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Candidate session number

Candidate name

School number

School name

Examination session (May or November)

May

Year

2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: English A1

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: The theme of loneliness in Robert Frost's poetry and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 3.01.12

## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

### Supervisor's Report

*The theme of loneliness in Robert Frost's poetry and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men.*

From Supervision and Interview:

It has been a pleasure to work with \_\_\_\_\_ on the Extended Essay. He is a young man who clearly has a passion for literature and wants to pursue this passion in university. When he initially began the process of the EE, his topic was much more broad in focus, but as a result of discussion and examination of thematic elements, he was able to focus on the idea of loneliness, an idea very much present in both works of literature.

\_\_\_\_\_ decision to pair elements and characters of *Of Mice and Men* with specific Frost poems made for an interesting comparison and contrast of ideas. At first I wondered if he would be able to find enough material to sustain the argument throughout the essay, but his choice of poems was sensitive and thoughtful, allowing him to explore important ideas that exist in two very different genres. In analyzing two genres, he came to understand that the techniques that writers use do vary depending on the work, and I think that he reflects this in his argument.

\_\_\_\_\_ expressed interest in how influential the time period was in the lives of both writers and wished he might have had the chance to explore this further. I was particularly interested in his idea of isolation as being self-imposed or imposed upon a character, an idea which he explores in his EE. Asking this sort of question shows a desire to examine a title from all possible angles, allowing for a more sophisticated analysis of the work.

*This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 3-1-12

**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number

**Achievement level**

**Criteria**

	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	1 ✓	2	2 ✓	2	
B introduction	1 ✓	2	2 ✓	2	
C investigation	2 ✓	4	2 ✓	4	
D knowledge and understanding	3 ✓	4	2 ✓	4	
E reasoned argument	2 ✓	4	2 ✓	4	
F analysis and evaluation	2 ✓	4	2 ✓	4	
G use of subject language	3 ✓	4	3 ✓	4	
H conclusion	2 ✓	2	1 ✓	2	
I formal presentation	3 ✓	4	3 ✓	4	
J abstract	1 ✓	2	2 ✓	2	
K holistic judgment	3 ✓	4	2 ✓	4	
Total out of 36	23 ✓		23 ✓		

Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

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IB Cardiff use only: A: 1054-37 Date: 24/15

# The theme of loneliness in Robert Frost's poetry and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

Extended Essay Subject: English

Candidate Name:

Candidate Number:

Word Count: 3,998

## Abstract

too vague

This extended essay is written around the theme of loneliness in Robert Frost's poetry and the novella Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck. The time period during which Steinbeck's novel, and most of Frost's work, is written is identified as the Great Depression. Loneliness is therefore looked at in the context of this time period and the setting of the rural United States. Steinbeck's work is analysed in terms of the characters which he uses in order to explore the theme of loneliness. The characters looked at in this essay are George, Lennie, Crooks, Candy, Curley's wife, Carlson and Whit. George and Lennie's bond is analysed as a contrast to the typical relationship between farm laborers. This relationship is compared to the poem 'Mending Wall' by Frost as the theme of emotional barriers is also strongly present here. Crooks is analysed as an example of loneliness brought on by society. A similar relationship is identified in the poems 'Acquainted with the Night' and 'The Lockless Door'. Curley's wife in Steinbeck's work is compared to the female character in 'The Hill Wife'. Candy is analysed as an example of loneliness brought on by old age. Similarities are found between this character and the speaker of 'An Old Man's Winter Night'. Carlson in Of Mice and Men is analysed as a farm worker who has been permanently damaged by his environment and is no longer able to make any human connection. Whit is also compared as the opposite of Carlson's character. Carlson's inability to understand other people is compared with the poem 'Neither Far Out or In Deep'. Both of these authors are found to be showing a similar message in their works, primarily that loneliness has only negative effects and therefore must be counteracted by companionship.

why ... ?

too simple + obvious  
as conclusion

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# The theme of loneliness in Robert Frost's poetry and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

The work of the American writers Robert Frost and John Steinbeck is considered, by many critics, to be essential to the understanding of rural American life in the 1900's. Steinbeck, an author and a journalist, in Of Mice and Men examines the isolation of migrant farm workers who, due to the economic situation, have been forced to abandon an ordinary life in the community and live a lonely nomadic lifestyle. Steinbeck also looks at the overall loneliness of rural life during the Great Depression; as Savannah Stockton notes "one element of the story which is perhaps the most striking of all is the theme of isolation and alienation". In his work, Frost similarly looks at the community as a cause of isolation for the individual. Steinbeck enjoyed a social lifestyle; he was a celebrity and welcomed his popularity. Frost, on the other hand, rejected the community in which he lived, and in his life embodied the consequences of isolation and social disengagement. Despite being very different individuals Frost and Steinbeck share a common view on loneliness, mainly that it is harmful and leads to misery. It is worth looking at the similarities in their views on life during the Great Depression in order to obtain an accurate and unique perspective of the effects this challenging period in the history of mankind had on the people who were most touched by it, the working class.

