

I. Features of Steinbeck's Novel

1. Naturalism

John Steinbeck is considered one of America's greatest Naturalist writers. The Naturalist literary movement is characterized by literature that employs the following features:

- Naturalist writing is devoid of many poetic features that authors might use. The prose uses few descriptions that provide images for the reader, and instead, focuses on the explanations and details. While *Of Mice and Men* contains passages of description (specifically the beginnings of chapters one, five, and six), a majority of the text is free from metaphor. Naturalist writing explores sociological conditions in a mostly objective manner, rather than focusing on the beauty of the language and story.
- Naturalist writing explores conflicts between social classes, particularly the exploitation of workers by those in positions of power. For example, in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck examines a microcosm of America by creating George and Lennie as characters who are trying to survive on a ranch, while at the same time creating a story that reflects the larger societal conflicts at hand—the lack of public policy to aid those afflicted by poverty and homelessness. Steinbeck's examination of both the microcosm and macrocosm describe American politics in the 1930s.
- Similar to the social commentary provided by Naturalist literature, *Of Mice and Men* is also a document of migrant workers in the 1930s. Naturalist writers create stories that tend to focus on one specific occupation or trade in order to document society, gathering specific data about actual life before writing. Also, because the literature focuses on one occupation or trade, the setting is usually limited to one less-than-ideal place, in the case of *Of Mice and Men*, a ranch. The setting provides a detailed look at the most brutal aspects of life that accompany self-preservation and basic human needs. Steinbeck used his ranching experience, as well as his experience in the Salinas Valley in order to create a novel that is almost more textbook than literature.
- Naturalist writers create stories in which the narrator or reader is an observer in the story. The characters created in the story, devoid of free will, are inserted into specific plots and observed as they cope with what fate presents. In *Of Mice and Men*, many of the characters strive for the American Dream. Lennie and George want only to make enough money to buy their own land; however, the characters are robbed of their dream by circumstances that seem beyond their control.

2. Genre Conventions

The novel is written as a play-novel, or a cross between a novel and drama. Each of the six chapters is an extended episode: action takes place in one scene and opens with a description of that scene. In each of the six chapters, characters enter and exit the scene with what seems like stage directions. Because of the large amount of dialogue, when the novel was actually rewritten as a play, much of the dialogue remained the same. The novel is economical: the language is simple, the dialogue tightly-knit, the most complex vocabulary is about farm equipment. There are very few characters in the novel and any symbolism or foreshadowing deliberately points to the inevitable end.

3. Use of Figurative Language (simile, metaphor, foreshadowing)

While a Naturalist writer, Steinbeck still employs literary and figurative devices from time to time for the sake of tone, mood, and meaning:

Simile

Be certain not to miss the “like” or “as” when reading the descriptions. For example, when Steinbeck describes the setting he writes: “On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones.” (p. 2)

The comparison not only establishes the peacefulness of the scene, but also suggests the lifelessness of it. As events in the novel transpire, the dream of the “rabbits” will, in a sense, turn to stone.

Metaphor and Imagery

Throughout the novel, Steinbeck uses animal imagery to describe his characters. For example, when George and Lennie are by the pond, “Lennie dabbled his big paw in the water and wiggled his fingers so the water arose in little splashes....” (p. 3) The image of the paw suggests that Lennie is a very large and powerful man.

Foreshadowing

There are quite a few incidents of foreshadowing in *Of Mice and Men*. The examples are not subtle, but instead directly lead the reader to the conclusion. For example, the comparison of the rabbits to lifeless stone sculptures foreshadows the death of George and Lennie’s dream. Also, in the first chapter, George warns Lennie that if anything happens while they are at the ranch, Lennie should return to the clearing (p. 15), clearly suggesting that something will indeed happen. Likewise, Lennie’s accidental killing of his puppy foreshadows his accidental killing of Curly’s wife.

