
Demythologizing the American Dream in John Steinbeck's
Of Mice and Men

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Abstract

Many twentieth century conventional American creative writers commonly believed that the American Dream can only be achieved through hard work. John Steinbeck goes against the tide as he demonstrates that taking for granted the achievability of the Dream by all can turn out to be an illusion and a trap. He highlights the failure of the American Dream through the lives of his white characters despite their determination to change their social status. This paper relies on New Historicism to analyze the pursuit and the failure of the American Dream by some white people in the twentieth century and on psychoanalytical literary criticism to reveal their unpredictability. It concludes that not the American Dream cannot be fulfilled only when one is white in the American context.

Keywords: American Dream, illusion, fulfilment, trap, Great Depression.

Résumé

De nombreux écrivains créatifs américains conventionnels du XXe siècle croyaient généralement que le rêve américain ne pouvait être réalisé que grâce au dur labeur. John Steinbeck se porte en faux en démontrant que tenir pour acquise la possibilité de réaliser le Rêve par tous peut s'avérer être une illusion et une encolure. Il met en lumière l'échec du rêve américain à travers la vie de ses personnages blancs malgré leur détermination à changer leur statut social. Cet article s'appuie sur le Nouvel Historicisme pour analyser la poursuite et l'échec du rêve américain par certains Blancs au XXe siècle et sur la critique littéraire psychanalytique pour révéler leur imprévisibilité. Il conclut que le rêve américain ne peut pas se réaliser que lorsque l'on est blanc dans le contexte américain.

Mots-clés : Rêve américain, illusion, réalisation, encolure, grande dépression.

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Introduction

The Great Depression (1929-1939) was the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world. It severely exposed Americans whose predicament Barbara A. Heavilin thinks it has “provide[d] a glimpse of a larger human tragedy that reaches beyond the boundaries of this small masterpiece about two down-on-their-luck bindlestiffs on a ranch and the pathos of their American Dream” (2). Iwan Morgan underlines that “millions of urban dwellers lost their jobs with the onset of the Great Depression” (122). As jobs, savings, and even homes and farms became threatened, it caused “mass layoffs and worker displacement” (Hanse 11). Many were forced into inter-state migration in search for seasonal jobs and better economic conditions. John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* is set in this very economic Depression-era and depicts this reality by showcasing how the dreams of many migrant workers become jeopardized. For Frederic I. Carpenter, Steinbeck’s “fiction has described the interplay of dream and reality; his thought has followed the development of the American dream” (454). More interestingly, this novella received criticism which generally focuses on supporting euthanasia-“a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life to relieve intractable suffering” (in Rodway, et al. 52) – (George mercifully killed his friend Lennie to avoid him lynching or sentences by justice (Steinbeck page x)), excusing racial slurs and racial stereotypes (pages xx), and containing offensive and vulgar language (pages xx). However, many failed to conduct the reader to view the fact that being white is *not* enough to welcome home the American dream.

Therefore, this paper aims at analyzing the link between the fulfillment of the American Dream and the whiteness in the American context by using the environment of the Great Depression as depicted by Steinbeck. In the process, it considers showing that the dream holds shaky grounds to many white people when pondering the reality of the country. This essay offers a new reading of *Of Mice and Men* through the prism of New Historicism pioneered by Stephen Greenblatt and of psychoanalytical criticism in Jacques Lacan’s perspective. New Historicism holds that the understanding of literature is not divorced from cultural backgrounds. It is, in the words of Stephen J. Greenblatt, an “approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise

that a literary work should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation of genius”. (in Sharma 2) Lacan’s psychoanalytical literary criticism reveals the instability of Steinbeck’s major characters whose mind aspire to success and the fulfillment of their dream which they never attain. Selden et al. summarize Lacan’s thought that is relevant to this paper in terms of “... unconscious processes ... identified with the unstable signifier. (158) The unconscious hides meaning in symbolic images which need to be deciphered”. The paper is structured around two sections. The first section considers the impact of the Great Depression on the characters’ lives and the second one discusses the shattered dream of the migrant workers despite their ephemeral resilience through mobility, which has long served as the “heart and soul of the American Dream”. (Parshina et al. 177)

1. The Complexity of Migrant Workers’ Experience during the Great Depression

This chapter elaborates on the intrinsic connection between the American Dream and the drawbacks generated by the Great Depression, which officially began in 1929 with the Stock Market Crash in the U.S.