Authors John Steinbeck and Robert Frost both had a strong connection to the rural lifestyle and farming. As well both of these acclaimed authors wrote some of their most influential works during a period of American history known as the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929 to the early 1940's. During this time discrimination against the African American community still existed and a large proportion of the population was living in relative poverty. Steinbeck began his professional writing career as a reporter but previously worked on a farm as a farm labourer during his childhood years in Salinas, California. California is also the setting for his novel Of Mice and Men and coincidentally the birthplace of Robert Frost. Frost also worked and owned a farm in New Hampshire. Whereas Frost's work is very personal and involved the poet looking into his rural surrounding to find deeper meaning in life, Steinbeck wrote the novel Of Mice and Men to show the breadth of problems of the migrant farm workers. Sometimes embracing and sometimes rejecting the emptiness, Frost undoubtedly was influenced by his own cultural and familial background in his interpretation. Thus, possibly due to the same time period, similar setting and similar farm experience Frost's and Steinbeck's works share some similar ideas on the concept of loneliness.

One of the first aspects of loneliness in relation to his main characters that Steinbeck looks at is how unusual strong bonds between men have become and how this has been eclipsed by sturdy emotional barriers. The protagonists of Steinbeck's novella Of Mice and Men are George Milton and Lennie Small. These two migrant farm workers travel together and share a bond of friendship. This kind of relationship is unusual for the time of the Great Depression, in which the novella is set, as working men must move around the country looking for work and never settling into any particular place to form a genuine friendship. The friendship of George and Lennie acts as a barrier against loneliness which constantly surrounds them. There is evidence of how unusual their relationship is in the beginning of Section 2 in Of Mice and Men when George and Lennie arrive on the Taylor Ranch. When George realises that he is taking the bunk of someone who just recently left Candy explains that the previous occupant "just quit, the way a guy will" (Steinbeck 21). Candy's tone suggests that this is not an uncommon occurrence. In fact this kind of

eclipsed  
bonds?  
barrier?

behaviour would be very common at the time as labourers would often move from farm to farm in search of better prospects. The residents of the ranch question the validity of George and Lennie's friendship because situations like theirs are extremely uncommon. The boss himself suspects George of exploiting Lennie because he has "never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy" (Steinbeck 24). Even amongst themselves the farm workers interact very cautiously keeping an emotional distance. Slim proposes that it is as though "ever"body in the whole damn world is scared of each other" (Steinbeck 36). This kind of behaviour suggests that these men have set up emotional barriers that make them unable to form genuine connections, but these barriers also protect them from getting hurt in the future. This is largely a defence mechanism set up to deal with the nomadic lifestyle of the migrant farmworker.

*needs more evidence*

Frost also examines this lack of connection between working men in his poem "Mending Wall". The emotional barrier which Steinbeck shows in his work takes on a physical form in an actual stone wall that separates two patches of land. In this poem, written from the author's personal perspective, which is a recurring theme in most if not all of Frost's poetry, Frost focuses on how his farmer neighbour is unwilling to connect with Frost himself who, although isn't native to the area, owns and takes care of his own patch of farmland. Frost's neighbour repairs the wall under the pretence of his father's saying "good fences make good neighbours". This use of a well known proverb could be Frost suggesting that this idea of self isolation comes from deep rooted beliefs that at this point are almost irreplaceable. Frost's neighbour and the other farmhands on the Taylor Ranch are incapable of accepting outsiders. At the same time Frost points out how he himself finds the farmer a "savage" because he mindlessly repairs the "wall" without a rational reason. This specific word choice suggests that Frost looks down on his neighbour because he cannot find any common ground and further reinforces their divide. Furthermore Frost could be suggesting that it is unnatural to create these barriers. By questioning "Why do they make good neighbours?" what is he "walling in or walling out" Frost suggests that although it is hard to justify these barriers they do in fact exist. The neighbouring farmer seems to find comfort in setting up a barrier between him and the stranger that Frost is to his farmer lifestyle. This behaviour is picked up by both Frost and Steinbeck as it was not too uncommon to the time. Loneliness, as they exhibit it, is sometimes an act of self protection and reassurance that people found a need for during this hard time.

