

Dualistic Image of Nature in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*: An Eco-critical Study

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Abstract

Destruction of nature has motivated the literary writer's sense of moral and artistic commitment to safeguarding the environment and maintaining its resources. Despite the proliferation of critical studies devoted to Steinbeck's literary achievements, the ecological concern of his literary production is limited. This study analyzes Steinbeck's dualistic image of nature as both benevolent and destructive as fictionally presented in *Of Mice and Men* (1937). The main themes of the text include nature in its pristine state, connectedness with the environment, meaningful life, realities of life, hierarchical system of domination and oppression, self-centeredness, group formation, victimization, discrimination, treating women as an object of possession, and relationship with nonhuman world. The study concludes that the politics of race, class, and gender combine to engender human and environmental destruction. Steinbeck places a huge emphasis on the interconnectivity of everything on the planet. It is crucial that human beings develop a rapport with nature.

Key Words: Nature, ecology, eco-criticism, J. Steinbeck, dualism, *Of Mice and Men*, harmony, interconnectivity, Great Depression

Introduction:

Destruction of nature has motivated literary writers' sense of moral and artistic commitment to safeguarding the environment and maintaining its resources. The aim of this study is to analyze Steinbeck's dualistic image of nature (environment) as both benevolent and destructive, as fictionally presented in *Of Mice and Men* (1937). This dualism originates from the cultural hierarchies of class, gender, and race. The idealistic beauty of nature at the beginning of the text confirms the benevolent supporting aspect of nature that enhances the formations of an idealized friendship between its principal characters; George and Lennie. As the story

develops, the perfect image of nature is turned into chaos. It is as a result of some arbitrarily imposed cultural politics of hierarchy based on dualism (male/female, white/black, poor/rich, and nature/culture). Central to this study is the treatment of such pivotal themes as environmental degradation and human exploitation of resources. Justifications for the selection of this topic are associated with the idea that despite the proliferation of critical studies devoted to Steinbeck's literary achievements, the ecological concern of his literary production is limited. Hence, the present study is motivated to bridge the gap between environmental studies and literature through

tackling Steinbeck's literary text, *Of Mice and Men*, from an ecological perspective.

For many years ago, J. Steinbeck's literary production had been the focus of many critical studies. These studies scrutinized his literary works from different perspectives. However, it is only in the previous decade that Steinbeck's ecological perspective was started to be considered by few studies. For example, one study acknowledges Steinbeck's environmental ethics asserting his ability to render the ecological moral code of his works (Hicks). Another study discusses Steinbeck's idea of ecological holism in his three works. These include *To a God Unknown* (1933), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *East of Eden* (1952) (Wasinrat). The study defines the idea of holism as the oneness of the human and the natural environment as well as that of humans and their social surroundings. Michael JI. Meyer's *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* is the most comprehensive companion to *Of Mice and Men* for the researchers, teachers, and students (Andrews 131).

A famous study about Steinbeck's ecological thinking is *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (1997) by Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr. It is an interdisciplinary collection of essays that analyzes the aspects of Steinbeck's writings that were previously neglected by scholars. These essays are regarded as a dynamic contribution to study the writings of Steinbeck from an environmental perspective. The book emphasizes that Steinbeck was able to think ahead of his time and the literary work is supremely

relevant to the contemporary context. Of importance in this respect is the examination of *Of Mice and Men* from an eco-critical perspective. Steinbeck's ecological views are evaluated as fictionally delineated in his novels to the extent that he is regarded as an 'ecological prophet' (Simmonds 323). However, his ecological concern in *Of Mice and Men*, in particular, has not received ample consideration. The consideration of the ecological aspect of *Of Mice and Men* in this study will be of a paramount significance, hence lies the importance and novelty of the study.

The ardent concern with the environment has necessitated critics to evolve a new genre of criticism called 'eco-criticism'. The main theme of eco-criticism is the assumption that the structures and ideas of desire which derive the interactions between the natural environment and the humans are of paramount importance to get a grip on the ecological predicament (Bergthaller). Eco-criticism is concerned with the relation between humans and nature, the relationship of human beings with each other, and with their environment, as reflected in literary texts. 'Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Glottfelty and Harold xviii). Eco-criticism has its origins in the interconnection between culture and nature, the cultural artifacts of literature and language, and human cultures in the real world. According to Joseph Meeker, literary ecology is 'the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human

species' (Glotfelty and Harold xix). William Rueckert coined the term eco-criticism in 1978. In his essay *Literature and Ecology*, he asserts that it means 'the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature' (Glotfelty and Harold xx).

