

Tribhuvan University

Critique of American Dream in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts in English

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Kirtipur, Kathmandu

December 2020

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Bisakha Ghimire has completed her thesis entitled “Critique of American Dream in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from June 2020 to November 2020. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Critique of American Dream in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Bisakha Ghimire has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I credit the successful completion of this thesis to my respected Supervisor-Assistant Professor Hemlal Pandey, for his unconditional and untiring guidance throughout the research. I would like to express my gratitude to him for his priceless time, patience and educational motivation which have been a strong milestone during the process of the thesis writing.

I would also like to extend my words of gratitude to the Head of English Department Professor Dr. Jiblal Sapkota for his invaluable suggestions regarding management of the thesis and the procedures for viva.

I also owe my sincere gratitude towards all the faculty members of the Central Department of English, for their direct and indirect contribution in making this thesis a reality. Finally, I am also thankful to my parents and friends for their love, care and attention that have been the motivating force for making this thesis successful.

Nov, 2020

Bisakha Ghimire

## Critique of American Dream in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

*The primary concern of this research is to critique and scrutinize the American official history, in relation with the dream of the marginalized during the time of Great Depression. The paper attempts to prove the marginalization of the powerless, their failure of aim and exploitation by the landlords in the contemporary era. This research paper presents the impossibility of getting life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for the downtrodden; though they dream for such things in their life, no matter what the circumstances are. The methodology that the research mainly uses is the theory of New Historicism by Michael Foucault. By showing the struggle of George and Lennie as failure, Steinbeck revisits the official history. This research concludes that the American history stands as Meta narrative and Steinbeck is able to scrutinize it throughout the novella.*

*Keywords: history, new-history, American Dream, Great Depression, marginalization.*

This paper analyzes John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* from the perspective of New Historicism. Ideas of Michael Foucault and James Trustlow Adams have been borrowed in the paper. Steinbeck's story of George and Lennie's ambition of owning their own ranch reveal the nature of dreams, dignity, loneliness, and sacrifice of the marginalized group. The work deals with the endless striving dream of the heroes and other characters to achieve that dream and live on it. This dream has been loaded in the mind of the characters because of the State policy which had created the expectation of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness in the psyche of the characters. The marginalization and exploitation of the people even exacerbated during the time of Great Depression. Instead of uniting against the contemporary hazards, there exists the polarization of American citizens. The American Dream even lingers in the time

of era when such things had been implausible. Through this research I will endeavor to question upon the validity of American Dream, and the cause of its failure during the time of Great Depression.

The novella begins with the two characters namely George Milton and Lennie Small leaving their work and walking the nearby land in California where they are destined to find the next work which they have been searching on. Among the two friends, George is a small, dark man and Lennie is opposite to him as he is a giant man with mental illness. While travelling to their destination, they stop at a stream for the evening, deciding to go to the ranch in the morning. Lennie has dead mouse in his pocket as he loves touching soft things. George requests him not to carry the dead mouse and reminds him of the trouble Lennie got in the last town where he touched a girl's soft dress. For this task he was accused of rape attempt. George also suggests his friend Lennie, not to speak to anyone the next day when they get into their workplace, particularly in the ranch. They both share a dream of buying their own piece of land, farming it and much to Lennie's delight keeping rabbits as the novelist exhibits "I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy" (22). Then they reach to the ranch the next day.

Upon talking with the boss, they are hired. In the same workplace they meet Candy with a missing hand, Curley and Curley's wife. George threatens Lennie not to indulge with Curley's wife as danger might occurs because he has the habit of touching soft things like woman's hair, cheek and breast. He also has the habit of touching animal's fur and their body as they are too soft. Upon realizing these habits of Lennie, George requests him not to continue such things as they had come to this place because Lennie had touched girl's dress and was blamed for rape earlier. Then they meet with Carlson and Slim who are also the laborers of ranch house. The three

friends Lennie, George and Candy dream of having their own ranch in the near future as Steinbeck elaborates “Ain’t many guys travel around together... I don’t know why. Maybe ever’body in the whole damn world is scared of each other” (35).

Curley’s wife often visits them and explores that she is not happy with her husband. She also has the dream of becoming a movie-star. She is described by the novelist as ‘tart’ “She ain’tconcealin’ nothing. I never seen nobody like her. She got the eye goin’ all the time on everybody. I bet she even gives the stable buck the eye. I don’t know what the hell she wants.” (51). Once she visit Lennie, he tells her that he loves petting soft things, and she offers to let him feel her hair. When Lennie strokes it too hard and messes it up, she gets angry. She tries to jerk her head away, and, in fear, Lennie hangs on to her hair. Curley's wife begins to scream. To keep her from screaming, Lennie holds her so tightly he breaks her neck. Knowing he has done something bad, he goes to the hiding place by the stream. Everyone started searching Lennie and George finds him in the place where Lennie is hiding. George has the desire of saving his friend, that is why he requests Lennie to see the stream and imagines their dream of owning farmland. The novella ends with George shooting Lennie at the back of neck.