1.1. Physical and Psychological Impact of the Great Depression on the Characters

The most devastating impact of the Great Depression was human suffering caused by poverty. This human suffering is reflected in the physical and psychological impact of which many people are victims, since poverty coexists with physical and psychological degradation. Steinbeck alludes to the same impacts plaguing most of his characters, as many are poor due to the effects of the Great Depression on them.

Of Mice and Men calls attention to the physical deterioration of its characters under the punitive impact of the Great Depression.

And then from the direction of the state highway came the sound of footsteps on crisp sycamore leaves. The rabbits hurried noiselessly for cover. A stilted heron laboured up into the air and pounded down river. For a moment the place was lifeless, and then two men emerged from the path and came into the opening by the green pool. They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the

open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats. (Steinbeck 2)

The two men who “emerged from the path”, are later known as Lennie Small and George Milton, the protagonists of the novel. Their introduction at the beginning with their workmen’s outfits, denim trousers and coats, shapeless hats, is symptomatic of the existing realities for workers during the Great Depression. Denim was the kind of cheap and hard wearing the underprivileged workers wore.

The physical appearance of the characters is encapsulated not only in what they wear but also in their individual appearance. George is described as someone with “restless eyes...slender arms” (2) while Lennie like someone with “shapeless face...pale eyes”. (2) It seems that they appear sickly and puny. Physically, they do not stand because the punitive Great Depression has ruined and used them up.

The appearance of Candy, the old swamper, who introduces George and Lennie to their bunk-house is equally telling. “The door opened and a tall, stoop-shouldered old man came in...He pointed with his right arm, and out of the sleeve came a round stick-like wrist, but no hand”. (18-19) Little doubt, the old man previously lost his hand, in performing his slave job on the ranch, in a machine accident, before being relegated to housekeeping chores as a swamper. His handicap is attributable to the unfortunate situations orchestrated by the Great Depression.

Not only did the Great Depression impact the physical posture of some characters but also, it psychologically cripples many of them.

The Great Depression had a tremendous psychological impact as it left deep emotional scars on the psyche of many American. Indeed; it is revealed that people who suffer a job-related hardship as a result of the Great Recession were more likely to show symptoms of “anxiety, depression, and hopelessness” (Buchwald et al. 28). In *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie is associated with such a mental disease which lowered his mental capacity. As a consequence, he depends on George to survive and to get out of trouble. His mental retardation leads him to do things beyond the norm. His experience with the dead mouse is illustrative:

‘Uh-uh. Jus’ a dead mouse, George. I didn’t kill it. Honest! I found it. I found it dead.’
‘Give it here,’ said George.
‘Aw, leave me have it, George.’

‘Give it her!’

Lennie’s closed hand slowly obeyed. George took the mouse and threw it across the pool to the other side, among the brush. “What you want of a dead mouse, anyways?”

“I could pet it with my thumb while we walked along,” said Lennie. (Steinbeck 6)

Lennie is so mentally challenged to a point that he is so sure of petting a dead mouse which he found on their way to Soledad. No doubt, he has an unorthodox attitude as common sense cannot fathom that a dead animal be pet.

Lennie is also absent-minded and often forgets things George tells him not to do: “O.K. - O.K. I’ll tell ya again. I ain’t got nothing to do. Might jus’ as well spend’ all my time tellin’ you things and then you forget ‘em, and I tell you again”. (4-5) George’s indignation here proves that Lennie is always forgetful no matter how many times George repeats things to him

The same episode occurred later when, during their journey in search of a new job, Lennie was asked to remember where they were going:

[...] You remember where we’re goin’ now?’

Lennie looked startled and then in embarrassment hid his face against his knees. ‘I forgot again.’

