

Steinbeck uses the character of Crooks to show the low status and powerlessness of ethnic minorities in racist era America. Our first introduction to the character of Crooks is again through Candy's words, when he tells us that Crooks was allowed into the bunkhouse at Christmas, showing us that he was not welcome in the bunkhouse at other times. Crooks' low status is confirmed for us when he refers to Slim as Mr. Slim, the only one of the workers to do so.

But it is in chapter four, set entirely in Crooks' room, that we get the clearest picture of Crooks' isolation and loneliness. His initial anger at Lennie's intrusion turns to 'scarcely concealed pleasure' at the novelty of having company. The circular structure of the novella is echoed in chapter four, highlighting the hopelessness of Crooks' situation. At the beginning of this chapter, Steinbeck shows him alone in his stable, wearily rubbing liniment into his back- at the end, almost the same words are used to show him repeating his actions, again alone, condemned to a life apart where 'a guy gets too lonely and he gets sick.' Crooks articulates the terrible price of loneliness: "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody." And he understands and possibly envies the friendship between George and Lennie, realising that even if Lennie doesn't always understand George and talking to Lennie isn't always satisfactory for George, it is :

"just the talking. It's just being with another guy." that matters.

When Curley's wife threatens Crooks: " I could get you strung up so easy it ain't funny", the reader gets a clear picture of the powerlessness of ethnic minorities at this time. Crooks realises his position and " retreats into the terrible protective dignity of the negro." Steinbeck's imagery here suggests that Crooks, like a snail, retreats into his shell as a defence mechanism: "Crooks sat perfectly still..everything that might be hurt drawn in." This animal imagery highlights Crooks' vulnerability in the racist world of 1930s rural America.

In this novella Steinbeck presents individual tragedies within the central tragedy. One of the casualties of the migrant worker lifestyle is companionship. but while the other migrant workers are paradoxically alone while living in close proximity, Crooks not only has a status as low as the animals' Crooks bunk was a long box filled with straw' but is also condemned to living alone 'spose you couldn't go into the bunkhouse and play rummy cause you was black'. Crooks is perhaps the loneliest character in the novel - and he is also aware of his own loneliness' Books ain't no good, a guy needs somebody to be near him.'

Crooks too has a dream, but his dream is in the past, a dream of companionship' 'Had two brothers. They was always near me, always there.' When he hears about the dream, his initial scepticism' nobody gets to heaven and nobody gets no land' is overcome by his loneliness and need for human company and he suggests to Candy and Lennie that he would be willing to work for free, just for companionship: 'If you guys would want a hand to work for nothing, just his keep.' However, after Curley's wife reminds him of his low status and vulnerability, he realise that the dream, for him, is futile: " I didn't mean it..I wouldn't want to go no place like that" and retracts his offer.

The fact that at the end of the chapter he is right back at the beginning, alone, highlights the futility of his dream and shows him trapped in his room alone - his room is a metaphor for loneliness.

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