As the paper attempts to critique American Dream during the time of Great Depression, it brings theoretical ideas from New Historicism which opened the analysis of literature in the social, political and historical context. The main concern of new historicism is to evaluate the practicality of official history. It regards the state policy as metanarrative and takes the side of downtrodden powerless people. New historicism is a method that is based on the parallel reading of literary and nonliterary texts. *Of Mice and Men* is better interpreted through New Historicism. Steinbeck too enters into the nook and corner of America in the novel. His way of narrativization is

in the line of new historicist approach because the subjugated issues are highlighted as the novel shows the pathos of marginalized. In contrast to the official history the novel depicts the picture of the society with shortages of essential good. In this sense, the novel refuses to privilege the official history and attempts to make a contrast between literally and non-literally text.

John Steinbeck is one of the greatest storytellers of the 19th century.

Steinbeck's characters are not rich men and women with plush and with decorated lives. They are the one who are the homeless, migrant workers, poor fishermen, farmers and even forgotten American people. This idea of representing the anti-hero is analogous with the idea of Foucault who is highly suspicious of universal truths, as Paul Rabinow elucidates "For Foucault, there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society. His strategy is to proceed as far as possible in his analyses without recourse to universals" (4). That is why Steinbeck also focuses in the marginal in the novella. Each of these downtrodden people is important story to tell; a story which is filled with love and pain. His stories tell us not only of the lives of the poor who seek to live in the seacoast of California and Mexico, but also the struggle of all poor people. In that sense the novel focuses on the issues of working class.

The dreams of the marginal characters are shattered. Steinbeck's way of portraying the characters in the margin are analogous with Foucault who also focuses on history from below. Regarding the concept of American Dream, it is widely regarded as the dream that glorifies fame and the pursuit of success. It also evokes the impression of America as an ideal world and the great country of opportunity. It is regarded as the world of new beginning and better life. So, the American Dream is the dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man,



with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest liberty, riches and happiness.

Steinbeck depicts the pursuit of American Dream in every element of the novella. Regarding the heroes George and Lennie, they both have the dream of having their own land. Their version of dream regarding having their own farm without a boss and enough rabbits juxtapose that they will one day possess the ranch. It is what official history of America carries and this discourse has been regulated in the life of characters. However, no matter how many times the dream lingers, finally it turns impossible. They are fed up with working in the farm of others, neither they are well paid nor well fed. Their life turns on changing with the changing situation. They are puppet in front of their boss as the novel describes “They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake” (13).

As a pioneer of new historicist movement, Foucault adheres the exclusive group of the society as opposed to mainstream and so does this novel too. Steinbeck highlights the issue of marginal, their life, dream and the bitter reality in the novella. Instead of king, prince, dukes, emperor and military leaders the common men are elaborated as hero. Steinbeck thus focuses on common people as he has heroized the workers like George and Lennie in the text. The heroes are happy in their dream though they are poor at present. Lennie asks how their farm will be and George replies in a very optimistic manner "O.K. Someday - we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs" (5). Almost in all part of the novella, there is the dialogue of the two friends regarding their dream. George therefore elaborates:

Well, its ten acres,” said George. “Got a little win’mill. Got a little shack on it, an’ a chicken run. Got a kitchen, orchard, cherries, apples, peaches, ‘cots, nuts, got a few berries. They’s a place for alfalfa and plenty water to flood it. They’s a pig pen...An’ rabbits, George.No place for rabbits now, but I could easy build a few hutches and you could feed alfalfa to the rabbits. (53)

These lines vividly explore the desired wish of the characters in the margin, particularly George and Lennie. Their dream is very appealing as it entices the nearby workers like Candy and Crook too. This idea reflects that American Dream even allures to those who come in contact with the one who possess American Dream. Candy also desires to join the shared dream of two friends therefore he wants to be a part of it.

Furthermore he wants to be a shareholder of that land which the two friends have dreamt of. Candy offers his saving amount to fund the purchase of the piece of land and be able to work and live on it with George and Lennie “it’ll be our own place” (60). Material dream captures the attention of each American no matter how they are poor or rich. It is the system which has been vigorously rooted in the psyche of American since Thomas Jefferson’s speech of ‘life liberty and pursuit of happiness. The workers of the ranch house are homeless, property less and jobless. They wanted to have their own world in the future.