‘Jesus Christ,’ George said resignedly. ‘Well-look, we’re gonna work on a ranch like the one we come from up north.’

‘Up north?’

‘In Weed.’

‘Oh, sure. I remember. In Weed.’ (6)

It seems Lennie is experiencing memory loss. A few moments after George rebuked him regarding his forgetful attitude, he continues to easily forget even the slightest things. This crystal-clearly shows Lennie’s mental sickness.

Within the scope of Lennie’s mental alienation, he is reduced to a child. His personality is like that of a child as he has childlike behavior:

George still stared morosely at the fire. When I think of the swell time I could have without you, I go nuts. I never get no peace.’

Lennie still knelt. He looked off into the darkness across the river. ‘George, you want I should go away and leave you alone?...

No-look! I was jus' foolin', Lennie. Course I want you to stay with me. Trouble with mice is you always kill 'em.' He paused. 'Tell you what I'll do, Lennie. First chance I get I'll give you a pup. Maybe you wouldn't kill it...

Lennie avoided the bait. He had sensed his advantage. 'If you don't want m, you only jus' got to say so, and I'll go off in those hills right there...

George said: 'I want you to stay with me, Lennie. Jesus Christ, somebody'd shoot you for a coyote if you was by yourself. No, you stay with me. Your Aunt Clara wouldn't like you running off by yourself, even if she is dead. (13-14)

This quote is suggestive of Lennie's being a burden to George. Just like parents are not free until their children mature, George thinks that with Lennie, he "never get no peace". (12) The fact that he always kills mice mirrors a child's behavior as he lacks of self-control and responsibility. George's subsequent declarations show that Lennie is nothing but a child who is incapacitated and unable to care for himself without George.

Furthermore, Lennie's gullible attitude and lack of maturity is also inferred in the following statement by George speaking to Slim, a jerk-line skinner, prince of the ranch, concerning Lennie:

One day a bunch of guys were standin' around up on the Sacramento River. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turn to Lennie and says, 'Jump in.' An' he jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke. He damn near drowned before we could get him. An' he was so damn nice to me for pillin' him out. Clean forgot I told him to jump in. Well, I ain't done nothing like that no more'. (42)

Although George feels sorry for what he does to Lennie in the past, the details regarding what is reported by George about Lennie show that Lennie has a childlike attitude. He is a character under orders despite his age. Lennie has no authority and George thinks that "he'd do any damn thing I tol' him". (42)

Lennie's mental retardation often makes him cause trouble to others. In weed, he gets himself into trouble with a young lady. George's subsequent discussion with Slim is revealing of his mental status:

'Course he ain't mean. But he gets in trouble all a time because he's so God damn dumb. Like what happened in Weed... 'What'd he do in Weed?' Slim asked calmly.

‘You wouldn’ tell? —no, ‘course you wouldn’.

‘What’d he do in Weed?’ Slim asked again.

‘Well, he seen this girl in a red dress. Dumb bastard like he is, he wants to touch ever’thing he likes. Just wants to feel it. So he reaches out to feel this red dress an’ the girl lets out a squawk, and that gets Lennie all mixed up, and he holds on ‘cause that’s the only thing he can think to do. Well, this girl squawks and squawks. I was jus’ a little bit off, and I heard all the yellin’, so I comes running, an’ by that time Lennie’s so scared all he can think to do is jus’ hold on. I socked him over the head with a fence picket to make him let go. He was so scairt he couldn’t let go of that dress. And he’s so God damn strong, you know.’

Slim’s eyes were level and unwinking. He nodded very slowly. “So what happens?”

