

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Great Depression era is the worst economic downturn in the history of America because of the crash of the stock market in 1929–1939 (“Great Depression History”). Due to massive unemployment, many people labored to find a job and were willing to work as migrant workers. Being one of the greatest historical events, Great Depression was used and became the topic for some authors for their literary works.

Of Mice and Men is one of many literary works which use Great Depression as their topic or background setting. This novel by John Steinbeck has won several awards and was also adopted into a film which was nominated for four categories in Academy Awards in 1939. This novel is not long, yet considered as a great work because it gives a vivid description about the condition of America during The Great Depression era. Despite its shortness, *Of Mice and Men* is regarded as a great literary work because it raises issues such as racism, sexism, and the Great Depression. Steinbeck also uses simple and vernacular language which Americans usually use in their daily life and it makes the novel sound real.

As a novelist, John Steinbeck is considered as a prolific American novelist of the 20th century, with more than 30 books published. Most of his works, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*, and *Of Mice and Men*, have similarities: the stories are set in California, happen during the Great Depression, and are about farm life. His passion for farming which developed in his childhood influences him in writing (“John Steinbeck Biography”). As a novelist, Steinbeck has received awards in literature, such as Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*, and New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for *Of Mice and Men*. Before he died, Steinbeck also won Nobel Prize for Literature.

Of Mice and Men is a novel about two migrant workers, George Milton and Lennie Small, who seek a job as a farmer during the Great Depression. These two major characters have contrasting and unique characteristics. The portrayal of unique major characters combined with a terrifying situation in America at that moment makes the novel even more captivating. Therefore, I argue that one of the strongest points to be discussed is the characters. Through the portrayal of two contrasting major characters, I will be able to reveal the purpose of the author in writing the novel.

For all the information needed is already provided in the novel, I will use the formalism approach, “a style of inquiry that focuses, almost exclusively, on features of literary text itself” (“Formalism”).

Statement of the Problem

The problems that are going to be discussed in this thesis are:

1. What are the characteristics of the two major characters?
2. What is the purpose of the author in portraying such contrasting characters?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

1. To show the characteristics of the two major characters;
2. To show the purpose of the author in creating such contrasting characters

Method of Research

The method I use in writing this thesis is library research. Firstly, I start by reading the novel *Of Mice and Men*. Secondly, I look for some information about the novel and the author from the Internet. Lastly, I analyze the novel based on the information that the novel provides. After analyzing the novel, I make some conclusions regarding the purpose of the author in creating the contrasting major characters.

Organization of the Thesis

There are three chapters in this thesis. The first chapter consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter includes the Analysis of the Contrasting Major Characters in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The third chapter is the Conclusion of the analysis. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which include Synopsis of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Biography of John Steinbeck.