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

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