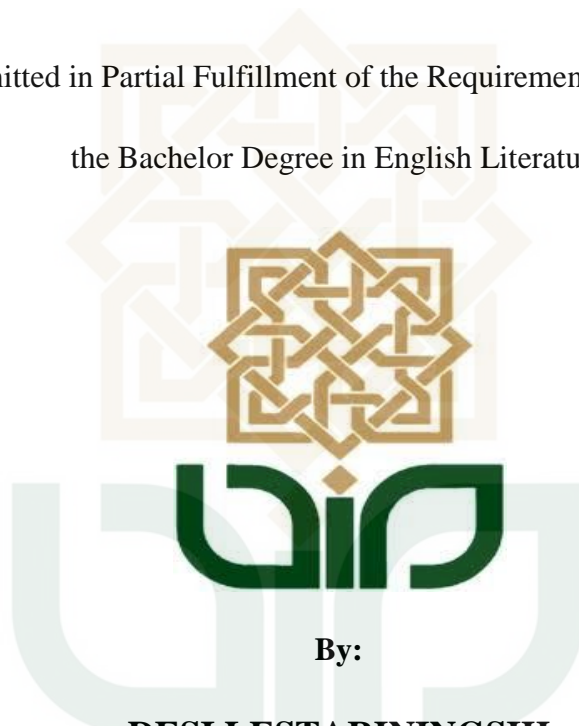


**THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN DREAM AND ITS EFFECT ON SOME  
OF THE CHARACTERS ON STEINBECK'S *OF MICE AND MEN***

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Gaining  
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature



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**2017**

## A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this thesis is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this thesis. Other writers' opinions or findings included in the thesis are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Kami menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqasyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris. Atas perhatiannya, kami ucapkan terima kasih.

*Wassalamualaikum Wr. Wb.*

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## MOTTO

*The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page. (St. Augustine)*

*But,*

*Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are. (Mason Cooley)*

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## ***DEDICATION***



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***To My Beloved Dad (Joko Pamungkas (alm.))***

***and My Dearest Mom (Salmiyah)***

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*Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.*

*Alhamdulillah Rabbil 'Alaamiin.* In the name of Allah SWT who always gives us blessing. *Sholawah* and *Salam* to our Prophet, Muhammad SAW and his family and followers. This graduating paper can be finished.

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Finally, I realize that this paper is far from being perfect. Therefore, any suggestions are gladly and warmly welcomed for improving this work.

***Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.***

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Yogyakarta, 20 November 2017

Desi Lestariningsih



## **THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN DREAM AND ITS EFFECT ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERS ON STEINBECK'S *OF MICE AND MEN***

By: Desi Lestariningsih

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper entitled *The Failure of American Dream and Its Effect on Some of the Characters on Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. The writer chooses *Of Mice and Men* because it is a short novel written by John Steinbeck in 1937 during the Great Depression Era. This novel depicts the life of working class in California, where many of previous farm workers sought job. The novel portrays the American dream during that era. This paper aims to find the American Dream found on the novel and analyze how the failure of the American dream affect some the characters. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. The theory applies in this research is American dream theory by Jim Cullen which deal with American Dream based on chronological order. The writer uses objective approach in analyzing the data. The conclusion from this paper is that there are three kinds of American dreams found in the novel. First is the dream of equality which is portrayed by Crooks character. Second is the dream of home ownership depicted by George and Candy's characters. The last is the dream of personal fulfillment portrayed by Curley's wife and Lennie's character. The next problem regarding on how the American dream failure affect the character is that because each character has their own motive in achieving the dream; when the motivation is lost, they lost the will to continue the dream too.

