

The Strange Case of Stock Figures and Their Loneliness in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

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Abstract

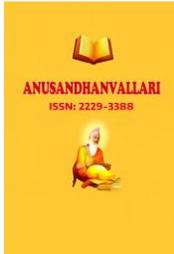
This paper analyses the alienated characters of the migrants in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife are among the most well-known characters who suffer from acute loneliness throughout the novel as a result of being detached from the general human population. In the plot, the characters experience estrangement due to their radically different circumstances from everyone else in the story. This article uses Karl Marx's idea of estrangement, which has its roots in his theory of human nature, to investigate this situation. The study successfully illustrates 'Alienation from species-being,' which is the fourth characteristic of alienation upheld by Karl Marx. In order to anchor the issue, this theory has been applied to explore loneliness and the pursuit of dreams amidst the character's adversity. From the analysis, the study discloses that liberation from alienation efforts have gone unrecognised and continue to be unheard in society. Thus, this study has attempted to discuss the theme of alienation and the nuances of the word alienation thoroughly.

Keywords: Alienation, unequal distribution, unrecognised, loneliness

Introduction

Humans, like all other organisms, need social connections to feel comfortable. They learn through interactions and communication with other people, which enable personal growth and identity development. In *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck presents a highly uncommon picture of the characters who are alienated and disheartened by their sense of loneliness and isolation. The three characters, Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife, feel alone since they are deprived of social interaction with other intellectual people. Their existentialistic essence is reflected in the hollowness they confront deep inside their souls.

The issue of social alienation is introduced at the beginning of the story through the characters' relationships with one another. The characters experience the same feelings of alienation, exploitation, and loneliness as actual migrant workers. They suffer from estrangement, which is mostly brought on by adverse circumstances and their intellectual detachment is at the core of their estrangement. Therefore, the number of their rootless grows daily. For instance, Crooks feels estranged all the time for different reasons. Since he is black and the people around him are racist, the ranchers aggressively avoided him, and he is left on his own. Compared to everyone else on the ranch, he receives unique treatment. The other character, Candy's lack of meaningful relationships makes him feel even more



alone. On the ranch, he has no relatives or close friends; his elderly dog is his sole friend. The third character, Curley's wife's being stuck in an unpleasant marriage and no one communicates with her, so she feels estranged.

The study reveals the state of alienation and exploitation through the marginalised characters of Crooks, Candy, and Curley's wife. Through their deeds and the other characters' descriptions of them, John Steinbeck tries to capture the characteristics of the characters as accurately as possible. The study can be correlated with Karl Marx's theory 'Alienation from species-being,' which is shown on a deeper level. The plot reveals that the characters feel a loss of identity and detachment from other human beings.

Study Objectives

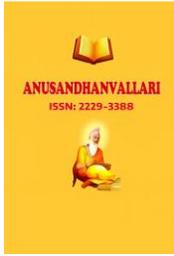
The study aims to analyse the representations of the stock figures and their loneliness in line with Karl Marx's theory. Alienation from species-being showcased in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The stock figures for loneliness are dissected into two categories: 1) Exploring their desire for companionship more persistently and unflinchingly. 2) Investigating the depth of social alienation is doomed to bear a stab of emptiness. Here, each aspect sheds light on the various layers of the character's rootlessness and highlights the potential dangers of alienation resulting in unfortunate isolation. Therefore, this research has the objectives of a study based on the forms of characters.

Methodology

This paper uses a descriptive methodology to analyse how Crooks, Candy, and Curley's wife are portrayed as receiving unfriendly treatment. By gathering information from the novel, a descriptive approach is offered to determine how the author has expressed his opinions about alienation. It offers a thorough analysis based on a close reading of the novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937), utilising the theory of Karl Marx's alienation. As a result, the study's foundational module is alienation factors.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the work seeks to accomplish the significance of the study, which will benefit future scholars. John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a perfect example of the complex social exclusion that the two protagonists faced. This study's primary goal is to investigate human rights violations while highlighting the need for people to modify their biased attitudes towards one another. This interpretation also emphasises how detached and distant the characters are from their interpersonal relationships. The inclusion of behaviours that function as useful instruments and the loss of important relationships with others are essential components of this discourse. In order to help individuals comprehend how alienation is a result of negative modernisation and what impact alienation has on people, this research offers a new method of evaluation.



Literature Review

Numerous influential and critical figures in the field of alienation have laid the groundwork for the major theme of this research. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand what alienation actually entails. Sociologists claim that alienation is a central issue in the modern human situation. A dictionary of literary terms defines alienation as "the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind." According to G.H. Nettler: "anomia is personal disorganisation; alienation is a psychological state of an individual and alienation is in the person who has been estranged from or made unfriendly towards his society and the culture it carries." (2)

Jyoti Singh, in *Theme of Alienation in John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* (2021), claims that among the other characters who have been abandoned and let down are Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife. According to him, when people have someone they can turn to for guidance and protection, they are at their best.