*Mostly treats the superficial aspects of this poem*

Steinbeck's character Crooks is a perfect example of isolation from people and nature partly due to self-protection. Through his experience living as a black man in white society Crooks has become bitter, cynical and afraid. Even within the ranch he must live in the barn as he is not allowed to be in the bunkhouse with the other men. He doesn't trust anyone and "kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs" (Steinbeck 67) because of his social standing. In Section 5 Crooks draws inside himself to avoid other people and rejects Lennie and Candy when they come to talk to him. His tone and repetition of "I got a right" suggest that Crooks feels somewhat threatened by the presence of others and becomes protective over his belongings. This kind of reaction probably comes from previous racial discrimination and he specifically mentions that he can't play cards because he's "black" (Steinbeck 68). For a moment he becomes interested in Lennie and George's dream and offers "a hand to work for nothing", but companionship. Crooks is forced to face reality and reject the idea. Steinbeck describes that Crooks seems "to grow smaller", have "no personality, no ego" (Steinbeck 80), when Curley's wife reminds him that he could be easily undone by her word. Still this moment suggests that everyone desires companionship and Crooks finds that in sharing George and Lennie's dream. Society's discrimination against his race and the overall loneliness of rural life seems to



have permanently damaged him and taken away any hope of a better life. The hardships Crooks has experienced have made him bitter and cynical and now he seems to take pleasure in causing others pain. He does this to Lennie by suggesting that George "ain't coming back" (Steinbeck 71). Lennie's trusting childlike nature causes him to quickly become distressed and Crooks takes "pleasure in his torture" (Steinbeck 71). Therefore Steinbeck shows, through Crooks, the negative effect isolation from society has on an individual.

But let's explore ... this is too packaged but ok!

Individual loneliness is also the focus of Frost's poem 'Acquainted with the Night' in which Frost examines the isolation of an individual from people and nature. Frost, similarly to the character in this poem, was unable to interact with the world around him, even in the rural New Hampshire where he lived the majority of his life. The isolation of the speaker in this poem is emphasised by the author's use of "I". This speaker cannot interact with the world around him because he has been damaged by his loneliness. In line 10 of this poem when the speaker mentions how there is no one "to call [him] back or say good-by" the reader comes to understand that the speaker feels utterly alone. Frost finds loneliness in his environment and is unable to escape it. He also isolates himself in the night and is "unwilling to explain" his behaviour to others. This is similar to Crooks's isolation although Frost isolates himself by choice and Crooks is isolated by society. 'Acquainted with the Night', like a lot of Frost's poetry, shows how Frost deals with his depression and isolation. In this poem it also seems that the speaker blames himself for his loneliness, perhaps because of an action that he regrets. Furthermore the speaker of Frost's "The Lockless Door", similarly to Crooks, fears the world and attempts to isolate himself from it. The speaker fears coming into contact with something that is knocking on his "door with no lock to lock" and physically leaves the area to escape it. The speaker is also uncertain of whatever is approaching but as a knock has to be made by a man we can assume that this something could be society itself. Frost could therefore be suggesting that the speaker has separated himself from society but at this point can isolate himself no further. Both the speaker and Crooks act similarly when faced with a threat in that they try to become unnoticeable. As shown by Frost in: "I blew out the light, I tip-toed the floor". In looking at characters who isolate themselves from the world because of fear both Steinbeck and Frost consider whether society forces people into isolation or if some people force themselves into isolation. In either case loneliness seems to have negative effects on the individual.

show

mean closer meaning of the poem:

show more

Steinbeck looks at the loneliness of old age through the character of Candy. At the start of Section 2, George and Lennie meet Candy at the bunkhouse. "The door opened and a tall, stoop-shouldered old man came in" (Steinbeck 19). The first impression of Candy is an old man bowed by age. Candy also has a lowly job, he is a "swamper", the last job that he will have on the ranch. That he has no power and is not respected is shown by George's harsh attitude towards him.

"I ain't so sure," said George skeptically, "What did you say he quit for?"

explain

"Why...he...just quit, the way a guy will"  
(Steinbeck 21)