Subjugated and forbidden issues are entertained by Foucault and the novelist. George and Lennie’s dream of working hard and saving enough money to buy their own farm symbolizes the concrete ways in which the American Dream serves as an idealized goal for poor and working-class Americans. Similarly, realizing the dream of George and Lennie, a Negro, Crook also joins there. “If you . . . guys would want

a hand to work for nothing-just his keep, why I'd come an' lend a hand” (71). This dream is not new to these characters as it has been started earlier with the *Declaration of Independence* (1776). This proclamation focuses on equal rights for everybody regardless of birth, wealth and social status.

Though these words constitute the foundation of the American Dream, historically, the phrase was originally coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *Epic of America* (1931). This book credits the value of American Dream for everyone as Adams remarks “what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (2). Hence, regardless of circumstances and the background it creates the possibility of material prosperity in the life of citizens. Such dream has been handled by the state, it is scattered by the state to the students, civil servants and even the common workers thus in Foucauldian sense the American Dream has been regulated in each and every Americans and the migrant workers.

Therefore American Dream is the grand-design of the state that has been continued at present too.

Despite the ‘roaring twenties’ followed by the Great Depression, the sentiment of Americans is also echoed in the character like Curley’s wife. Her dream is different than others, but there are structural similarities of the general desires. She is dissatisfied with her life and she dreams of becoming an actress in Hollywood. She imagines how great it would be to stay in nice hotels, own lots of beautiful clothes, and have people want to have her photographs. But she has been double marginalized. On the one hand her dream is not going to be fulfilled, while on the other hand she is detested by George who describes Curley’s wife as venomous to Lennie “I seen ‘em poison before, but I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than

her. You leave her be” (36). Like the men, she dreams of material comforts and a life of luxury which are essential part of American Dream but the dream is unattainable.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had a profoundly damaging effect upon the welfare of the people of the United States. This situation has deprived many of jobs, homes and savings. It had created widespread poverty and destroyed a previous mood of optimism. Businesses and banks closed and money was worthless. Many people became unemployed and suffered poverty; they were hungry with the lack of food, and homeless. It was only the rich, who were able to survive the Depression. For William Gold Hurst, the novella exists as tragedy in capitalistic America “a tragedy...tensions created by the capitalistic systems” (123). America is a country guided by capitalistic system since ages back. Profit is kept above welfare and humanity. Even in the time of Great Depression such things took place. What was necessary is the unity of people regardless of their caste, class, gender but money minded tendency damaged the strength of Americans as Curley and his father continue to exploit the ranch workers.

There were several hazards in America during the time as Goldhurst opines “Others contend that it has little or no political content but rather stresses sociological points such as our unenlightened treatment of old people and the mentally retarded” (123). In many American cities, hundreds of thousands of farmers were roaming the country in search of jobs, and many families were experiencing hunger and malnutrition. Victims of the depression needed something larger to make reality their inspiration. Many of these Americans turned their hopes and faith towards The American Dream, and thus Dream survived. In *the novella*, George and Lennie dream of their “little house and a couple of acres” (4) and travels the country

in pursuit of fortune and wealth. However the circumstances come just opposite. It is the suffering of marginal in the place of capitalism.

Steinbeck also employs the similar sort because the excluded group is highlighted rather than the people in the top. During the time, downtrodden were unfairly treated in term of social class. George and Lennie encounter hostility and calamity everywhere they visit. They play a key part in the masterpiece. Most of the characters of the novel admit at some point dreaming about a different world. But the Great Depression was a very catastrophic era where the dreams were no longer possible.

As there was injustice roaming, the United States of America was no longer associated with the freedom. Rather than showing the dream of privileged class Steinbeck has focused on the aspirations of American working class. Like Foucault, he has also presented the excluded groups of the society who are regarded as animals in the contemporary American society. "From outside came the clang of horseshoes on the playing peg and the shouts of men, playing encouraging and jeering" (8). Such is the condition of exclusive group as they are landless and powerless.

The characters of the novella are the true believers in the myth of American Dream that takes different shapes in their mind. Both George and Lennie are the symbols of the poor ranch hands who wish to work for anyone. Their dream is the dream of independence. Lennie insists upon George telling and retelling him the same story about the wonderful life they are going to have on the farm that they will buy some day. The novel has been analyzed by Martin Arnold as "it is more about sociology and history than about literature" (3). In this context the novel can be regarded as the reservoir of historical aspects as history or fact has been amalgamated

with the fiction. Being known about the tragic consequences of America, Steinbeck did not engage in romantic concept of dream vision.