In the research of Yudi Efendi entitled *Tokoh Tragedi dalam Novelet of Mice and Men by Karya John Steinbeck* (1997), his study made an analysis that clarified the many significances of characters' behaviours in response to their tragedies. His study focusses on the manner in which characters undertake significant activities to deal with the negative occurrences in their lives.

Yossa Galuh Darhantian's *Marxist's Alienation in John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men's Characters* (2016) shows that the story's protagonists are estranged in line with Marxist's characteristics. Even though the study's primary focus is on Marxist alienation, since capitalism is a key component of Marxism, it is crucial to discuss its role in the narrative.

Rara Novita, in *Alienation of Modern Man in John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men* (2014), asserts that certain social dynamics in society that generate a clear separation between man and society are the root cause of alienation.

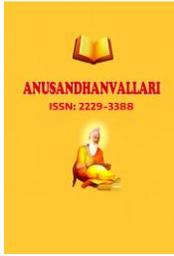
Subsequently, alienation is the main source of human misery, the author focused on alienation, as the review indicates. In summary, this paper examines alienation from Karl Marx's standpoint within the setting of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Therefore, this approach differs specifically from previous studies in that it addresses characters who are alienated.

Discussion

In the sphere of literature, dramatic literary works shed light on the painful experiences of human alienation, which have become useful instruments for identifying oppressive legacies. The study reveals existentialists' uncomfortable sense of alienation, which is often entwined with loneliness. The debate suggests that the three characters' hope was that they would discover companionship to cope with their loneliness, but the other characters created an alienation situation among the characters.

Stock Figures and Sense of Alienation

In the contemporary scenario, the majority of people have encountered alienation at some point in their lives. The main factors that contribute to it are individual decisions and the barriers that society has put in place. Many people are compelled to live alone due to societal obstacles erected by others in their geographic area. Similarly, the



chosen novel for this research explores the two characters' experiences of identity loss and self-alienation. Alienation is often the outcome of their lack of social support. Investigating John Steinbeck's thoughts of alienation and identification as they appear in his writings is therefore fascinating.

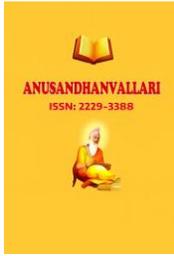
This study focusses on circumstances in which John Steinbeck's characters actively relate to alienated concepts. It also discloses the characters' many experiences of estrangement. The characters had a deeper sense of alienation and identity loss as a result of this type of loneliness seeping into them. It was thought that even if the characters had ambitions, their inability to overcome life's obstacles prevented them from ever being able to completely realise them. Through the characters, it maintains estrangement by illustrating how these people's vices or limitations, physical or mental, keep them from realising it. Consequently, it revolves around this basic human need that, despite its greatest attempts, remains unfulfilled.

The paper starts by analysing the character Crooks, who is the only other black figure on the ranch and is kept apart from the other characters. The real basis of his alienation is not only being black; it is the class disparity. Crooks is a metaphor for a person who, over experience, is comfortable in loneliness and thinks that social contact is inappropriate. An understanding of Crook's loneliness may be gained from his past. He was reared on his father's farm and says, "There wasn't another coloured family for miles around. And now there ain't a coloured man on this ranch, and' there's just one family in Soledad... If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin' it." (70)

Sadly, Crooks is the only worker who encounters animosity and estrangement from coworkers. His living conditions serve as a constant reminder of his solitude. Because of his race, Crooks is physically separated from the other ranch labourers. His physical isolation causes him to grow bitter and aggressive towards anyone who approaches him, underscoring the detrimental effects of loneliness. "Crooks, the negro stable buck, had his bunk in the harness room, a little shed that leaned off the wall of the barn." (66) Further, he is portrayed as living in a harness room, while they all reside in a more fitting bunk house. The horse should have lived there, but it is not a human place. This shows quite clearly that he is not one of the other males. Capitalism has caused him to become estranged, wherein the lower class is essentially exploited by the superior elite.

Crooks tries to keep himself detached from others when working because he has been excluded from every activity for an extended period of time. When Lennie Small first enters his room, Crooks begins talking about how alone he feels and how discrimination impacts him. Crooks discusses his feelings with Lennie on this: "A guy needs somebody? to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make any difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. I tell ya. I tell ya a guy gets too lonely and' he gets sick." (72-73) Obligated, shunned and abandoned by the other farmhands, Crooks becomes agitated and cruel.