Eco-criticism not only replies to the American nature writing but also attempts to raise awareness in the society. It explores 'the intersection of art with the rhythms and textures of life on earth and, throughout that exploration, achieve a deeper resonance, raising fundamental ethical questions, demanding that we think carefully about how to live well and wisely' (Ryden 8). Eco-criticism tries to modify the consciousness of the people. William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology* has put it, 'how can we resolve the fundamental paradox of this profession and get out of our heads? ... How can we move from the community of literature to the larger biospheric community which ecology tells us ... we belong to even as we are destroying it?' (Glotfelty and Harold 121).

At school, Steinbeck had a keen interest in the work of literature. He began writing short stories. His wide reading of plays, novels, poetries, myths, and texts provided him in-depth knowledge and he became a multifaceted personality. He joined Stanford University to study English literature, French, biology, zoology, and marine science. Steinbeck's ecological understanding is influenced by many contemporary factors. Brown, Steinbeck's teacher, was a strong believer of the interconnectedness of sciences and modern philosophy. He was of the opinion that science characterizes the physical universe

while philosophy makes it agreeable to the condition of man. Hence man, like any other organism, is an integrated whole existing with other integrated wholes and within the larger integrated whole which is the physical universe. He opines 'a true naturalist should take as his vocation the task of understanding the organismal basis of living nature and the unity of life' (Benson 235).

In this respect, man's closeness to nature is emphasized by Steinbeck. He firmly believes that man's body itself is from the elements of nature. He stresses the indebtedness of human beings to the earth, to nature from which man originated. 'Our bodies came from this soil - our bones came ... from the limestone of our own mountains and our blood is distilled from the juices of this earth' (DeMott xxx). Hart quotes Anders Osterling's opinion: 'But in him [Steinbeck] we find the American temperament also in his great feeling for nature, for the tilled soil, the wasteland, the mountains, and the ocean coasts, all an inexhaustible source of inspiration to Steinbeck in the midst of, and beyond, the world of human beings' (Beegel et al. 44)

Two ideas are regarded as a product of the association of Steinbeck with Ed Ricketts; the phalanx and non-teleological thinking. There appears to be an incompatibility between the possibility for beneficial group action by the phalanx and the amoral passivity of 'is' thinking. 'Is' thinking particularly appears foreign to the moral indignation that is part of much of the fiction of Steinbeck. Steinbeck's idea of Non-teleology has its basis in the theory of Darwin. Darwin considered things holistically and also focused on the

interconnectivity. Non-teleological or 'is' thinking accepts the circumstances without questioning or probing deeply to any happening:

Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be or could be or might be, but rather with what actually is - attempting utmost to answer the already sufficiently difficult question 'what or how', instead of 'why'... Those who think non-teleologically more than any other thing is capable of great tenderness and an all embracingness which is rare otherwise It sees life as a whole, not through the narrow spectacles of specialized interest: the whole forms part of the picture only and the infinite whole is unknowable except by being in it, by living into it. (Steinbeck and Ricketts 135-148)

Dualism, as the concept indicates, implies a kind of conflict and opposition between two competing forces. The term was initially coined to represent binary opposition that is co-eternal. The meaning is preserved in philosophical duality and metaphysical discourse. However, it is also generalized to denote a system containing two essential parts. In the philosophy of mind, dualism refers to the claim that matter and mind are two categories that are separated ontologically. In the philosophy of science, dualism means that there exists a dichotomy between the subject and the object or the observer and the observed. Moral dualism refers to the conflict between the malevolent and the benevolent. It represents an aspect that destroys the harmonious coexistence in the universe. When the relationship between

two elements of the universe is dichotomic, the ecological atmosphere is reduced to a chaotic state. As a moral and literary ecologist, Steinbeck has fictionally emphasized the destructive effects of dualism on the environment. Dualism and binary opposition deeply penetrate the texture and structure of *Of Mice and Men* to stress the novelist's eco-critical ethical dimension.

Discussion:

Of Mice and Men, 'one of Steinbeck's most compressed and unified works,' (Timmerman 96) was set during the period of the Great Depression. It presents the suffering and frustration of most American working class people. They were plagued by poverty and unemployment due to the crash of the stock market and natural calamities. People found themselves disintegrated, alienated and displaced in an inhospitable world. Hopeless and helpless, workers migrated from one place to another searching for jobs. Sometimes, they were hired by agencies to work as farmhands. Ranch hands, like George and Lennie, were satisfied with a low pay as long as they were provided with food and a bunk house to live in.

