# OF MICE AND MEN

# Candy's Dog

## Section 2

'His ancient dog lifted his head and peered about, and then painfully got to his feet'.

### Carlson:

That dog of Candy's is so God damn old he can't hardly walk. **Stinks** like hell too. Ever' time he comes into the bunk house I can smell him for two, three days. Why' n't you get Candy to shoot his old dog and give him one of the pups to raise up? I can smell that dog a mile away. **Got no teeth, damn near blind, can't eat**. Candy feeds him milk. He **can't chew** nothing else'

'After a moment the ancient dog walked lamely in through the open door. He gazed about with mild, half-blind eyes. He sniffed and then lay down and put his head between his paws'

## Section 3

'Old Candy, the swamper, came in and went to his bunk, and behind him struggled his old dog.'

### Carlson:

'God awmighty that dog stinks. Get him outta here Candy! I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog.'

## Candy:

I been around him so long I never notice how he stinks'

#### Carlson:

'Got **no teeth**, he's all **stiff with rheumatism**. He ain't no good to you Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself. Why n't you shoot him Candy?'

The old man squirmed uncomfortably.

Well – hell! I had him so long. Had him since he was a pup. I herded sheep with him. You wouldn't think it to look at him now but he was the best damn sheep dog I ever seen.

'Look Candy. This 'ol dog jus suffers hisself all the time. If you was to take him out and shoot him right in the back of the head, why he never know what hit him'

### Slim:

That dog ain't no good to himself. I whish't somebody'd shoot me if I got old and a cripple'.

### Carlson:

'If you want me to, I'll put the old devil out of his misery right now and get it over with. Ain't nothin' left for him. Can't eat, Can't see, Can't even walk without hurtin'

Candy looked a long time at Slim to try to find some reversal. And Slim gave him none. At last Candy said softly and hopelessly, 'Awright -take 'im. He did not look down at the dog at all. He lay back on his bunk and crossed his arms behind his head and stared at the ceiling.

### Candy:

'George, I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog'

The description of the dog is important as a motif for ageing and what will happen to all of the men eventually. It is a foreshadowing of the death of Lennie at the end of the novel and is intended to force the reader to confront some uncomfortable truths about life and death.

We already know that at this time a man's worth was measured purely on his ability to work as a manual labourer. Everyone had to work and was not looked after once they had ceased to be of use. The only exceptions to this on the ranch at first appear to be Candy and Crooks, who both have permanent positions. However, these two men perform the lowliest of functions, doing the jobs that no-one else would want to do. Their existence

involves performing filthy and thankless tasks that are demeaning to their age and experience – however, it is either that or get thrown out.

The dog is often seen as a metaphor for Candy himself – old and crippled and not a great deal of use for anybody. It has nothing to look forward to apart from a slow decline and then death – is this what Steinbeck is saying life will be like for Candy? It is likely that he is making a political point about the nature of a society that did not care for its elderly - where there was no provision for them to be cared for in old age – the society created by Hoover. He makes the reader think about what would usually happen to old people in this itinerant society.

It has long been an accepted part of looking after a domestic animal that the most humane ending when the animal is in the condition of Candy's dog is to destroy it. Candy does not readily agree to this and it is an important factor in understanding his character. He clings on to the animal even though he knows the right thing to do would be to destroy it. He remembers back to when he first go the dog and mentions that it was the best sheepdog he'd ever had. He is harking back to a time when both he and the dog were useful and of value. Neither of them is any more. Candy finds himself in the same position as the dog. It seems that when the dog dies his happiness and hope will die with it.

Steinbeck, as usual, inserts a glimmer of hope into this sequence. He interjects the discussion with George and Lennie about getting some land and how Candy could contribute into the part of the narrative just after the shooting of the dog. This, coupled with Candy's realisation that he should have shot the dog himself gives the reader a sense of hope in this otherwise bleak section of the narrative.

The technique of foreshadowing is very clearly seen in this section of the novel. The death of the dog is necessary to prevent it from experiencing further suffering – just like the death of Lennie at the end of the novel.

Perhaps George remembers Candy's words when he makes the decision to shoot Lennie himself, rather than leave it for someone else to do.

George and Lennie are best friends and companions in the same way that Candy and the dog were. It is a relationship of owner and animal. The way in

which the dog obeys Candy and would have been trained to work for him is similar to the way that Lennie obeys George and does what George has trained him to do. Lennie relies on George to provide him with the necessities of life and repays him by working hard. It would have been the same for Candy and the dog.