

(c) 'Dreams do the characters more harm than good in *Of Mice and Men*.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? [20]

The Great Depression began after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, severely impacting the global economy. Companies went out of business, leading to mass unemployment, with 15 million people losing their jobs. Most banks collapsed, wiping out life savings and pushing previously stable Americans into extreme poverty. The financial crisis affected both city dwellers and farmers, whose land was ruined by the Dust Bowl. Laborers like George struggled, moving from job to job in a desperate attempt to survive. This instability caused families to separate, leaving many workers lonely and fostering a survival of the fittest mentality. In this competitive environment, men preyed on each other to gain an advantage, leading to widespread discrimination, including sexism and ageism. Dreams and aspirations provided a temporary escape from daily troubles but were often unrealistic. This is why the statement "Dreams do the characters more harm than good in *Of Mice and Men*" is accurate, as pursuing these dreams often led to disastrous consequences.

The dreams of the protagonists, Lennie and George, can be seen as doing them more harm than good. Their dream of owning a farm, where Lennie could "*tend the rabbits*", served as an escape from the harsh reality of their lives as itinerant workers in 1930s America. The Great Depression led to mass unemployment and widespread poverty, making their dream of owning land difficult to achieve. Their friendship is unique in the novella, as many characters are lonely, yet their dream inadvertently drives them further apart. Lennie's childlike nature and lack of self-awareness cause him to accidentally kill Curley's wife, shattering their dream and forcing George to make the heart-wrenching decision to kill Lennie to protect him from a worse fate. George's reluctant acceptance of this responsibility, as seen in his statement "*I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you*", highlights the devastating impact of their dream on their relationship. Additionally, the dream's unattainability is emphasised by Crooks, who cynically remarks, "*Ever 'body wants a little piece of lan'. It's just in their head*", reflecting the widespread disillusionment of the era. In conclusion, although Lennie and George's dream provides temporary solace, it ultimately does more harm than good by exacerbating their suffering and undermining their bond.

Curley's wife's dreams also cause more harm than good. Her unfulfilled aspirations of becoming an actress in Hollywood are evident when she tells Lennie, "*I coulda made somethin' of myself... maybe I will yet*". Her dreams reflect the limited opportunities for women in 1930s America, as societal expectations often confined them to domestic roles. Curley's wife's dream leads her to feel isolated and trapped in her unhappy marriage, making her seek attention and companionship from the other men on the ranch. This behavior results in the other characters perceiving her as a flirtatious troublemaker, with Candy referring to her as "*jailbait*". This negative perception intensifies her loneliness and further alienates her from the ranch community. Her pursuit of companionship, driven by her unattainable dream, culminates in the tragic encounter with Lennie. Unaware of Lennie's strength and his obsession with soft things, Curley's wife allows him to touch her hair, leading to her accidental death when Lennie panics and inadvertently breaks her neck. Ultimately, Curley's wife's dream of escaping her oppressive circumstances and achieving stardom not only isolates her further but also brings about her untimely demise, demonstrating that her dreams do more harm than good in the context of the novella.

The character Candy embodies the theme of dreams causing more harm than good. As an aging, disabled ranch worker, Candy clings to the dream of owning a piece of land with George and Lennie, saying, *"S'pose I went in with you guys. That's three hundred an' fifty bucks I'd put in...I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I want to"*. This dream offers Candy hope and a sense of purpose, filling the void left by his dog's death, but ultimately leads to disappointment. His desperation to escape his lonely, isolated existence at the ranch makes him vulnerable to the unrealistic dream that George and Lennie share. The harsh reality of the 1930s Great Depression rendered many Americans unemployed and struggling, making it nearly impossible for laborers like Candy to achieve their dreams. The tragic events that unfold in the novella, such as Lennie accidentally killing Curley's wife and his own subsequent death, shatter Candy's dreams. When the dream finally collapses, Candy exclaims, *"You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we?"*. These repeated questions reveal Candy's growing despair and the damage caused by his dreams. In the end, the unattainability of the dream exposes its harmful nature, ultimately leaving Candy with a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment.

The character Crooks exemplifies how dreams can cause more harm than good. As an African American stable hand with a crooked back, Crooks is isolated from the other ranch workers due to the rampant racism and segregation during the 1930s in America. Living in a separate room, he develops a cynical outlook on life and dreams. When Lennie shares the dream of owning a farm with him, Crooks initially scoffs, saying, *"I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads...An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it"*. Despite his skepticism, Crooks is momentarily drawn to the dream, asking, *"If you... guys would want a hand to work for nothing—just his keep, why I'd come an' lend a hand"*. This moment of hope highlights the allure of dreams, even for someone as disillusioned as Crooks. However, the discriminatory society of the time, combined with the harsh realities of the Great Depression, make the dream unattainable. When Curley's wife threatens Crooks, he is painfully reminded of his marginalised status, causing him to retract his interest in the dream, telling Candy, *"I wouldn't want to go no place like that"*. Ultimately, the dream's futility reinforces Crooks' sense of hopelessness and confirms his belief that dreams only bring pain and disappointment.

In conclusion, Steinbeck poignantly explores the theme of dreams causing more harm than good through the experiences of its diverse characters. While dreams offer temporary solace and hope amidst the harsh realities of the 1930s Great Depression, they also generate disappointment and despair when they remain unattainable. The characters' struggles to achieve their dreams, set against the backdrop of societal discrimination and economic turmoil, highlight the detrimental effects of chasing unrealistic aspirations. Steinbeck's portrayal of dreams ultimately serves as a reminder that while they can provide comfort, they can also lead to pain and disillusionment when confronted with the unforgiving realities of life.