The opening setting of the book which represents the nature in its pristine state establishes tranquility and beauty. It introduces the place where George and Lennie, the protagonists of the work, decide to settle in before going to the ranch. Nature is filled with life and beauty as described in the following lines:

On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan Mountains, but on

the valley side the water is lined with trees - willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter's flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. On the sandy bank under the trees the leaves lie deep and so crisp that a *lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them*. Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening. (3; emphasis added)

The setting incarnates a pleasant and soothing atmosphere. The adjectives used like fresh, warm, green, and golden impart to the scene, feeling of relaxation and calmness. The scene also suggests optimism and hope to accentuate the idyllic image of the place. The reader infers the existence of harmonious relationship among all the species of nature that eradicates all aspects of insecurity and disturbance. The charming nature of the place invites people to restore their energy and get relaxed. The poetic idyllic description of the setting is erupted by the intrusion of two characters, George and Lennie. They roam the wilderness to search for a job, with their bindles on their backs. Unable to cope with the changing socio-economic conditions of their environment, George and Lennie find physical and emotional security in nature. Since they do not have a place to live in, nature becomes their shelter where they can cook and sleep surrounded by the flora and fauna of the Salinas River. The symbolic comfort and safety of the river bank is stressed when George tells Lennie to return to the river bank if he ever gets in trouble.

The harmonious atmosphere of nature strengthens and nurtures a strong bond between these two helpless people. Despite their physical and intellectual differences, they develop a complementary relationship. In this relationship, 'George is the mind, the parent, and the controller; Lennie is the body, the child, and the controlled' (Doyle 83). Their complementary and sustaining relationship enhances their need for each other: 'I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you' (Steinbeck 15). They attempt to establish a friendly relationship with nature and its elements. This connectedness with the environment is practically manifested when George asks Lennie to have balance in drinking water. Doing so, George tries to stop Lennie from abusing water as an essential environmental resource. Lennie's love of nature is shown in his habit of petting small animals.

In a reciprocal kind of relationship, nature bestows her bounties on George and Lennie. It nourishes their bodies with food to eat and a shelter to rest in. It also provides them with serenity and calmness to activate their minds and to draw their dreams and future plans of having their own land: 'we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and—' (Steinbeck 16). It is worth noting that, in their dreams, they do not aspire for accumulating money or wealth. Instead, they hoped to get a land and to raise some animals that emphasize their strong friendship with nature.

The world of the ranch manifests images of ugliness and malevolence. Aspects of beauty, serenity, fairness and calmness in the outdoor nature are replaced with forces

of evil, injustice and depravity inside the ranch. The bunk house, located inside the ranch, is bleak and dark. It is described as a 'rectangular building...', 'the floor unpainted...', and 'there was nailed an apple box' (Steinbeck 19). The atmosphere is aggressive, dull, and uncomfortable. Lennie, the innocent and sensitive creature is the first character who infers the ugliness of the place. He announces his dislike of the ranch when he says to George 'I don't like this place, George. This ain't no good place. I wanna get outa here.' (Steinbeck 34). It is unhygienic and lacks the basic accommodations. George perceives its dirtiness and comments: 'What the hell kind of bed you giving us, anyways' (20). Besides its physical bleakness, the world of the ranch is dominated by a segregating and insensitive system of hierarchy. It is, in one sense, a metaphor of human society during the 1930s where people are oppressed by their social and economic conditions (Bruszt 9). Steinbeck fictionally illustrates the plight of its inhabitants of social outcasts. He attempts to show the suffering of poor farmers, women, black people (Hart 35) and those with mental and physical disabilities.

Lennie's mental retardation makes him the object of victimization even by other victimized people like Crooks. For example, he is tortured by Crooks's threatening words about George's never returning back and 'They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, *like a dog.*' (35; emphasis added). Candy is another victim in the ranch world. Because of his old age, poverty, and physical disability, he is humiliated and marginalized. Steinbeck refers to him as 'jus' standin' in the shade'

(26) to assert his insignificance and the low status he possesses. He knows that his usefulness at the ranch will soon be over, and he is frightened of the future.