In the concluding part of the novella, there seems to be the unattainability of American Dream. The dreams of George, Lennie, Candy and Crook to possess a ranch becomes unfulfilled. Curley's wife's dream to be a famous Hollywood star is also destroyed. George decides to kill Lennie to save him from being lynched. When he kills Lennie, George abandons every hope. It is Lennie who coaxes George to repeat the dream of ranch time and again. By killing him, George also actually kills their shared dream of having their own farm without a boss. This act of murder is justifiable in terms of justice. Had Lennie not been killed by George, he would have been lynched by the angry mob regulated by Curley. George also becomes disillusioned when he flashbacks the shared dream with Lennie.

Therefore George misses the impossibility of American Dream as remarked by Crook:

I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it.

(67)

*Of Mice and Men* teaches a grim lesson about the nature of human life and existence. The profundity of isolation and loneliness is rooted in almost all of the characters like George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks, and Curley's wife as Steinbeck shows "Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail

on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to." (13-14). All of these characters are extremely lonely and long for nothing more than a true companion. They are in search of friendship, love, relationship. American Dream is such dream which can make its aspirants lonely as Steinbeck has depicted.

However such pathos of marginal history has been absent in official documents of United States of America. One can find the depiction of economic crisis, fall of Gross Domestic Product, economic deprecation etc. in American official history. The feelings of marginal are less represented in such documents where political views engulf the marginalized people's views. It regards the Great Depression era as stock crash, low business of share market and internal business but where are the marginal in such history books? In the text *Encyclopedia of Great Depression*, we can find similar sorts of market, stock and securities related aspects as the book vividly exposes "the Great Depression severely tested both democratic political institutions and market based economies" (10). There has been the representation of grand things only but the common problem faced by poor are absent in the historical document. Therefore, the text lacks the issues of marginalized section in the contemporary era.

In the Great Depression, subjected to the exploitation of industrial capitalists and their agents like banks, tenants lost their land and home. They had to leave their native places and became migrant workers, living from hand to mouth problems, however such things are lacking in historical documents as the article *The Global Impact* juxtaposes "The worldwide economic crisis of early 1930s serves as a yardstick for the depth speed and international event of all economic crises ever since" (1). This paper also deals with the economic aspects of the nation and its international relationship however the downtrodden are largely excluded.

The workers engaged in temporary jobs, shifting from one ranch to another. In the bleak years of the thirties, life became a nightmarish experience of poverty and brutal struggle for survival. All they desire and dreamt for the largest part of the life was for a piece of land that belonged to them, where they could plant some crops and vegetables, raised poultry and livestock to sustain their life, and where they could build a house to keep themselves warm in winter. *Of Mice and Men* was set just in such background.

Curley's wife, the only female character in the novel, tells Candy that she has been unhappily married. She seems to be disgusting as she appeals the ranch workers sexually. Under the observation of Candy, she gave Slim the eye and she gave Carlson the other eye, She was regarded as flirt "She got the eye going' all the time on everybody" (51). She made her first appearance when George and Lennie were alone in the bunk house. She was rather erotic with full, rouged lips and heavily made-up wide-spaced eyes. And when she was addressing to the two men, she put her hands behind her back and leaned against the door frame so that her body was thrown forward.

This shows that how Curley as a farm lord is engaged to accumulate capital instead of providing care and love his lovely wife. In this sense the novella also forwards the concept of love and relationship instead of those American Dream. As she caught sight of Lennie's fascination with his eyes moving down over her body, she chose to look at her fingernails, smiling archly and twitching her body. Her seductive body movement convinced both the men and the reader that she was an immoral woman. As she is nameless in the novel. T Agatha describes Curley's wife as "Curley's wife, a woman of no name, who got no sympathy from her fellows but



was regarded and misunderstood as a tart” (57). She is an unknown and powerless character; neither she has been named nor given a voice.

The characters are helpless by their isolation, and they attempt to destroy those who are even weaker than they are. The boss and Curley are the epitome of capitalist during 1930s, to whom life was a matter of luxury as usual. Steinbeck thus records the prevalence of oppression in the text. But most of the time, the characters dreamt of better life in one point or another. Their wishes have been robbed by the circumstances even before the time the novel begins. What makes all these dreams typically American is that the dreamers dream of unlimited happiness. They desire for the freedom of their own instinct. As a humanist writer Steinbeck thus portrays the issue related to ethical concern as Steinbeck has been regarded by Y.X. Chang as “A faith in humanity seems to transcend the gloom and despair, which makes Steinbeck apart from other Depression writers of the 1930s” (355).

George and Lennie dream of owning a farm, which would enable to them sustain themselves, however the circumstances come just opposite. Their dream is represented as being unattainable. This is predominantly evident in the case of George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks and Curley’s wife. All of these characters admit to fantasizing about the ‘American Dream’; untarnished happiness and the freedom to pursue their dreams. Lennie is intellectually disabled, and needs George’s constant support and protection. Unemployment was dominant in the society as said by Donald Worster “The next few years were to be difficult for many Americans since a large percentage of people became unemployed and millions of people had to leave their homes for good” (4). However, in the harsh society they live in the era proves impossible, and their dream ends when George has to kill Lennie in an act of mercy. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck explores the theme of aspiration by showing how

trying or failing to realize their dreams affects the characters' personalities and actions.

