

By Claudia Durst Johnson

A Literary Analysis

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the West. He resists the old man's efforts to keep that adventurous spirit alive.

The grandfather stands for everything Carl Tiflin hates. And the grandfather is the one who embodies greatness and the hope for passing along to subsequent generations the adventuresome spirit that led to his and his generation's courageous trek toward the West. Grandfather was the leader of these brave people, facing hostile Indians and famine on a wagon train in their quest for the unknown. Jody thinks of his grandfather and the other pioneers as heroes, "a race of giants" (94).

The tragedy is that this great pioneering way of life has died out. Something small and petty has taken its place. Even before his grandfather tells him that "westerning has died out of the people" (100), Jody realizes this—that perhaps only Billy Buck has something of the necessary greatness in him.

Those in control in the present generation, unlike the pioneers, are smaller men, interested in diminishing life, killing the spirit, and belittling the importance of the tradition and the past.

The common element in the four stories that comprise *The Red Pony* is the affirmation of the human heart, great in imagination, sensitivity, aspiration, and spiritual meaning. This is real "life." It must always battle and seek to rise above an opposite death force found in devouring, dog-eat-dog nature and in the deadening smallness of men whose vision is limited to the mundane practicalities of natural survival.

(OF MICE AND MEN) **START HERE**

The same theme also dominates *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck's highly popular and much dramatized book of 1937. Steinbeck wrote of his work, "This is at once the sadness, the greatness, and the triumph of our species."<sup>1</sup> It is the story of the human potential to rise above the animal level to a finer spirit. The new element introduced in the story, however, is the power of a society, formed of nature's baser forces, to destroy this finer human spirit.

Three main topics establish the theme: (1) the animal identities and animal-like traits of the characters; (2) the dreams of rising above the animal level; and (3) the society whose animalistic drive for survival and conquest crushes the human spirit.

Lennie, large, simpleminded, and clumsy, is the character whose