Black and physically challenged, Crooks is compelled to live on the periphery of ranch life. The pitiful situation is that he is not even permitted to visit their lodgings or play cards with the others. He is a lonely and miserable man who lives alone in a room off the barn. The stableman, Crooks, is homeless and in need of help, much like the other immigrants. He also feels alone. Crooks says: "...I ain't wanted in the bunk house, and you ain't wanted in my room." (68) It is acknowledged that he feels isolated, as those of his hue do not receive the same respect. Moreover, he was alone and had no one to confide in or ask for help when he needed it. Although it is easy to oversimplify Crooks' attitude towards loneliness by seeing it in this binary fashion, it is crucial to understand that loneliness is not something he chooses; rather, it is something he becomes accustomed to. Therefore, Crooks' character highlights the idea of loneliness and the need for companionship as the central elements of existentialism. It is clearly understood that lonely



people do not have relationships with other people. The analysis shows that he highlights African Americans' problems as well as the pervasive prejudice of the time.

Ageing is an inevitable part of life and often results in significant changes to one's physical, psychological, and social features. When older individuals are kept isolated from the rest of society, social relationships break down extremely rapidly. According to the study, growing older can also cause a profound sense of alienation from oneself. When people experience a loss of identity due to age-related bodily changes, it can lead to a form of alienation. The disparity between their internal sense of self and their external reality may cause them to feel alienated from their own bodies and identities.

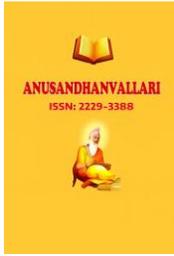
Another character in the story, Candy, a farmhand on a ranch, suffers from estrangement as a result of becoming older. He fears that if he continues on the ranch, ageing will make him wage a losing war against himself. For him, finding a job on the ranch is more difficult, especially after he suffered serious injuries. Candy is also terrified of what growing older could bring for him. It also results from a fear of falling behind. So, one could argue that his fear of growing older and the associated constraints are the root of his loneliness.

Candy shares a room with another man that is close to the barn, but he feels alone and isolated since he is physically separated from the other guys and cannot engage in the activities of the other ranch workers. His inferiority complex, stemming from his race, causes him to live in seclusion. Due to his physical separation from the other workers, he feels alienated by the layout of the ranch. The novella also illustrates the various ways in which people become estranged from one another due to geographic circumstances, including a shift in perspective, a drive for independence, a lack of trust in one another, an increased sense of vulnerability, social disengagement, and a failure to adjust to a new culture.

Candy has an old dog with pale, blind eyes, a grey snout, and a limp. Candy was left alone, and their close relationship was broken when the dog was shot and killed. The dog's passing represents both old Candy's and all of those migrant labourers' predetermined failure and fall in life. It is evident that the dog gave his life meaning and that he spent most of his days with the dog, who was a true friend. Later, he became much more fearful and estranged after losing his dog, who was the one companion he had who was always there. Candy is irrelevant on the ranch, as he is viewed as less useful and marginalised because of his age and disability. He is in need of a companion but goes unrecognised as he is unable to form relationships with others.

The study analyses another character, Curley's wife, who is a prime example of loneliness and searching for identity. In the plot, she would constantly approach individuals and ask them about her husband: "Have you guys seen Curley?" (61) By raising this question, she tries to start a conversation with others, but because she was the boss's wife, nobody wanted to talk to her. She retaliates: "I got nobody to talk to. I got nobody to be with. Think I can just sit home and do nothing but cook for Curley? I want to see somebody. Just see them and talk to them." (49) Curley's wife was thus abandoned and alone till her death. She thus became irrationally angry with everyone.: "Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely... get lonely. You can talk to people but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else, he gets mad. How'd you like not to talk to anybody?" (86-87)

According to the plot, Curley's wife is also weak because of the prejudice that women face in our culture. She also says she does not like her husband and doesn't want to stay in jail all the time. It should be noted right away that John Steinbeck gently underlines the idea of loneliness in this research. The majority of the study presents estrangement as a pervasive and destructive force that impacts all of the plot's major characters. Each character



experiences loneliness and isolation to varying degrees, highlighting the challenging conditions that underprivileged people face in a society that values strength, utility, and conformity. According to the interpretation, John Steinbeck emphasises the significance of human beings in the world, just like Karl Marx. Here, Curley's wife's attempt to strike up a conversation with the others demonstrates the extreme lengths one may go to in order to prevent isolation. It is also noted that due to society norms and the treatment of other people, such as Candy, the old man, and Crooks, the black stable hand inevitably suffers. It is only because of their social inequalities, Crooks, Candy, and Curley's wife are the most alone characters in *Of Mice and Men*. It is noted from the analysis that they also have no relationship to any of the other characters in the story.