Written in the new historicist line, the novel critiques upon the politics, the characters are in dilemma seeing the politics. George and Lennie's dream of owning land is unattainable as a result of Lennie's careless actions caused by his ignorance of his physical strength. George constantly cautions Lennie not to retaliate if he is teased by others. It is because such actions of Lennie might halt their dream. The main way Steinbeck explores the theme of dreams is through George and Lennie's dream of one day owning a rabbit farm. In the beginning of the novella, when the two men are on their way to Soledad, George says that having the goal of owning ranch sets them apart from other colleagues. George has told the story to Lennie enough that Lennie knows it off by heart. This shows that, even though Lennie is characterized as childlike and George as clever, both men are equally invested in this goal, and both need it to help them get through their horrible circumstances. Sometimes George thinks that he could have done a significant task and got a good position if Lennie was not with him:

God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay in a cat house all night. I could eat any place I want, hotel or any place, and order any damn thing I could think of. An' I could do all that every damn month. (12)

Through the rabbit farm, Steinbeck shows that dreams help people to survive, no matter how difficult achieving them seems. Steinbeck also explores the transforming impact dreams can have on people. Crooks is psychologically restored when he

becomes involved in George and Lennie's dream. Crooks is a particular victim of the novel's setting: black, he has suffered a lifetime of racism "Listen, Nigger. You know what I can do to you if you open your trap? ...I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny" (91). When Crooks is introduced, Steinbeck characterizes him as a bitter and cruel character who torments Lennie by pointing out risks and problems in George and Lennie's plan.

Crook worries after a lifetime of isolation and disappointment. Steinbeck describes such isolation as "They got no family. They don't belong no place" (15). When Candy mentions that he's putting in money, Crook has reason to believe the dream might be possible and he quickly asks if he can join them, his previous bitterness disappearing. Steinbeck shows that faith in a dream can draw someone back from bitter hopelessness. Candy is similarly affected by exposure to George and Lennie's goal. Like Crook, Lennie, and Curley's wife, he is especially vulnerable in the harsh setting. Crooks describes his loneliness to George as:

Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's goin' to come back. S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunk house and play rummy 'cause you was black. How'd you like that? S'pose you had to set out here an' read books. Sure you could play horseshoes till it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody – to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. (82)

As with Crook, some of the damage that the setting has done to Candy is healed by the idea of something better. Before the novel's turning point, Steinbeck also explores the impact that failing to achieve one's dreams can have on someone. Curley's wife is initially characterized as simply cruel and manipulative. When she's speaking to Lennie in the barn it becomes clear that she is as much a victim as anyone else in the

story as the novelists eulogizes “accustomed to a male-dominated society, pretending to be something she is not, alone and unloved” (36). She tells Lennie that someone from the film industry told her she was supposed to be a film actress. She is also lonely like other characters.

Curley’s wife aspired to be someone adored and admired, but instead she has ended up shut away by a possessive thug in an environment where the only company sees her as a danger because of her sex. Through Curley’s wife, Steinbeck shows that such disappointment can have a corrosive effect on a person’s behavior. However they impact people, Steinbeck ultimately uses the plot *Of Mice and Men* to explore the fragility of dreams. It is clear from the beginning of the novel that the rabbit farm will be a difficult thing to get, and it is also clear that Lennie cannot long survive the harsh setting.

Steinbeck shows that, even when our dreams seem just within reach, predictable problems can still destroy them completely. Throughout ‘*Of Mice and Men*’ Steinbeck explores the theme of dreams and aspirations from several angles. He shows us how they can motivate people, how they can restore people, how they can bring out the better sides of people, how their failure can result in bitterness and depression, and how they can be easily destroyed. He skillfully builds up the reader’s hope along with George, Lennie, Crooks, and Candy’s. And like them, Steinbeck deliberately foreshadows how fragile their dream is.