Keyword: American dream, equality, home ownership, personal fulfillment

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## **THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN DREAM AND ITS EFFECT ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERS ON STEINBECK'S *OF MICE AND MEN***

Oleh: Desi Lestariningsih

### **ABSTRAK**

Skripsi ini berjudul *The Failure of American Dream and Its Effect on Some of the Characters on Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Penulis memilih untuk membahas *Of Mice and Men* karena novel ini adalah sebuah novel pendek yang ditulis oleh John Steinbeck pada tahun 1937 dalam masa Depresi Besar. Novel ini menggambarkan tentang kehidupan para kaum buruh yang mencari pekerjaan. Novel ini memuat tentang potret *American Dream* pada masa itu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan *American Dream* di dalam novel dan menganalisa bagaimana kegagalan *American Dream* mempengaruhi beberapa karakter dalam novel. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian adalah kualitatif deskriptif. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Teori *American Dream* oleh Jim Cullen yang mengacu kepada urutan konologis terjadinya *American dream*. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan objektif dalam menganalisis data. Kesimpulan yang diperoleh dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa ada tiga jenis *American dream* yang terdapat di dalam novel. Yang pertama adalah mimpi akan kesetaraan (*dream of equality*) yang digambarkan dalam karakter Crooks. Yang kedua adalah mimpi akan kepemilikan rumah (*dream of home ownership*) yang ditunjukkan oleh karakter George dan Candy. Yang terakhir adalah mimpi akan kepuasan pribadi (*dream of personal fulfillment*) yang digambarkan dalam karakter istri Curley dan Lennie. Masalah selanjutnya yang berhubungan dengan bagaimana kegagalan *American Dream* mempengaruhi karakter dalam novel adalah karena setiap karakter mempunyai tujuan tersendiri dalam mencapai mimpi, ketika motivasi nya hilang, mereka kehilangan keinginan untuk melanjutkan mimpi mereka juga.

Kata kunci: *American dream*, kesetaraan, kepemilikan rumah, kepuasan pribadi

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

*Of Mice and Men* is a short novel by John Steinbeck that was first published in 1937. In literature works, novel is one of the popular genres available. Abrams stated that novel is “the term for novel in most European language is *roman*, which is derived from the Italian *novella* (literally, “a little new thing”), which was a short tale in prose” (2009:226).

Some of Steinbeck novel was written during 1930s when the Great Depression occurs. During that period, lots of people might lost their hope; but as many other Americans, there is American dream that play the role of hope. The term of American dream was mentioned by James Truslow Adams on his book, *The Epic of America* written in 1931. He stated that:

... that 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 difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (1931:317)

It is linear with the content of the Declaration of Independence in Congress, July 4, 1776: “... that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,

Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness, ... (<http://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>). In the novel, those aspects of American dream can be seen on the characters' hope in having their own land or being freed from loneliness or alienation. The writer will further analyze those aspects using American dream theory by Jim Cullen. Cullen categorized American dream into various kinds based on loosely chronological order (Cullen, 2003:8).

The writer chooses novel as the object of study because novel can be a portrayal of life unlike short story that "..., cannot afford the space for leisurely analysis and sustained development of character, and cannot develop as dense and detailed a social milieu as does the novelist" (Abrams and Harpham, 2009:332). Therefore, why the writer specifically chooses *Of Mice and Men* because as it was written during the Great Depression Era, the writer wants to know how the American dream was manifested during that period and how the dream failure affects the characters. This novel also shorter than other Steinbeck's novels set during the Great Depression, but it still manage to convey the purpose in showing the American dream of the characters. The writer also chooses to not include all the characters on the novel. The writer will only include characters that show the kind of American dreams found in the novel, and analyze them. The writer will not categorize the characters, and will solely choose by whether the character portrays the American dream or not.

The Great Depression was a large scale economic depression worldwide which lasted about 10 years starts from 1929 until 1939. It was triggered by "Black Thursday" on October 24, 1929. That was when lots of traders sold their

stock shares of 12.9 million in a day; then the prices fell 23 percent caused the stock market crash. Because of that, by 1933 in America, unemployment had risen from 3 percent to 25 percent and wages fell 42 percent. Prices also fell 10 percent each year because of deflation. These also caused farmers lost their land; and because of over cultivation throughout the years and a drought, the “Dust bowl” phenomenon was happening in Midwest. This previously fertile land became wasted and barren caused workers look for job in California. (<http://www.thebalance.com/the-great-depression-of-1929-3306033>).