Candy does not choose to answer George back; he backs down. In fact, Candy is almost invisible on the ranch. When the 'Boss' appears he goes away. Candy does not expect to make friends, he is tolerated; not allowed to join the trip to town; he is left behind with Lennie and Crooks. As an old man he is at the lowest level of life and has no more importance than a "negro" or the mentally deficient Lennie. At the start of the narrative Candy is not entirely alone. He avoids loneliness by keeping a dog around that he has had

show

"since he was a pup" (Steinbeck 45). Candy is proud of his connection and this snows now even this kind of link between man and dog is enough for someone to survive. The consequences of the loss of this connection can be seen when his dog is killed by Carlson. Candy becomes quiet and incommunicative. Upon overhearing George and Lennie talking about "the dream" Candy uses the opportunity to regain a connection with someone. Steinbeck shows that even this thread of hope is enough to make Candy talk to George in confidence and trust which he does when he tells him: "I ought to of shot that dog myself", and therefore acknowledging that his connection to the dog was significant and also forming a new bond. Candy completely invests himself into the hope of this dream and that makes it even harder on him when the dream is shattered. When Candy realises that "it's all off" (Steinbeck 93) he becomes just like everyone else, hopeless and alone. Because of his age Candy feels useless on the farm and having "a little bit of land" (Steinbeck 75) for himself seems to be the only possible way of regaining some happiness. It's the aspect of having something for himself as well as the companionship that Lennie and George would provide that most attracts Candy to the idea. The situation in which Candy finds himself at the end of the novel can be generalised to any elderly person who has outlived anyone who could keep him company. ✓

The elderly man in Frost's poem "An Old Man's Winter Night" finds himself in an analogous situation to that of Candy. "A light" "to no one but himself", this old man is also alone and isolated from the rest of the world. This character as well is in need of companionship which Frost expresses in: "One aged man --one man-- can't keep a house". With the use of "aged" Frost specifically identifies the issues of an old man living by himself but by repeating "one man" Frost seems to suggest that any man, no matter how old, cannot live by himself. Therefore both Steinbeck and Frost suggest that companionship is necessary and the fact that the Great Depression has taken this opportunity away from many men should be seen as a devastating consequence. The old man in Frost's poem is also isolated within his home. "The doors looked darkly in at him" suggests that even within his own home, the ownership of which would partly complete Candy's dream, the old man is lonely. Therefore it is not enough to have something for yourself if you are not sharing it with someone. Frost also states that what "brought him to that creaking room was age". By this the author could be suggesting that age is the main catalyst for this man becoming alone and therefore avoiding loneliness is pointless because if ageing makes us older then none of us can avoid it forever. The main similarity between Candy and the old man of Frost's poem is that neither of them could fight against what made them lonely. It's a natural process which in the end isolates them. ✓

?? explain

But show more

Both Steinbeck and Frost find that women can be isolated and lost in a society. Through the character of Curley's wife Steinbeck provides a chauvinistic portrait of a lonely and desolate young woman. Although this character is disliked by most of the men on the Taylor Ranch, and treated as a possession by her husband, Steinbeck shows in one very important scene that she is just as lonely as anyone else. Because she has a husband who provides for her Curley's wife is relatively well situated in life. During this time period her situation would have been quite a rare one but as she later reveals the marriage was not out of love and therefore she was unable to escape loneliness. In contrast with the other men there is nothing for her to do on the ranch and she eagerly jumps at any opportunity of connection. Curley's wife feels lonely on the ranch because she believes she "coulda made somethin' of [herself]" out in Hollywood (Steinbeck 87). In her interaction with Lennie Steinbeck uncovers that she was tricked into believing that she was "a natural" (Steinbeck 88) and now she seems to be unable of letting that dream go. In confiding in Lennie Curley's wife forms a connection and temporarily loses her loneliness. In Section 5 Steinbeck presents her as an ordinary person who, just like everybody else, ✓

requires love and attention. This is a contrast to how she is usually seen by the men, as someone who could potentially put them in danger of losing their job through her aloof and flirtatious nature. Throughout the novel some critics have noticed that she foreshadows violence, for example she appears before Curley's hand is crushed and she herself is killed. This on the other hand could also reflect her nature of never staying in any place for long and always looking for a possible connection. Curley's wife frequently goes around to the bunkhouse or to the barn in order to find someone to talk to, but is often hastily rejected by the farm workers. Through this character Steinbeck looks at how a woman breaks under the gradual tension of a severe environment and falls prey to isolation.

Similarly in "The Hill Wife" Frost looks at a woman isolated from the outside world and yet at the same time not being entirely alone. The woman in this poem, like Curley's wife, is also married. She seems to struggle with the loneliness of her rural lifestyle and finally finds peace in "the grave". The structure of the poem is varied for each section. The first is labelled "Loneliness" and seems to be the characters personal account of experiencing the feeling and looking out in hope of companionship, therefore showing how crucial everyone personally finds this need. The poem ends with a section called "The Impulse" and is structured in short stanzas and has half rhymes. The form is significant because this section reads quickly thus suggesting a rapidity of events. This woman finally sees a solution to her loneliness and quickly yet defiantly achieves her catharsis. Quite like Curley's wife this woman feels trapped and isolated in her home and seeks to find a way out. This also coincides with the name of the second section: "House Fear". Both of these women are not entirely alone yet it isn't enough for them not to feel isolated. Furthermore "the way out" for both of these women was death. In this aspect of women and loneliness both Steinbeck and Frost suggest that women need even more than men not to feel alone. They need to make a deep emotional connection and yet this seems impossible in a world where most have already been damaged by the effects of loneliness and struggle to make any kind of bond.