Despite the fact that there was Great Depression and the migrancy caused by the dust Bowl, there was high unemployment rate. Marginal groups like lower class, female, blacks were even exploited a lot. There was the also the prevalence of racism and sexism as Crook and Curley’s wife are too marginalized. Describing the Foucauldian notion of authorship, Grace signify Foucault’s ideas as “finding the

text's meaning in its author's 'mind' or 'intentions' is a historically contingent operation: for a long time, it was not practiced at all" (11). As the writer is guided by his own historical circumstances, so does the novel, it is because of the depiction of America

All of the characters are looked down on and left out. When the novella was first published, according to Jackson Benson, it receives "the best seller list immediately" (351). During that time even racism and sexism were generally accepted in society. Both issues play an immense role in the novel since two of the characters are treated badly by the other people on the ranch. They are Crook and Curley's wife- Crook due to his color and Curley's wife due to her gender. Sexism and racism are problems that have been ongoing for centuries. Despite the fact that there had been the announcement of equality regardless of birth and gender, since the Great Depression struck America, both issues are prominent at that time.

Crook has two things working against him in Steinbeck's story; he is the only African-American on the ranch and he has a deformed spine. Due to his race and physical deformity, Crook lives by himself in the ranch's barn. He is described as proud and aloof, but readers get the sense that Crook acts aloof due to aching loneliness. Crook is secretly happy when Candy and Lennie come to visit him. He even allows himself to momentarily believe that he too will live on their little piece of land. After a debate with Curley's wife, Crook realizes that even if George, Lennie, and Candy let him live with them, it would never really work out the way he wanted because of his skin color.

The word sexism means discrimination based on a person's gender or biological sex. Men and women are therefore not considered equals. Instead one sex is believed to be of more value than the other. In most cases, females are considered

the less valuable sex. At least women were certainly believed to be of less value than men in the 1930s when discrimination against women was still very noticeable. The only female character that physically appears in the story, the unnamed wife of Curley is viewed with disgust by the workers. Despite only being married a few weeks, she already has what the workers call "the eye" (26) and they refer to her as a "tart" (26). It is implied that she constantly seeks out male attention to relieve her loneliness. Like the men who are plagued by loneliness in the story, Curley's wife is both lonely and regretful and says that she could have been in movies or magazines if she had not married Curley. It seems that she only married Curley to escape her mother, who was domineering and did not let her go to Hollywood.

As generally acknowledged Steinbeck's novels portray the context of Great Depression, where there was hard times and people were treated in an injustice manner. The most important novel that captured the reality of most difficult period is *Of Mice and Men*. This novel can be regarded as historiographicmetafiction as it describes the historical circumstances of America in relation with the oppression and exploitation of marginal. It is a form of writing which compares historical writing with fictional texts as they share techniques of narrativization and emplotment. Thus, historian creates story within the boundary of history. It is one kind of postmodern ideas which rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event.

The Great Depression is the time when American Dream is like a nightmare. It was no longer the long desired dream for freedom which includes prosperity and success. In his text *The Epic of America* James Truslow Adams defines American Dream as:

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is not the dream of motor car and high wages, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to achieve the fullest stature of which they are capable of, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the circumstance of birth and position.

(10)

The Great Depression was the time where dream of American especially marginal groups was no longer possible. The characters in the novella are also true believers in the myth of American Dream that takes different shapes in their minds. George and Lennie are the symbols of the poor ranch hands who wish to work for anyone but themselves. Both of them cannot control their lives, as they had to do what the landowner tells them to do. They feel safe in the dream of possessing the land. The dream about farm is what keeps them going. For them the dream of land is an antidote to loneliness and disappointment. George describes the farm constantly to Lennie as: Well...we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter we'll just say the hell with going to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it and listen to the rain coming' down on the roof" (18). Unfortunately the dream shatters during the concluding part of the novella.

George believes that he along with Lennie have a free and idyllic life soon. The narrator as per the dream of George exhibits the land with Eden like qualities "We would live offa the fatta the land" (57). Both of them hope that all the food they want will be right there without too much hard work and labor. George describes the farm in terms of things he loved when he was a child. It offers the reader a hint that

this dream would not come true in the end. It is because childhood is a period in every person's life that passes and never comes back as George imagines "I could build a smoke house like the one grandpa had" (57) and describes the land as having the beauty of his childhood "An' we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid" (57).

Though the dream was first shared by George and Lennie, it was followed by the other characters in the novella. The material dream as the source of happiness and prosperity is rooted in each and every characters. As they have no home and no family, it is regarded that possessing land and building house later on will provide enough stability in their life. The dream between George and Lennie was secret earlier but once Candy overhears them talking about their farmland "You know a place like that" (59). Being one handed, hunchbacked, and the approaching old age Candy becomes interested in their plan. He explains to George that he would be grateful to him if he let him live on their future farm until he dies in exchange for a large sum of money he has saved. He is afraid that he will have the same fate as his dog which was killed as it was no longer useful on the ranch.

The dream of possessing land touched the cynical Crook too. Just like George and Lennie, he perceives the farmhouse as a piece of Eden "I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an 'on the ranches with their bindles on their back an' that same damn things in their heads...just like heaven" (74). As Crooks is a negro he was treated like outcast. He has to sleep in the harness room instead of the bunkhouse and is also rejected from most of the activities "cause I'm black. They play cards in there, but I can't because I'm black. They say I stink" (68).