Besides his being economically unimportant, Crooks, the stable hand, is the most persecuted character in the novel. In his description of the character of Crooks, Louis Owens writes:

an animated reminder of America's slave-holding economy, his twisted back evidence of the human cost of that economy. The fact that Crooks's family once possessed a farm identical to the dream-farm George and Lennie yearn for underscores his commonality with these men who are fodder for the machine, but the volume of the California Civil code for 1905 that sits on Crooks's shelf *testifies to his awareness of difference.* (4; emphasis added)

His blackness alienates him from other ranch hands. He is often referred to as 'nigger' by his fellow ranch workers. He is not welcomed inside the bunkhouse and is forced to live in seclusion. At Christmas, the white workers make him an object of entertainment. They tie his hands back and fight with him. The stigmatic color of his skin increases his bitterness against the white workers. He refuses to allow Lennie enter his room saying: 'You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room. *Nobody got any right in here but me.*' (69; emphasis added). He is severely humiliated by Curley's wife who threatens him fiercely: 'I could get you strung upon' to establish aggressive white supremacy over the black. It is ironic to find in Crooks's room books

about human rights to prove the insensitivity of the world of the ranch, which dehumanizes people due to the color of their skin ignoring their knowledge and open-mindedness.

Curely's wife is another victim of the patriarchal system of the ranch. She is married to a man who does not give her love or respect. She is regarded as an object of possession by Curley ignoring her as an independent human being with feelings and thoughts. She is treated 'as property, as chattel of the ranch like the other powerless workers' (Hart 36). To stress her marginalization, she remains nameless in the text. She is always referred to as 'Curely's wife' to subordinate her to the authority of her husband. She is described by many characters with degrading terms such as 'tart' and 'ratrap'.

As a moral ecologist, Steinbeck demonstrates that hierarchal systems and structures based on domination and subjugation are responsible for environmental degradation. They separate man from his community and turn him into a passive being living, working for himself. An excellent example that proves this view is when George and Lennie have their first meal in the ranch. Since they are new, Slim advises them to get the food before it finishes. 'You guys better come on while they's still something to eat. Won't be nothing left in a couple minutes.' (Steinbeck 37). This confirms the selfish and the inhospitable nature of the ranch men, which is largely contrasted with the natural world of the opening scene. They do not care if other men had anything to eat and they just think about themselves. In such a

community, man is hesitant to be an active participant in the construction of a healthy environment. Steinbeck opposes the idea of people as social organisms living and working by themselves (Shillinglaw 9). He disapproves itinerant workers' loneliness due to the selfish and cruel system of living 'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the *loneliest guys in the world*. They got no family. They don't belong no place...they ain't got nothing to look ahead to' (15; emphasis added). In an oppressive environment where individuals are trapped by their own self-interests, there is no place for emotional bonding.

Consequently, Steinbeck's ecological mind dictates that environmental stability can astutely be achieved through the catalysts of solidarity and interconnectedness of human beings as social organisms on the one hand and their environment on the other. Steinbeck's phalanx permeates the story and explains the desire of the characters, particularly, of the wretched of the earth to constitute a group of individuals collaborating to fulfill a definite aim (Doyle 82). In *Of Mice and Men* and other novels, as Steinbeck said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he celebrates 'man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit' (22). As a result, belonging to a group is a prerequisite for environmental rehabilitation. To survive the insensitivity of the surrounding, men form a group that functions as individual social organisms. The individuals that make up the group have a common goal and they strive to fulfill it. Steinbeck has written in one of his letters in 1933, 'The fascinating thing to me is the way the group has a soul, a drive, an intent,

an end, a method, a reaction and a set of tropism which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make up the group' (Steinbeck and Robert 76).

Of Mice and Men demonstrates the significance of solidarity and belonging to a group. George and Lennie, the helpless migrant workers, originate a group of friendly and caring companions to confront the toughness of the Depression era. More importantly, the strong bond between George and Lennie invites other depressed and discriminated characters to be active participants in the group with a common and noble goal they all aspire to achieve.

George and Lennie strive to achieve their dream of having a land of their own: 'Someday - we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and... live off the fatta the lan', Lennie shouted' (Steinbeck 16). It is this dream that gives substance to their relationship. This dream of a beautiful and idyllic land sustains their utter need of contentment and safety from the cruelty of life. It is turned to be like a song they try to recite to cheer up their dejected souls. The dream of having a land and raising animals establish their connectedness with nature since it involves certain practices such as planting, gardening and harvesting that practically relate them to the cycles of the natural world. The litany that George keeps on repeating to Lennie about the farm becomes a ritual that creates a mystical bond with this parcel of land and gives meaning to their existence.