In Of Mice and Men the farm hand who is most emotionally closed off seems to be Carlson. This individual is lonely to such an extent that he has forgotten the importance of the bonds of friendship and loyalty. This aspect of Carlson's personality is evident when Carlson shoots Candy's dog because he "stinks" (Steinbeck 45). Carlson suggests that Candy take one of the newborn puppies and thus judges that one of them will be an adequate substitute. He doesn't take into account the deep connection between Candy and his dog and therefore sees no value in their bond. For Carlson killing Candy's dog is simply a necessity that should not even need careful consideration. Men like Carlson are shown by Steinbeck as being completely and irreversibly damaged by the loneliness of their lifestyle. In a way Carlson is the greatest victim of the Great Depression as other characters like Candy, Crooks, and Curley's wife at least find some kind of hope and connection with others while Carlson doesn't even try. The counter balance to Carlson's character seems to be that of Whit, who instead strives to find any connection out in the real world. This trait is especially emphasised when Whit finds an article in the newspaper possibly written by a farmworker that he used to know. Donald Pizer notes that Steinbeck chose to create characters who were afraid of loneliness, Whit goes to extremes to make links with 'friends'. He is afraid of being alone - the fate of farm workers. The narrative itself finishes with Carlson saying: "Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?" (pg106). Carlson is of course talking about Slim and George after George has had to kill his best friend. That Carlson fails to see that this event may cause anyone to be sad is in itself quite shocking and serves as the final message from the author. This ordinary man from the working class is unable to understand the greater picture.

In Frost's poem "Neither Far Out or In Deep" the author also looks at the inability to see the greater picture as a major fault in most humans. "The people along the sand", likely meaning society as a whole, "cannot look out far" and "cannot look in deep". Deep in this case likely means to grasp a deeper meaning. Thus Frost is suggesting that humans as a race often miss the important aspects of life. In this way humans often pursue meaningless things like money or fame and thus isolate themselves from what's truly important, genuine human connection. This lack of understanding can also force these "people" into being emotionally blocked off from others. For example a lack of understanding can lead to prejudice which can lead to an isolation of certain people. As well the inability to "look in deep" could lead to an inability to connect with each other. After all it takes a certain degree of understanding and taking interest to form a bond with someone. On the other hand the people in this poem seem to show conformity and therefore are somehow grouped and connected to each other. The poem ends on a rhetorical question: "when was there ever a bar to any watch they keep?". This final sentence could be Frost suggesting that there was never anything to limit or control humans and perhaps this is a downfall as it is human inability to understand others that lead to individual isolation in the early nineteen hundreds.

of nature

misses Steinbeck's focus on social & economic pressures.

Both of these authors consider the effects of loneliness in their unique ways. Steinbeck through the interaction of his characters in Of Mice and Men shows the reader how loneliness has damaged people into being unable of ever forming true bonds with one another. His narrative ends with the strongest bond in the novel being severed out of necessity and yet in itself the ability of the other characters to overlook murder already suggests that they have been changed by the loneliness around them. Most of Steinbeck's characters either isolate themselves or have been isolated by society. In Frost's poetry Frost often looks into himself and into the environment around him. Frost found loneliness in himself and projected this onto his work. Through his setting Frost finds loneliness in ordinary life and in human nature. Both of these authors highlight the long lasting effects of loneliness on the individual. As well in contrast to the effects loneliness has the authors seem to praise companionship and connection and deem it necessary for happiness. I think both of these authors in their observation of loneliness further reinforce the idea that the fundamental necessity for people is to have hope because without it there is no reason to exist.

why are they lonely

\* The fact they "overlook" murder shows how they understand George's actions

This essay is better on Steinbeck but merely gives a list of characters & describes their loneliness. There is ~~no~~ no consideration of the social causes behind loneliness. Not one of Frost's poems is fully explained or analysed.

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There is a strong element of packaging and  
polishing here: the texts being more summarised  
✓ than explored or explicated. The poems do  
not receive enough genuine criticism and do  
not seem to really have much in common with  
Steinbeck's novel. However, the central premise  
is a good one — and might have worked  
quite well if the writer had been keener to  
investigate, explore and grapple rather than to  
redact.