The writer is interested in America because for centuries America had been attracting millions people from all over to world to come with various reasons. For several decades, the uncontrollable numbers of illegal immigrants become a constant political debate, but people still flooding the land. (<http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline>) Thus, American dream is also still relatable to be learned. The Great depression becomes a part of history that helps to shape the dream. The failure of American dream is important in this research because not every dream can be fulfilled especially during the Great depression, and it answers the question on how it affects the characters.

It is what the novel tried to portray, the life of the migrant workers during the great depression era and how they tried to achieved their American dream. Each character with dream has different motivation and different ways to reach the goal. They also have different reactions on the outcome of the dream. In this research, the writer tries to analyze the American dream found in the novel and the outcome of that dream. The result is that all the characters that represent the



American dreams are failed to achieve their dream. Hence the writer chooses to analyze how the failure will affect the characters' action or decision using American Dream theory by Jim Cullen. Many people want to achieve their dream. That is why the writer is interested in analyze how its failure affect the characters.

As a Muslim, we believed that Allah created human in many different background, status, race, and religion in order to them for knowing each other. All of them are basically created equal; the thing that differentiates them is only how righteous they are in Allah's eyes, so no one can be judged by others. Hence the American also has the similar dream of equality. In regards Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness concept, Islam also has similar concept as seen in Q.S Al Isra: 33,

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا  
فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوَلِيَّهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ  
مَنْصُورًا

*And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly - We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported [by the law].* (<http://quran.com/17/33>)

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The novel was written during the Great Depression Era, so people wanted to hold on to the slightest hope available. For a long time people are familiar with the term American dream. *Of Mice and Men* also depicted how people will pursuit the dream in the darkness era, so the paper will focus on answering these:

- A. What are the American dreams portrayed in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*?
- B. How the failure of American dream is depicted in the story and how it affects some of the characters?

### **1.3 Objective of Study**

This paper objective is to analyze the American dream and its failure in obtaining American dream as seen in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

### **1.4 Significance of Study**

Theoretically, this research aims to reach particular purposes that are hopefully useful for the readers. This paper studies about the American dream portrayed in the novel and how it fails and the effects to the characters. With the portrayal of American dream in the novel, we can compare to the American dream nowadays.

Practically, this paper purpose is to increase the writer ability in analyzing the American dream during the Great Depression Era. For the researcher, hopefully this research can provide different perspective and can be compared, analyzed, criticized or explored deeper in different works.

### **1.5 Literature Review**

The writer uses some previous researches conducted to the object or theory as a literature review. First, the writer use graduating paper entitled, "John Steinbeck the man and the Environment (Intertextuality in the social awareness of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*) by Rini Handayani from Sanata Dharma University (2007). In her research, the writer

not only uses one novel by Steinbeck; she uses three novels that set on the Great Depression Era to reveal the social realism issues. All the novels were set in the *Promised Land*; California where all the characters are struggled to achieved their dreams.

Then, there is another researcher from the same institution, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, by Setyorini Kholidi (2013) entitled, “Anxiety and Defense Mechanism on George Milton in Pursuing the Dream as Portrayed in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*”. The writer concludes that George has suffered from two kind of anxiety. He got realistic anxiety because of Lennie and other circumstances surrounded. He also suffers from moral anxiety from Aunt Clara to take care of Lennie. Those anxieties produced his defense mechanism named repression, rationalization, and fixation.

Next, there is Rara Novita from UIN Sunan Kalijaga (2014) in her thesis entitled, “Alienation of Modern Man in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*”. The writer is interested in alienation topic because it is always been a part of human life. Alienation happens because of the sharp division created by social forces in society between people and their society. The writer will relate the concept of alienation in modern man on the novel. The researcher believes that *Of Mice and Men* is portrayal of the reality of human’s social phenomenon. This novel would create a good emotional response towards readers that can lead extensive discussions.

The last is an essay entitled “*Of Mice and Men: The Failure of the American Dream Essay*”. It is a five paged online essay from [studymoose.com](http://studymoose.com)

written in 2015. While the title seems like exactly the same, this research offers deeper analysis with the actual theory. The essay found in studymoose did not mention any theory used.

