community. He is old and not fit to survive in this territory any longer, where everybody needs someone or something to hold on to. Candy holds on to his dog. When it is shot, Candy breaks completely, though he recovers his hopes when hearing of the dream of George and Lennie. It becomes also his dream, his particular way to escape on the one hand and to keep going on the other.

Crooks, the stable man, is another character with problems in this novel. He is African-American and has a pain in his back. He is also alone and escapes from his situation by reading. When Lennie enters his privacy he also finds in him a person to whom he can talk sincerely. Lennie is a passive listener that provides the way for other people to say their sorrows. Maybe that is why George also needs him.

Slim is the good figure in such a society. He represents all that is good, just, calmed and balanced, and he is conscious of that terrible place he lives in. He is also surprised because of the strange relationship between George and Lennie. Slim is the one that at the end seems to see beyond. He is able to see in Lennie one more, not just a simple-minded.

As mentioned above, Lennie remains the only person to whom people can talk their true feelings. When Lennie is in the barn, Curley's wife talks to him. In that moment we become aware of all the suffering she is going through. Here, in the barn, one of the most tragic passages of the novel takes place: Lennie, a prisoner of his strength, kills Curley's wife which will result in his own death. This action will bring many problems to Lennie. It could be said that this tragic episode is not just a killing. The fact that everything has taken place in the barn is full of significance. The barn is a safe, warm and comfortable place, the place in which death might be lighter. Besides, the killing has been performed by a person with no malicious intentions at all. This killing could mean the liberation of Curley's wife who had been imprisoned in a community which did not accepted her as such. Her killing is a kind of rebirth for this woman who at last has been liberated from her cage. When Lennie becomes aware of his act, he remembers what George told him once in case he got in trouble: to follow the river and to hide in the bush.

Once more in American literature the river remains that safe, beautiful and quiet place. It is important how water helps people. Water gives life and protects it. When Lennie kills Curley's wife he goes straight to the river. There, he will be found by George, self-shocked because he is quite aware that their dream has now gone pieces. At this point we remember the passage where Candy's dog is shot by Carlson. The dog becomes a symbol for these people, who are no longer valid in this society, people who are old, black, or simple-minded. Candy says that they have killed his dog because he was any more valid, and he wishes to happen the same to himself since he also recognises his uselessness in that West Country. Now, Lennie becomes another no-longer valid figure in this society, and George shoots him so that he can be free. George cannot bear the idea that Lennie could be shot by someone else as happened to Candy's dog, or that he could be kept in prison. George, in a kind of parallel structure to the one of the barn liberates Lennie of his weight: having to live in a society made only for a few. In the same way as Curley's wife's death took place at that safe and comfortable barn, Lennie's death happens in the safety of the river, and he dies when he is being told the dream once more.

Lennie's death in the river can only mean liberation for him, a continuation of that dream in another sphere in which live has a meaning. For George, the death of Lennie means not only the dream gone to pieces, but his own psychological death as well. Just as Candy needed his dog, George needs Lennie, and his life breaks completely in this act of liberation. However, he will never feel ashamed for having let in others' hands the killing of the person he loved most.

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