OF MICE AND MEN

Chapter 1

lumbered-moved heavily, as if weighed down

junction- a point of union or connection

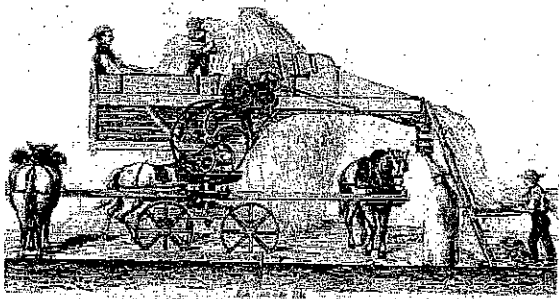
mottled-spotted, blotched with colors

recumbent- leaning, resting

heron- a long-necked wading bird with a long tapering bill, larger wings, and soft plumage

bundle- a blanket-roll or a pack of personal belongings

thrashin' (threshing) machine- a machine for separating grain crops into grain or seeds and straw



brusquely-shortly, abruptly, ungraciously harsh

imperiously-commandingly, arrogantly, dominantly

morosely- sullenly, gloomily

jack-slang for money

yammered- uttered repeated cries

Chapter 2

scourges-causes of widespread or great affliction

swamper-a general assistant, a handyman, a helper

graybacks-slang for lice

tick-a mattress consisting of its tick (fabric case) and its filling

liniment- a liquid or semiliquid preparation applied to the skin as a pain reliever

buck-a male human being, a man

buckers-those who move or load heavy objects

skinner-a driver of draft (team animals)

cultivator-a machine used to loosen the soil while crops are growing

plaintively-in a woeful or melancholy tone

barley-a cereal grass used in malt beverages, breakfast foods and stock feeds

mollified-soothed, appeased, assuaged

pugnacious-having a belligerent, aggressive nature, combative, truculent

derogatory-expressive of a low opinion, degrading, disparaging

tart-prostitute

trace chains- two chains, straps, or lines of harness used to attach an animal to something (as a vehicle) to be drawn

contorted-twisted into a strange shape or expression

mules-shoes or slippers without heel straps

brittle- sharp, tense, lacking warmth

bridled-showed hostility or resentment

archly-forwardly, impudent

apprehensive- anxious, fearful

wheeler-a draft animal (a horse or a mule) pulling in the position nearest the front wheels of a wagon

complacently- with self-satisfaction

grizzled-streaked with gray

Chapter 3

found-free food and lodging in addition to wages

scuttled-ran playfully and nimbly, scurried

derision- an expression of ridicule or contempt

receptive—open and responsive

rheumatism-any of various conditions characterized by inflammation or pain in muscles, joints, or fibrous tissues

euchre-a card game in which each player is dealt five cards and the player making trump must take three tricks to win the hand

kewpie- a small chubby doll with a topknot of hair

goo-goos-slang chiefly used in the phrase "goo-goo eyes" used here to

mean those girls who are love-struck or romantics

hoosegow-slang for jail

reprehensible-deserving of criticism or censure

bemused-lost in thought

welter (welterweight)-a boxer weighing more than 135 lbs. but not more than 147 lbs.

wryly- cleverly, often with ironic or grim humor

solemnly-seriously, gravely

Chapter 4

aloof- reserved, emotionally detached

hame-one of two curved projections which are attached to a collar of a draft animal and to which the traces are fastened

fawning-humble, spiritless

disarming- displaying no criticism or hostility, ingratiating

booby hatch- slang, insane asylum

sullenness- gloominess, disagreeableness, sulkiness

contemptuously- despising, disrespectfully

indignation-anger aroused by something unjust, unworthy or mean

bindle stiff- hoboes, homeless migratory workers

floozy- cheap, immoral, tawdry

appraised- evaluated, judged

crestfallen- humiliated, ashamed

Chapter 5

consoled-n. an influence that spreads easily

earnestly-n. the beginning of a journey

writhed- n. burden

bewildered- adj. vague, not fixed in advance

Chapter 6

scudded-moved swiftly as if driven forward

skittered-glided or skipped lightly or quickly along a surface

snooker- a variation of pool played with fifteen red balls and 6 balls of various colors

belligerently-assertively, with hostility

dutifully- with a sense of duty, obligation or respect