All the previous works above show at least one of the objects or theory as the writer; however they are different. The first research uses Marxist approach and History-biographical approach to get deep understanding on Steinbeck's social awareness of lower class people. The second research only focuses on George Milton Character. She applies psychological theory especially Sigmund Freud's theory of anxiety. Next research uses the Schacht's perspective of alienation. In this research the writer applied American Dream Theory with objective approach on analyzing the American dream and its failure on some characters in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Using only intrinsic elements of the novel make the analyze more focus on the novel itself.

### **1.6 Theoretical Approach**

The writer uses American Dream theory by Jim Cullen and applies objective approach that only focuses on the intrinsic elements of literary work named characters, plot, setting, theme, etc. Abrams and Harpham state that objective criticism or approach:

deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an "extrinsic" relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by "intrinsic" criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelation of its component elements. ... (2009:63)

American dream had been a popular term since 20th century. It is a dream to have a better chance in getting a better life. This dream made many people from all over the world to come to America to make a better life and get the freedom that they cannot achieved in their homeland. As mentioned that Cullen had categorized the American Dream First is the desire of religious freedom that made many Europeans migrate to America. Second is the political manifesto of the dream that is The Declaration of Independence. Next is the desired freedom from slavery which then became the dream in regard of equality. After that, there is dream of home ownership which then further became dream of personal fulfillment that may vary depend on the individual (Cullen, 2003:8-9). Because the novel setting is during the Great depression which happen after the Declaration of Independence, there are only three kinds of American Dreams found in the novel. They are: 1) Dream of Equality, 2) Dream of Home Ownership, and 3) Dream of Personal Fulfillment.

## **1.7 Method of Research**

### **1.7.1 Type of Research**

The type of research applied in this research is qualitative method uses library research. The writer uses sources like novel, books, websites, and other sources to support the research. In qualitative methods, the research does not deal with survey or numberings in any form. The writes has to narrate the data in words.

### **1.7.2 Data Sources**

There are two kinds of data, the primary or main data and the supporting data. The primary data are taken from *Of Mice and men* Novel by John Steinbeck. The supporting data used by the writer are books and works related to the novel and the topic.

### **1.7.3 Data Collection Technique**

In collecting data, the writer uses some steps. First, the writer does some close reading on Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Next, the writer takes the data from the novel that will be analyzed. Last, the writer collects the marked data based on the objective approach used and applies the theory used.

### **1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique**

In analyzing the data, the writer follows these following procedures. First, is choosing the novel to be analyzed, which is John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Second, the writer determines the problem statements. Next step is to study the content to analyze the American dream in the novel and its failure, and how it affects the characters.

A description of American dream theory by Jim Cullen must be given; then, the writer can apply the theory and starts analyzing. By the end of the research, conclusion and suggestion of this paper must be written.

## **1.8 Paper Organization**

This paper is arranged into four chapters. The first chapter informs about the introduction that consists of background of study, problem statements, objectives of study, significances of study, literature review, theoretical approach,

method of research, and paper organization. Chapter two explains the intrinsic elements of Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* including place and time setting, summary, plot, characters and characterizations, theme, and point of view. The next chapter contains the analysis in details about the American dream as portrayed in the novel and how the failure of the American dreams affect some of the characters. The last chapter presents the conclusion about the research and suggestion.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 4.1 Conclusion

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that there are at least three kinds American dream depicted by Steinbeck on *Of Mice and Men* Novel. They are the dream of equality, the dream of home ownership, and the dream of personal fulfillment. Each dream is depicted by different characters. We see the dream of equality is carried by Crooks, who is the only black skinned person in the story. As any other African-American in that time period, he also faced discrimination although he is not the descendant of slave.

The second American dream portrays in the novel is the dream of home ownership which is shown in George and Candy's characters. Although, both of them only made the dream behind of some pretenses that caused they to end their dream when the motivation that made the dream possible is lost. The last American dream in the story is the dream of personal fulfillment portrayed by Lennie and Curley's wife. Lennie only followed George. George said that he wants to have home and land, but actually Lennie only want to freely pet soft things like animal fur. Hence George promised to get Lennie rabbit. The kind of personal fulfillments that she wants are fame, wealth, and the satisfying feeling from getting attention by men. It is ironic when her initial American dream was fame, but her name was never mentioned throughout the book.