Their deep obsession with the dream as an escape from the harsh reality motivates other

oppressed ranch hands to participate in carrying it out. Old, disabled and heartbroken after the brutal killing of his dog, Candy offers all his savings to George to share in buying the farm of their dream. He eagerly explains to George his part in the dream:

I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys. If they was a circus or a baseball game... we would of went to her... jus' said 'ta hell with work,' an' went to her. Never ast nobody's say so. An' they'd of been a pig and chickens... an' in the winter... the little fat stove... an' the rain comin'... an' us jes' settin' there. (Steinbeck 9)

Crooks, suffering from racial discrimination, makes cynical remarks accentuating the impossibility of fulfilling one's dreams in a segregating society. When he first listens to Lennie's account of the farm dream, he claims:

I seen hunderds 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. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. (Steinbeck 73)

However, he is ready to change his scornful remarks when he realizes that the dream is so substantial since it is initiated by a group of men and is funded by Candy's money:

If you guys would want a hand to work for nothing - just his keep, why

I'd come an' lend a hand. Via collective work and cooperation of the group man to achieve this noble goal, the dream can be a possibility. These cooperative intentions of George, Lennie, Candy and Crooks create self-confidence and attic belief which make them feel they could swing her. (61)

The pivotal significance of the dream 'is its ability to unite people in their struggle to define themselves and their lives' (Levy 68). Unfortunately, in a society which is governed by cruel hierarchal system of domination and oppression, group man dream dissolves to ashes (Hart 33).

Integral to the notion of interconnectedness of all entities –human and non-human– is the idea of man's closeness to nature which is reflected in the choice of the title of the text. The title which is taken from Robert Burn's poem 'To a Mouse' suggests that the lives of men and animals are deeply linked. Both of them struggle for survival, yet their dreams and plans are doomed to failure by 'forces bigger than themselves' (Reinking 30). As a result, one can claim that man is deeply connected with the nonhuman world and the change in one system influences and affects another. He is a co-inhabitant and part of the creation. The relationship is shared with all creatures.

Man's affinity with the non-human world is fictionally presented through Steinbeck's delineation of his characters in *Of Mice and Men*. Man has a coexistence with animals and plants on equal sphere. The coexistence follows a system of close connections. The realization of the wholeness of nature and its inseparableness assists human beings in

living in it without damaging it. The prospect that a man is a species-being and has a sense of oneness with the universe should not make him passive. Existence has a definite pattern in man. He enjoys uniqueness in all creatures due to his responsibility to exhibit kindness to other creatures. The character of Lennie is deeply associated with nature through a series of animal imagery. He, for example, walks heavily like a bear (Steinbeck 1). He acts like a bear when he says he can go and live in a cave (30, 145). In the text, Lennie is described by others as a bull (43) and referred to as a cuckoo (65). When he is hit by Curley, he 'covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with terror,' like a sheep (91). These associations, definitely, emphasize rather than diminish his innocence. Lennie's love to pet animals like rabbits, for example, which stand for beauty, simplicity and innocence displays his deep innocence and love of nature.

Lennie's loyalty and innocence, derived from his closeness to nature, nurtures his relationship with others. Lennie gives meaning and substance to George's life. It is through Lennie, George abandons the aimless life of a helpless migrant worker and strives to achieve more meaningful existence. Dejected and depressed, Curley's wife, Candy and Crooks turn to Lennie to be relieved from distress and loneliness because they find in him the attentive ears that listen to their anxiety and suffering. Like nature in the romantic tradition, Lennie bestows salvation on the dejected and exhausted souls of modern civilization. For example, in a long passage, Crooks expresses his sad and vulnerable situation

without anybody to rely on or to relieve him from his loneliness. He finds in Lennie's careful listening, though devoid of comprehending the abstract notions of his speech, the fulfillment of an ardent desire for a companion: 'a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. *The thing is, they're talkin'*, or they're settin' still not talkin'. It don't make no difference, no difference' (70; emphasis added).

