

# Minor Characters in *Of Mice and Men*

---

## Kai Zheng, Kevin 3F(14) S10(12)

---

*Of Mice And Men*, a well-known novella written by *John Steinbeck*, is situated in *Salinas California, United States* during the Great Depression, where the migrant workers struggled to live on ranches to pursue their American Dream – to 'live off fatta the lan'. However, as wonderful the dream might sound, *Steinbeck* picked up the real sound from the minor characters such as, Candy the handicapped and discriminated but dreamful man, Curley's wife who suffered from loneliness because of sexism, and Crooks the resentful black stable buck whose dream has never come true. These minor characters act a significance role in the plot as well as portraying the big picture of the severe social issues in the 1930s American Society.

Firstly, Candy has revealed that how the pipe dream can fizzle out despite of the generous financial support. Candy comes with curiousness to the bunkhouse to listen attentively to George and Lennie's conversation. George is telling Lennie the second time about their dream utopia where they 'got a little win'mill ... a little shack ... a chicken run ... a place for alfalfa ... a smoke house' and life whey they can smoke the bacon and hams, sausages and salmon. Candy, the family-less old becomes affected and suggests to contribute to their dream eagerly that 's'pose I went in with you guys, Tha's three hundred an' fifty bucks I'd put in ... but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the gardne some'. With the financial aid and the future physical support from Candy, readers are confident and hopeful that the dream can come true one day. However, the dream breaks down immediately after Lennie has killed Curley's wife. In fact, the death of Candy's dog foreshadows how quickly the dream will break down – as the dog is shot immediately after Curley has promised to contribute to the dream. The tradegy shows how the American Dreams of the minor characters – the migrant works – in the society can break down quickly.

Secondly, Curley's wife loneliness in the ranch shows the problem of sexism. In the story, Curley's wife is not even given a name, as if she is an object owned by Curley. She is constantly referred to as 'a tramp', 'tart' and a 'looloo' that is a break-jail for men. The men only emphasizes on her appearance such as her heavy made-up, cotton house dress and red mules, and they boycotts her because they 'do not want to get into troubles'. More lonely Curley's wife is, the more she trys to approach the workers to flirt with them. However, the more she flirts, the more she becomes a victim of sexism. This derogatory attitude toward Curley's wife highlights the misogynistic culture in the United States in 1930s, where women are possessions who did not own a name who can never pursue their dreams.

Moreover, Crooks the black stable-buck shows the problem of racism and the discrimination to disabled. Crooks on the ranch is the only black man that he has to experience and receive a great amount of racism and discrimination. In Chapter 4, he even admits his low social status by describing himself with racial slurs such as "this is just a nigger talkin', an' a busted-back nigger". Mainly due to his race, he is forced to 'keep his distance' from other ranch hands; yet, he keeps the

*California civil code 1905* as he still beleives he has civil rights as protected by the law. However, even Curley's wife can threaten him with ease that she claims she is now 'standin' here talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs-a nigger' and will 'get him strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny'. The reality is, the black people in the American society were not only discrimminated and not protected by laws, they were segregated and even been treated like slaves despite of the abolition of slavery and serfdom. Similar to women, black people can never pursue their dreams as well, and will become as resentful and bitter like Crooks.

In a nutshell, the minor characters in the book - Candy, Curley's wife and Crooks - all shows that the American Dream is unfair to the minority and the severe discrimination against the minor communities in the American society at that time. Should there be no movements in human civil rights and movements against racism and sexism in the recent years, these minor characters in the society would still suffer from much pain and loneliness.