George carefully built his line of solitaire cards. “Well, that girl rabbits in an’ tells the law she been raped. The guys in Wee start a party out to lynch Lennie. So we sit in a irrigation ditch under water all the rest of that day. Got on’y our heads sticking outa water, an’ up under the grass that sticks out from the side of the ditch. An’ that night we scrambled outa there’. (43-44)

The incident reported here results from Lennie’s inability to restrain himself from causing trouble. Here, the envy of touching and feeling the young girl’s red dress caused him prejudice as he is accused of rape. No doubt, Lennie has a serious mental disability and behaves like a child for, as put by Montagu, “Children want to touch everything, for this is their most familiar way of getting to know anything”. (20)

Similar incidents happen in the ranch in Soledad with Curley the son of his boss. His being tempted to touch the forbidden caused him the greatest prejudice that endangered his life. His indelicacy to touch “sof things” (94) leads him to chock the lady: “He moved his hand a little and her hoarse cry came out. Then Lennie grew angry. ‘Now don’t,’ he said. ‘I dont’t want you to yell...He shook her then, and he was angry with her. ‘Don’t you go yellin’,’ he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck” (96). Lennie accidentally killed Curley’s wife when he touches her soft hair because of his inability to control his own emotions. At the end of the day, he was killed for his complacency.

Lennie also suffers from behavioral disorder which leads him unintentionally to another offense. He was unjustly attacked by George who thought he was laughing at him. The subsequent incident with Curley is a strong allusion to the situation:

Lennie covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with terror. He cried: 'Make 'um stop, George.' Then Curley attacked his stomach and cut off his wind... Lennie took his hands away from his face and looked about for George, and Curley slashed at his eyes. The big face was covered with blood. George yelled again: 'I said get him.' Curley's fist was swinging when Lennie reached for it. The next minute Curley was flopping like a fish on a line, and his closed fist was lost in Lennie's big hand. (67)

In fact, it is Lennie's behavioral trouble that drives him in such a situation. Normally, Curley was quarrelling with Carlson, a ranch-hand who killed Candy's smelly dog, over his wife. While the discussion was going on, Lennie "was smiling with delight at the memory of the ranch" (66) when Curley attacked him, thinking that he was laughing at him. Consequently, Lennie defended himself and crushed his hand.

The fact that Lennie always causes troubles around may be the reason behind George's warning him to keep quiet. In fact, when they were about to meet the boss who should employ them in his ranch, George sternly told Lennie not to speak any word about the job fearing the boss may sense his craziness. The quote reads:

'That ranch we're goin' to is right down there about a quarter-mile. We're gonna go in an' see the boss. Now, look—I'll give him the work tickets, but you ain't gonna say a word. You jus' stand there and don't say nothing. If he finds out what a crazy bastard you are, we won't get no job, but if he sees ya work before he hears ya talk, we're set. Ya got that?...

Lennie droned to himself softly: 'I ain't gonna say nothin'...I ain't gonna say nothing'...I ain't gonna say nothin'. (6-7)

It is evidenced that George is strongly convinced that Lennie is "a crazy bastard". For him, Lennie's mental issues might prevent them from getting the job. To secure a job in time, it is important to be both physically and psychologically healthy. It is crystal clear that Lennie is suffering from personality disorder which involves "submissive, clinging behavior in which a person has an extreme need to be taken care of." (Perry in Faith

1). This situation frustrates George who wished he were alone without Lennie to depend on him to a point that he could not enjoy his social and professional life. As if the effects of the Great Depression could only be visible in Lennie's behavior, George also ends up being spotted by the atmosphere imposed by the depression. He becomes impatient and unable to continue looking after Lennie. He confesses: "if I was alone I could live so easy. I could get a job an' work, an' no trouble" (11). Clearly, George cannot bear it anymore. He is fed up with Lennie's attitude. In this regard, the author seems to inform the reader about the impact of the Great Depression over all.

The Great Depression not only left scars on people's life but it also forced many into migration in search of seasonal jobs. The next subsection is dedicated to the issue.

1.2. Forced Migration as a Result of the Great Depression

This subsection discusses how the Great Depression is responsible for the involuntary displacement of people as observed in the novella. It describes George and Lennie who move from places to places in search of new job opportunities and a better life, which they will never get. Also, it scrutinizes the skyrocketing unemployment it brought with itself and the dislocation of millions of workers from all walks of life in search of new jobs.