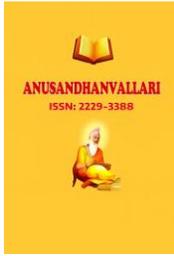
According to the study, John Steinbeck eloquently examined the problems associated with loneliness and provided examples of how isolation is detrimental to mental health. Every person's experience of estrangement adds to a realistic portrayal of the human condition. In addition, the novel's setting during the Great Depression, a time of intense social and economic change, highlights the characters struggles with loneliness as they try to overcome life's obstacles. Notably, the storyline heavily emphasises the need for social connection and the detrimental effects of seclusion.

According to the study, none of the characters have truly achieved companionship or happiness because alienation serves as the most melancholy reminder of life's harsh realities. It is noted for the study on the lives of helpless victims that John Steinbeck conducted using his own observations. From Steinbeck's writings, one may infer that these defenceless individuals would have had the same level of luck in capitalistic American society if only a few external factors had been altered. Steinbeck spoke of valuing the magnificence that exists inside our hearts and souls. Each of his suffering characters carries a message that affirms everyone's natural capacity for life through their bravery, grandeur, and triumph.

Humans are members of unique societies, each of which is made up of various social classes, cultures, and religious beliefs. If their needs, aspirations and companionship are denied, they feel alienated in the throng. This study shows that Crooks is alienated ethnically, Candy is alienated because of his old age, and Curley's wife is isolated as gender biased.

According to the study, John Steinbeck is among the most well-known and significant social protest writers in American literary history. In actuality, Steinbeck is exceptional in both his social critique and his politeness. Notably, he uses his works as a means of expressing his criticism of society as a whole, acting as a wake-up call against harmful practices and a path towards their rectification. His anger, which comes through in a few of his writings, did not prevent him from seeing that goodness is fundamental to human nature and that evil just has to be awakened from its slumber.

In addition, he was a writer who adeptly used his expertise to awaken the awareness of his complacent people and shatter their complacency in order to build a better and more prosperous future. The only things that might have inspired Steinbeck's inventiveness and given American literature a really golden voice were his empathy, love, and humanitarian concerns. It is clear that the progressive separation of the ego results in alienation, and isolation ultimately leads to survival. A thorough analysis of a few of John Steinbeck's writings identifies a recurring motif.



Results

The goal of this thorough analysis of the work is to pinpoint the moral transgressions experienced by the three characters. The study navigates the unsettling reality of imperial rule and women's subordination. These are the outcomes: 1) John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a harsh depiction of alienated characters; the characters who long for company are unable to speak with any of the characters, which is extremely embarrassing for any human being. 2) The hopes and dreams of the characters provide insight into their internal conflict. Here, the character's alienation is not their individual alienation but their whole humanity. Therefore, it can be revealed that the various acts of enforced alienation symbolise a profound loss not just for the individual but also for the entire community.

Conclusion

The chosen characters in the plot make it clear that humans are entangled by exposing this deliberate abuse. It can be revealed that they are taken away from companionship violently; this is a calculated action concealed behind the false mask of human wellbeing. The character's elimination represents a clear-cut cultural threat that causes them to be dislocated from their own community. The three characters are motivated by an inner quest to discover the meaningful purpose of existence, which drives them to fight a never-ending war against harsh, alienating conditions. Therefore, the intense isolation experienced by the three characters may be seen through the prism framework of Karl Marx alienation theory.

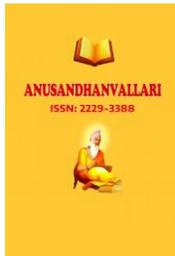
The study of alienation in relation to human beings in this novella is important because it provides insights into the social as well as psychological conditions of depression. It is also possible to understand the impact of poverty, inequality, and constant migration on the characters' lives and relationships. Likewise, the study of alienation in relation to other humans can also shed light on more significant social issues, such as human interactions and the effects of instability on individuals and communities. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the realism and cultural context of the novel. Its' themes and issues provide valuable insights for observing human behaviours in contemporary society.

Study Recommendations

This study focusses exclusively on literary texts; the imposts are based around societal reforms. The following lists the specific areas in the literary realm: 1) There should be more writers' works included in this extension. 2) To investigate how imperialism has affected the characters. 3) The other characters alienation and survival can be analysed.

Study Limitations

Primarily, the present study uses John Steinbeck's play *Of Mice and Men* as its main source to examine how society alienates the characters. The playwrights' other works are not included in this study to exclusively study the select novel. In addition, the research is limited to a single author, purposefully left out in order to highlight the plot's authenticity. Furthermore, the study only examined the alienated characters; it has not compared the other alienated characters.



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