

Notes on *Of Mice and Men*

themes and motifs:

- **man's vulnerability to fate**
 - the callousness and indifference of the universe in the face of need, suffering, and death
 - the inevitability of certain events—for example, the fatal flaw that leads to one's demise
- **the relationships between prejudice, intolerance, misunderstanding, and fear**
 - these forces lead to alienation and separation in modern society
- **solitude**
 - all human beings are ultimately alone despite the power of friendship and kindness
- **the sustaining power of dreams**
 - contrasted with the hopelessness and self-destructiveness of those without dreams
 - but the loss of one's dream can also cause profound disillusionment, passive acceptance of one's fate
- **the importance and power of friendship and loyalty**
 - people have a need for closeness and understanding
- **the plight of the "common man"**
 - the working class's experiences characterized by alienation, isolation, and powerlessness
 - the tragedy of "social cripples": those who aren't valued by society

symbols:

mouse, puppy, rabbits:

- Lennie's need for affection
- the vulnerability of all living things to fate (serve to foreshadow Curley's wife's death)
 - ironically, Lennie himself is somewhat like these things in his vulnerability

old dog:

- the powerlessness of those who aren't valued by society

farm:

- heaven
- impossible dreams that both sustain and frustrate people
- the unattainable American Dream

bird eating snake (near the end of the book):

- the indifferent workings of fate

setting sun:

- endings (foreshadowing)
- death
- loss of hope

Crooks's injury, Lennie's retardation, Candy's missing hand:

- the powerlessness of those who aren't valued by society
- fatal flaw or weakness that leads to one's doom

prostitutes, alcohol:

- self-destructiveness
- the need for escape from reality characterized by hopelessness, powerlessness, desperation
- powerful desires and needs that cannot be repressed; urges that prevent the realization of one's dream

solitaire:

- having to make one's own way in life
- our ultimate aloneness as individuals
- universal feeling of alienation and loneliness

names:

- George Milton: reference to author of *Paradise Lost*
- Lennie Small: both ironic and fitting