During the period of the Great Depression, there was a mass exodus in the cities of the U.S. Lennie and George, making a case study in *Of Mice and Men*, are subjected to this fate as they pack their belongings and travelled for miles from Weed to Soledad. In fact, Soledad and Weed are six hours three minutes far apart, if you drive non-stop, that is 349.98 miles. They "carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders" (2) as a result of the Great Depression which forcibly displaced and turned them in nomads, moving around in search of seasonal jobs: "well- look, we're gonna work on a ranch like the one we come from up north...In Weed" (6). Under the constraints of the Great Depression, both characters wander through cities and States as their new lives were challenging.

The Great Depression prevented many characters from having a normal life. It broke up families who ended up going in different directions

to save their lives. George expresses the frustration of such an unfulfilled social life in these terms:

George's voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. '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 inta 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. (14)

George's monologue to Lennie is a reality shared by all the workers of the ranch. They have no family and they might have been feeling such a desperate isolation situation since they "belong no place". This overriding feeling of dislocation from their places and separation from their beloved is evidenced in George's voice tone as it became deeper.

That many migrant workers are not stable and have been moving from a unpropitious to unpromising job is common with the workers, Whitey, the blacksmith whose position is vacant and whose bed George is about to take is evocative:

George stepped over and threw his blankets down on the burlap sack of straw that was a mattress. He looked into the box shelf and then picked a small yello can from it. 'Say. What the hell's this?'
'I don't know,' said the old man... 'Tell you what...' he said finally, 'last guy that had this bed was a blacksmith... (19)

The excerpt confirms that no worker, under the harsh influence of the Great Depression takes a job permanently. Whitney is probably in another ranch somewhere, trying to make both end meets just like Lennie and George who also left Weed to Soledad.

2. The Nightmare in lieu of the Dream

This section deals with Steinbeck's portrayal of a pessimistic view of the American Dream throughout the novella. Although characters have dreams of a better and richer life, the dream failed almost all of them. The Great Depression has toppled down the ambitions of the Founding Fathers enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, stipulating that prosperity through hard work and determination is possible.

In *Of Mice and Men*, most of the characters have a dream. Although they worked hard on ranches to achieve the cherished American Dream, the dream failed them.

Lennie and George's highest aspiration is to own piece of land and be free from the need to work for others:

'OK. Some day—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 and...'

'An' live off the fatta the lan', Lennie shouted. 'An' have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we're gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.'...

Well, said George. '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 goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof. (15-16)

In fact, according to Koffitsè Ekélékana Isidore Guelly, the "American dream is also a dream of home ownership" (133). Consequently, in the novella, George and Lennie's dream of owning "a little house an' a room to ourself. Little fat iron stove, an' in the winter we'd keep a fire goin' in it" (61) seems unrealistic. This self-confident way of talking about their dream infers they have forgotten the overall depression atmosphere wherein to fulfill the American Dream seems biased. They ignore that the dream is reserved for a category of people and white trash conjuring images of poor, ignorant are fenced off from that category.

Within the above descriptive model, the greatest ignoramus of all is Lennie who could no longer sleep because of their illusory dream:

They made their beds on the sand...From the darkness Lennie called: 'George—you asleep?'

'No. Whatta you want?'

'Let's have different colour rabbits, George.'

'Sure we will,' George said sleepily. 'Red and blue and green rabbits, Lennie. Millions of 'em.'

'Furry ones, George, like I seen in the fair in Sacramento.'

'Sure, furry ones.'

“Cause I can jus’ as well go away, George, an’ live in a cave.’

‘You can jus’ as well go to hell,’ said George. ‘Shut up now.’
(17)

No doubt, Lennie’s insomnia is due to his illusion of fulfilling their dream of being successful and run their own business. Their unrealistic dream of owning colored rabbits—red, blue, green—seriously haunts him to a point that he could not even sleep by night.

That the fulfilment of the American Dream should not be taken for granted, its delay is being questioned by Lennie in these terms: “George, how long’s it gonna be till we get that little place an’ live on the fatta the lan’—an’ rabbits?”. (59)

The American Dream during the Great Depression victimized many people and Candy is one of the characters that George and Lennie dragged into this illusory dream. The click started for Candy when he listened to a conversation between George and Lennie:

Lennie said: ‘Tell about that place, George.’