Crook is an intelligent person but he feels inferior and weak. In his confrontation with Curley's wife, Crook felt dominated and low self-esteem when she



says “well you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny” (81). He is marginalized in racist America. Even a white female can dominate black male in a very harsh manner. He has been double marginalized but such things are absent in the historical texts.

Curley’s wife being a daughter in law of ranch-house owner also possess the item associated with American Dream as she yearns for material comforts. She desires to become a famous Hollywood actress and dreams of fame, fortune, expensive hotels and fancy clothes. Her marriage to Curley destroys this dream because after the marriage her dreams are shattered and Curley never permits her to leave the ranch to become an actress. Her life becomes failure, as she is the wife of man who never loves her but only hates. The dream which she imagines for happiness and reality however becomes unreal.

Character never stops of dreaming about prosperity and happiness in the turbulent world they live. The destiny of Curley’s wife and Lennie go hand in hand as they are closely associated by their isolation. They are both rejected by the men on the ranch who do not want to have anything with them. They need each other to make end to their painful lives. While doing so they end each other’s dreams. Although Lennie is good in intention, he is evil in his action. He tries to express affection but strokes too hard the soft hair of Curley’s wife. The only sight of a rabbit that Lennie have is a hallucination after the death of Curley’s wife. The dream takes the illusion at the end of the novel. His killing of Curley’s wife awakens George to the impossibility of their dreamed farm.

The final scene shows Lennie calling George who tells him the story of the farm they are going to have some day. George tell him to look across the river and imagines the farm “and live o the fatta the lan” (110). While telling about the places

they are going to have, out of real affection for him, George shoots Lennie in order to prevent the approaching worst death. Thus Lennie dies with the hope that their dream will be accomplished soon. But George, the alive one has not such comfort as he feels he is guilty of such activity. He has to live with the guilt of having killed his friend has to go on living with the failure of their dream. Although he should have felt free from a burden like Lennie, he feels now even more miserable as there is no other dream to strive for. In this context of dream deferral Peter Liscaopines “The ending of the story is...neither tragic nor brutal but simply a part of the pattern of event” (76). The reader thus has to acknowledge the inevitability of some situations that are part of an unforgiving world as the dream of characters fail.

Lennie dies and George continues living in loneliness and without any hope. None of the other characters even achieve their dream because of the unfavorable circumstances. Under the influence of the Great Depression, Steinbeck describes the fate of the common man, lonely and hopeless in his struggle to survive. They dream about such future that never comes in their life. Lennie is the victim of mental smallness like mice suffer physically being small. He has to die because he cannot control his own actions and his fatal strength. He is more animal like than human as Steinbeck describes Lennie’s walking habit as bear and eating habit as horse “the way a bear drags his paws and drinks from the pool like a horse” (9). As Lennie even dreams about living in a cage like a bear, the novel foreshadows human actions to the actions of animals.

Despite his physical power and strength Lennie is powerless in front of the universe. George and Lennie struggle against the injustice of the world and at the same time against their own weak features that are part of the human nature along

with the animals. According to Paul McCarthy, the novel features the dream which is but a meaningless dream:

In the last analysis, George and Lennie symbolize something of the enduring and hopeful as well as the meaningless. They manage-if only for a brief time-to rise above circumstances. And to convince others as well as themselves that dreams are part of the territory that all they have to do is keep working and hoping and some day they will have their own place...but they cannot. (102)

Along with informing the historical circumstances including time and space in *Of Mice and Men*, it also includes elements that are part of every human life. The most important message of the book is futility of one's holding into dreams. Throughout the novella *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie and George's relationship shows that even though they are true friends, friendship can be difficult at times. In the novella, George is responsible for Lennie and is always watching out for him. He sometimes wishes though that he did not have to take care of Lennie as much as he does.

George seems to be the caretaker of Lennie in the novella. In chapter one, George says to Lennie, "'An' whatta I got,' George went on furiously, 'I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things I got to get you out'" (11). At this point, George is angry and resentful towards Lennie because Lennie messes up opportunities for George. Even though they are friends and George cares for Lennie a great deal, he gets frustrated with him and shows that they are sometimes difficulties in their relationship as friends. Overall, the relationship of Lennie and George shows that even the best and closest of friendship can be difficult at times.