The next problem statement is in regards on how the American dreams portrayed in the novel and how the failure affects the characters. The dream of



equality is portrayed by Crooks in form of his desire to be seen as a not hopeless cripple who can work on anything he wants and to be included in other's dream. The thing is that he dislikes other people achievement, and has lack of motivation. Upon his failed dream, it affects him to behave proudly and belittles someone he thought weaker than him.

The dream of home ownership is portrayed by George and Candy. George's dream is portrayed as a fight against loneliness. He always thought that he should be different from other workers that stuck in un-ended cycle of earning money, wasting them, moving toward another ranch to earn money again, and then waste them again; so he wants Lennie to accompany him to fulfill the dream. George's failure affects him in form of his behavior to end his own hope and becomes of what he feared greatly, being lonely and behave like other workers.

Candy's dream is portrayed as his hope to get rid of his fear of him being useless and be eliminated or shacked. He associated himself with and old dog that will be eliminated by its owner after it no longer useful. He wants to share his earnings to feel useful again. The failure of his dream affects his behavior to blame other and make no effort in continuing the dream.

The last dream portrayed in the novel is dream of personal fulfillment by Lennie and Curley's wife. Lennie's dream is portrayed as a pure desire of enjoyment. He only has simple thinking because of his mental disability. He seeks for George's approval since George is like a guardian figure to him. He wants to feel soft things. His failure to achieve the dream leads him to his fate as being killed by George.

Whereas Curley's wife dream is portrayed by her hope to have easy life without much effort. At first she seek fame since she hope that fame can make her become a center of attention and rich at the same time. Unfortunately, she cannot make it happen, so she wants to be rich without effort by marriage. Turn out that his husband is very possessive. Encourage by her initial dream of fame, she seeks for attention. The failure of her dream makes her to behave irrationally. She knows that her husband is very possessive and temperamental, but she flirts to gain others' attention. She ignore her own fear of violence that leads to her death also.

Based on all failure of the dreams in the story; it can be concluded that, according to Benjamin Franklin statement that American dream can only be achieved when the ability to shaped one destiny is determined by the person him or herself. In the story, George, Candy, and Crooks defined their dream because they have particular motivation; but, when the motivation is lost, they also lost the will to continue their dream. That means their motivation was not strong enough to help them shaped and achieved their dream. Lennie never know the strength he had, he naively follow everything George said. His motivation is to satisfy George, so he can get what he wants. In other hand, Curley's wife seeks and easy way out by changing from one personal fulfillment into another that caused her death in the end. It is true that the past experience will affect the present, whereas the present will also affect the future; but, the person's own motivation should be enough to define their dreams.

## 4.2 Suggestion

This paper is in fact still very far from perfect because of the limited time and source available in conducting the research. There are a lot of obstacles that the writer faces in completing this graduating paper. Despite of the limitation, *Of Mice and Men* still provide various topics to be discussed.

This paper only focused on American dream based on objective approach that only focuses on the intrinsic element of the novel; so, for further analysis, the next researcher can use different approach. Furthermore, the writer only analyze on how the American dream was portrayed in the novel and how its failure affects George, Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife. The next researcher may explore the other characters to be analyzed.

The factor that caused the American dream fails in *Of Mice and Men* mostly because when the motivation that makes that persons dream is lost. They hold on temporary factors such as person or dreams of other. In other to achieve their dream, in Islam, we are taught that we can only depend on Allah, The Almighty and the Creator of all as mentioned in Q.S Al Kahf:44,

عُقْبًا وَخَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا خَيْرٌ هُوَ ۗ الْحَقُّ لِلَّهِ الْوَلَايَةُ هُنَالِكَ

*There the authority is [completely] for Allah, the Truth. He is best in reward and best in outcome.* (<http://quran.com/18/44>)

Most of the characters put their motivation in wrong way, so they are easy to back away the motivation is lost. Actually, if they put their hope on God, like the motto created by the America's founding fathers, "In God we trust"; they will

never lost their hope in achieving their American dream, no matter how difficult the obstacles they face.



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