‘I jus’ tol’ you, jus’ las’ night.’

‘Well, it’s 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’. (60)

The long conversation between George and Lennie about their fantasy of owning a land, growing vegetables and rear animals (61-2) sparked an interest in Candy who interrupted them as he asked excitedly: “how much they want for a place like that?”. (62) Lennie finally gave in to temptation: “‘Tell you what...’Spose I went in with you guys ‘Tha’s three hundred an’ fifty bucks I’d put in...I ain’t much good, but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some.” (63) Candy associates himself with Lennie and George’s fram plan. He is even ready to give his life savings to help them buy the farm which will result into nothing else than a mirage: “That’s three hundred an’ fifty bucks I’d put in...” (63).

In a real sense, many characters in the novella have a dream. They dream of a better life but they seem to be unable to make that better life materialize. Although Lennie, George and Candy have cherished

aspirations, they repeatedly fail to make them happen. The whole narrative is all about a listing of their dreams but no where did they fulfill. Crooks', the black stable-hand, subsequent intervention highlights their illusion:

You're nuts' Crooks was scornful. 'I see 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. Just like heaven. Ever'body wants a little piece of lan'. I read plenty of books out there. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody never gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkin' about it, but it's jus' in their head. (78)

Crooks' revelation above certifies that George and his friends live in illusion and as a matter of fact, their aspirations are nothing but a myth. For Crooks, the dream is the best shared thing as hundreds of ranch workers, George, Lennie and Candy included, hope for a better life which is simply similar to building a castle in the air.

Crooks himself has a dream which will never be fulfilled. He dreams of living freely and being equal to others but is not able to do so because of his skin color. The following dispute with Curley's wife when he was trying to claim his right is a case in point:

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a coloured man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all...She turned to him in scorn. Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap? Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes, ma'am.'

'Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego—nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said: 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless. For a moment she stood over him again; but Crooks sat perfectly still, his eyes averted, everything that might be hurt drawn in. (85).

This forgoing is additional evidence that dream fulfillment by Americans as a whole including master and slave is truly a complex issue. Indeed, if the most privileged race, the Whites cannot achieve their dream because of the prevailing atmosphere of depression, what would it be of the fate of the slave in such a context. It is clear that the latter would face a greater challenge making his dream of freedom come true.

In fact, Crooks is segregated against because of his skin color and no one visited him before in his bunk. Candy openly admitted this reality when he confessed: “‘I been here a long time,’ he said. ‘An’ Crooks been here a long time. This’s the first time I ever been in his rooms.’” (79). From the indented quote above, Crooks is being threatened by Curley’s wife when he claimed a basic right, which is not to be disturbed. He felt a sense of contempt to a point where he was reduced to nothing.

This feeling of loneliness due to his skin color, which prevents him from being integrated, was also expressed during a discussion with Lennie:

Crooks said gently: ‘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 bunkhouse and play rummy ‘cause you was black. How’d you like that? S’pose you had to sit out here an’ read books...A guy needs somebody- to be near him.’” He whined, “A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he’s with you. I tell ya,” he cried, ‘I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an’ he gets sick’. (76-77)

Crooks is comparing his situation with that of Lennie during a conversation when George abandoned Lennie for a short while. He was complaining about his lonely life and sickness as he was segregated against due to his black skin color. Although, his strongest aspiration is to have full rights, freedom and be equal to his white colleagues on the ranch, this aspiration will never materialize.

Another character whose dream and aspirations will never come true is Curley’s wife. Her unsuccessful marriage has stolen her dreams and freedom. Prior to her marriage, she was oppressed by her mother and later on by her husband until Lennie totally fragmented her dreams as he killed her.

Everything started with her mother’s successively preventing her from fulfilling her glamorous dream of becoming a Hollywood actress. She said:

‘I live right in Salinas,’ she said. ‘Come there when I was a kid. Well, a show come through, an’ I met one of the actors. He says I could go with that show. But my ol’ lady wouldn’ let me. She says because I was on’y fifteen. But the guy says I coulda. If I’d went, I wouldn’t be livin’ like this, you bet’. (92)

The mother of Curley’s wife has contributed in shattering her daughter’s dream. She prevented her from preventing her from fulfilling her heart desire, becoming an actress because she thought she was too young to become an actress.