The character of Lennie emphasizes how man's closeness to nature is disturbed by the dialectics of nature and culture, human and animal, and civilized and primitive. Steinbeck has figuratively linked Lennie to the animal kingdom to stress his primitive nature which is not tolerated by modern civilization. His innocence and mental disability make him vulnerable to exploitation by other characters. His relation to George is like that of a dog to its master: 'Good boy! That's fine, Lennie! Maybe you're gettin' better... Lennie choked with pride. I can remember, he said' (Steinbeck 33). In addition, he is badly used as an object of ridicule by George who asks him to jump in the river though Lennie does not know how to swim. As a retarded person, Lennie is taken care of by George who arrogantly claims 'he coulda bust every bone in my body jus' with his han's, but he never lifted a finger against me' (41). He is antagonized by Curley who always picks fights with him. When Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife, her husband decides to take revenge. He organizes a group in order to search for Lennie and to 'shoot the guts outa that big bastard' (70).

It is fundamental to discuss how the nonhuman world which constitutes an integral part of the environment is exploited by the hierarchy of human culture. Aristotle held that 'after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and ... the other animals exist for the sake of man' (Taylor 149). This view is deeply ingrained in human culture to accentuate man's superiority over other species. It is worth noting that *Of Mice and Men* is abundant with many examples of man's violation of the rights and laws of the nonhuman world causing disorder in the ecological system. In the opening chapter, the serene and idyllic scene of nature is disrupted by the arrival of the two characters: George and Lennie. Their presence, in the beginning, has disturbed the calmness of the scene. It has scattered and frightened the safe animals: 'The rabbits hurried noiselessly for cover. A stilted heron labored up into the air and pounded down river' (Steinbeck 1). Lennie's habit of petting small animals involves separating these poor creatures from their natural habitat and social groups denying them the needs of normal development. There is nothing worse than killing these animals out of love. Lennie's inability to control his physical strength leads to his unintentional killing of them. In an attempt to explain how he kills the mice, he says to George, '...pretty soon they bit my fingers and I pinched their heads a little and then they was dead--- because they was so little' (10). Carlson's heartless shooting of Candy's dog and Slim's drowning of his dog's puppies are all manifest examples of man's role in the extinction of animal species. The uncontrollable use of insecticide by farmers

is mentioned by Candy to 'positively kills lice, roaches and other scourges' (20). Needless to say, long term exposure to such chemicals has damaging effects on the biological system of the environment as proved by scientific research.

It is important to consider that *Of Mice and Men* opens and ends with the same setting of the bank of Salinas River. By creating this circular structure deliberately, Steinbeck has ecologically confirmed man's affinity to nature. George and Lennie end at the same place, they start from, without achieving their dream. The tranquility, peacefulness and beauty of the first scene are disturbed in the final scene by the noise of the wind scattering the 'dry brown' leaves. The snake of the first scene which glides 'smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head from side to side' (83) and lives harmoniously with other animals appears in the final scene to be ruthlessly swallowed by a heron. The brutal killing of the snake foreshadows Lennie's death. The scene is evil and affirms the predatory nature of the humans and animals. The sense of hope found at the beginning of the book is replaced by a tense and violent mood. The natural world at the end of the text which incarnates barrenness and bleakness reflect the spiritual and moral sterility of modern civilization. Man's attempt to exploit nature leads to environmental confusion. Natural disturbances are caused by man's indifference to the environment and the marginalization of human nature. Man is vulnerable to be victimized and destroyed as a result of the damaging hierarchal dualistic system he unrelentingly imposes on the environment.

Conclusion:

To sum up, *Of Mice and Men* has fictionally expounded that all hierarchical social systems and structures are responsible for the environmental crises and problems. The domination of man over man is the root cause for environmental degradation. The contrasting images of nature as a friend and an enemy are artistically delineated to denunciate man's ideology of hierarchy. Nature is portrayed as a benevolent nurturing force when values of justice, equality, and compassion prevail. However, when oppression, injustice and exploitation triumph, nature is turned to be an evil, malevolent force. The study concludes that the politics of race, class, and gender combine to engender human and environmental destruction. As a moral ecologist, Steinbeck has proved his uncompromising commitment to the environment. He places a huge emphasis on the interconnectivity of everything on the planet. It is crucial that human beings developed a rapport with nature. It will safeguard the nature and bring an ecological balance. The friendship between George and Lennie is idealized to accentuate that compassion is necessary for guarding our entities of the earth and for helping human beings to guide our decisions regarding the problems that deplete the environment. The study highlights the significance of the identification and collaboration between the human world and the environment. It can end all forms of racial, social and gender oppression and encourage human values of justice, tolerance and equality to attain environmental sustainability.

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