The characters in the novel ultimately act on their own in the novella despite the American Dream in their mind. This can be interpreted by engaging with Nietzsche's notion of freewill and the conception of individual freedom. Nietzsche regards 'Will to Power' as striving force for an increase of power ...that all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this" (366). As freewill is necessary for the establishment of new discourse and to subvert the preexisting notion, one makes the goal and take every risk and danger in life. In order to access that great passion, one should not hesitate to offer any sacrifices. Willpower demands for the progression, upward mobility, evolution and advancement to newer form of being.

Similar sorts of Nietzschean ideas can be found in the novella as the characters in the margin act on their own. George kills Lennie despite the interest of the people in the power like Curley. Lennie has killed the wife of Curley when he strongly strokes her body. The angry mob could not resist such task and they search Lennie in order to lynch him. But George acts in his own freewill as he kills Lennie to stop his difficult death by the angry mob. Hence this task of George can be regarded as the application of the Nietzschean notion of freewill.

Language of novella is simple and direct. There is high proportion of dialogue among characters. Dialogue has slang and dialect. Because, of this the language reflects the characters, time and place. Through these high proportion of dialogue, Steinbeck is given the voice to a people who don't have a voice; hence he is giving voice to the voiceless as the language itself denotes that the speaker is the one from margin "Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. I tell ya" (82). This is the language of Crooks a poor black fellow. Lennie with his learning disability, Candy representing old people, Curley's wife representing women, and

Crook's representing blacks don't possess a voice of identity etc. These all are voiceless margins whose story has been represented by Steinbeck as analogous with Foucauldian idea of Marginal history.

Finally author's message to the readers is that do not make impossible plans, they will always fail. By doing so, Steinbeck critiques upon the official history of American Dream. So, the fatalistic tone is emphasized in the novella. Life is harsh and dreams are fragile. And yet, every story is important, no matter whose story it is. Though few high-class people like the boss and his son Curley has been depicted by the writer, they have not been focused to a large extent as marginal characters are focused a lot like George and Lennie.

Steinbeck is sympathetic toward his characters, but not to intent happy ending for them. As author has depicted the novel often shows the world as a place where characters have to fight to survive, in a universe with the dream world of freedom, world of poverty, friendship and loyalty. Along with George, Lennie, Candy there exist problems even in the life of Crooks a black fellow. He is also the marginal characters who has been given voice by the novelist. Because of his skin color, he is isolated and is never treated like an American, except few times when he was a young boy and played with white kids who lived nearby: "The white kids come to play at our place, an' sometimes I went to play with them, and some of them was pretty nice" (79). But since he is the only black person living on the ranch, he is completely on his own and has no real friend.

Steinbeck presents the characters and the whole events to the readers just as they are. The relationships are mutually beneficial. As migrant workers struggle to maintain permanent relationships, all characters are isolated in some way, even George and Lennie feel loneliness. Most characters dream for a better life, to escape,

to be self-sufficient. So the novella presents fatalistic view of dreams. This idea is that dreams will never come true.

The Great Depression 1929-1939 started with the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929, where stock prices fell almost by half overnight. The aftermath of the crisis was disastrous, first in the United States, where output fell by nearly a third and massive unemployment manifested itself as Albers interprets “The economic activity indices suggests that global economic recovery after 1931 was slower than previous evidence suggested” (2). In Europe too, there was similar consequences. In the following spring, over 3 million people in America had lost their jobs. In the next two years 12 million men and women would lose their employment as well. The unemployed had no money to buy food, nor a place to stay.

It was a common sight to see people staying under bridges, along the railroad tracks or even in public toilets. Farmers did not feel the impacts of the Wall Street crash as soon as the urban population because most of them had not participated in the stupendous prosperity that occurred in the years before the crisis. Also, they could provide their own food supplies and therefore did not have to worry about food shortages. Unfortunately, it was not going to be long until farmers of the country would feel the impact of another crisis that struck in the 1930s, the Dust Bowl.

Steinbeck reminds us that each and every person should be accepted for who they are and be able to live in harmony with others. Migrant ranch workers had to work hard to survive and lived an isolated and lonely life. When dealing with these tough times and uncertainty about the future it was necessary to have someone by your side to count on, a true friend who is willing to sacrifice everything for you. Unfortunately, such friendship does not come easily. The problems faced by the two friends has been analyzed by Brooks Atkinson as “George’s loyalty and manly

forbearance and Lennie's pathetic helplessness an interdependence and vigilant understanding" (20).

In a nutshell, the novella *Of Mice and Men* critiques on the American Dream as unfulfilled passions that is equivalent to quest for death. The way Steinbeck arranges the characters from different class during the Great Depression reflects the internal decay of American society despite the external economic crisis. There exists the impossibility of getting life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for the downtrodden though they dream such things in their life, no matter what the circumstances is. Hence, this dissertation captures the ethos and pathos of marginal and critiques upon the material American Dream, which has been originated and regulated by the American history.

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