Later, Curley’s wife was again a victim of her mother who intercepted a letter send to her by a guy who promised to make her a movie star. She narrates the story to Lennie in these words:

‘Nother time I met a guy, an’ he was in pitchers. Went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon’s he got back to Hollywood he was gonna write to me about it...“I never got that letter,” she said. “I always thought my ol’ lady stole it. (93)

The stolen letter has its full meaning. Curley’s wife will never fulfill her dream of becoming a movie star. She “coulda sat in them big hotels, an’ had pitchers took” of her and “spoke in the radio” (93) if her mother did not interfere and prevent her from achieving her own version of the cherished American Dream.

Curley is one of the characters that prevents his wife from attaining her aspirations. When her mother considered her a teenager, it toppled down her dreams, she was obliged to get married. She married a man she does not love. She confessed her feeling to Lennie: “Well, I ain’t told this to nobody before. Maybe I oughtn’ to. I don’ like Curley?” (93). Despite the fact that she is a freedom lover, she is being oppressed by her husband. She was prevented from talking to people, especially men, for fear of being into trouble with her husband: “What’s the matter with me? she cried. ‘Ain’t I got a right to talk to nobody?’” (92). The wife’s questioning reveals a great dissatisfaction with the oppressive situation that stifles her and prevents her from fulfilling herself and enjoying her rights as a human being.

Moreover, Curley’s wife’s untimely death is plainly the representation of a shattered dream. In fact, “hopes and dreams get snatched away from people due to things like death...” (Harley, 1). In this

respect, Curley's wife will never achieve her dream because she was accidentally assassinated by Lennie: "He shook her then, and he was angry with her. 'Don't you go yelli,' he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck" (96). The Hollywoodian aspirations of Curley's wife will never materialize. She will be buried with all this nice dream he had for, as Zandee puts it, "death is considered the enemy of life" (1).

The death of Curley's wife conditioned Lennie's, George's and Candy's dream. Put differently, their dream ends with Curley's wife's death to paraphrase Hussein ZA and Ahmed AN (7). Once George realized that Lennie has killed Curley's wife, he went looking for him in order to settle the score, putting the dream on hold: "George came quietly out of the brush and the rabbit scuttled back into Lennie's brain...". (108) Further, George "reached in his side pocket and brought out Carlson's Luger, he snapped off the safety, and the hand and gun lay on the ground behind Lennie's back". (110) After remembering their shared dream of owning a farm "Le's do it now. Le's get that place now" (111), George "pulled the trigger...Lennie jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering." Lennie's death conclusively demonstrates one of the novella's central ideas which consists in taking it for granted that only White peoples are American Dream makers. It is therefore agreeable that Luke S. H. Wright's has encapsulated it all in his article "The Death of the American Dream" by saying: "it would be well to remember that Adams specifically coined the term 'the American dream' to warn of its possible death" (199). Verily, Lennie's death has put an end to their cherished dream of buying their dream farm.

Conclusion

This study has been conducted around the hypothesis that being white is *not* enough to welcome home the American dream. The objective has consisted in analyzing the link between the fulfillment of the American Dream and the whiteness in the American context by relying on the environment of the Great Depression as depicted by Steinbeck. The study has considered showing that the dream holds shaky grounds to many white people when pondering the reality of the country. This reality, reinforced by the phenomenon of the Great Depression, has claimed many victims on both physical and psychological levels. Delving into the

issue, with the theories of New Historicism, and the psychological literary criticism, the study has revealed that the Great Depression has blocked many Americans from fulfilling the American Dream as enshrined in James Truslow Adams' book, *The Epic of America*. It has also found that all Americans including Whites and Blacks are exposed to the failure of their dream. Thus, failure is not the apantage of the unprivileged but it is there for all. Even though all the white characters in the novella have developed aspirations and expected to materialize them, this paper has concluded that the protagonist Lennie's death is the representation of the death of the white American Dream.

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