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## ABSTRACT

*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck is a story from the very core of the toughness and harshness of real life, it is a story of no censure, it is the reflection of the world of Great Depression and American Dream from the eye of Steinbeck. In this essay, the reflections of Steinbeck's plain language and all its features on the world he has created in the novella are investigated, how the language gradually forms up the social pyramid, how it, through the carefully chosen adjectives and adverbs, build the characters, and the social structure of the ranch are examined.

Steinbeck takes the reader on a journey to the world of American Dream along with two contrasting characters, George and Lennie, and through this journey, the reader sees both the top and bottom and middle of the social pyramid in the society, which creates all the unfairness. The social pyramid resembles to a caste system, as shifts through classes are nearly impossible, as the bottom layers, in this case women and black man, are destined to be crushed under the conventions of the society, as the layers depend on money and strength, as the boss stands on the top, and as Lennie, the misfit, do not have any place in the pyramid. While Steinbeck aims to show the reader how this misfit will be ultimately destroyed entirely from the society, he uses the plainest language he could use. He chose to stay away from any kind of ornamentation, or embellishment, he used natural elements, metaphors and similes and gave out detailed descriptions of characters and setting but obeyed no grammar rules, did not grant any complicated diction. The essay acknowledges the compelling effect of the language, as it is the perfect match to tell this earthy story.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck is the novel of minds and hearts lost in the famous vortex called "The American Dream", that are trying to survive the pyramid of social classes, that belong to a woman, a man, a boss, helpless workers, and two fellows with the most extraordinary story. Steinbeck takes its readers to this story of devotion and brotherhood, the story of George and Lennie, two migrant workers who are bound up to each other for the most of their lives, who travel, eat and dream together, but at the same time who are so different from each other. *Of Mice and Men* is the book of a relationship in which one is dependent on the other, in which one is always responsible to clean up the deed and histories. George is a man who would have his only concerns as making an almost negligible amount of money, having somewhere to sleep, going to cathouse and drinking if Lennie would have not been a part of his life, while Lennie functions in the novel as he shows the reader how the misfit, would be eventually eliminated from the society. Steinbeck draws a society, and all the conflicts, social classes and discriminations within it. As Steinbeck is the author of societies and reality, he does not go off from his classic contents and stick together to depict another society in *Of Mice and Men*. Steinbeck, created the story in such a time where Wall Street was demolished, where the working class was gradually sinking in what was called the American Dream, and he reflected all the conventions of this context, as the way they are. He did not use a fancy language, which would be far from the full of slang, miles away from grammar language, the real language of West. He built the pyramidal structure of the society, he put a woman whose freedom is restricted, workers who have to acquiesce to hard conditions, a boss who stands on the top of the pyramid, and

Lennie who does not belong to any part of this caste system. In this essay the core of this pyramid will be explored through the detailed analysis of the society, the reflections of Steinbeck's characteristics and the functions of the language.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL

*Of Mice and Men* has the context of the year it was written: 1937. In 1937 as Steinbeck was writing for the San Francisco News, he had the chance to witness the conditions of the migrant workers of California. At that time California was named as the "promised land" in which it was believed infinite money lied and even the most unreachable dreams were realized. These are actually the highlights of the era "The American Dream", the famous title that is born from the ashes of the collapse of the Wall Street in 1929. As the stocks on the Wall Street fell apart, first the 10-year long period called the "Great Depression" commenced as it triggered the American Dream to come alive. The American Dream is really the dreams of the Americans, the worker class of the Americans, who are waiting for a hand to pull them out of the abrasive conditions. To extend these abrasive conditions: failed crops, drought, forced migration to opulent lands, unemployment... Almost every migrant worker had to live under a master, and the one having the land, having the property also owned the men, just like Candy said "*I have planted crops for damn near ever'body in this state, but they wasn't my crops, and when I harvested'em, it wasn't none of my harvest.*"(Steinbeck, 108-109). Candy and all the others working on the farm were in this condition; they had worked for all their lives, and the outcome of all this labor was nothing but a trivial amount of money which would

only afford one or two shots of drink every week and a ride to the cathouse. This has caused for these men to dream what is called the “American Dream”. American Dream is the dream of having a land of oneself, in which there is no prodigiously exhausting hours of work, or a mean boss, or frivolous money: “*Somethin’ he could live on and there couldn’t nobody throw him off of it.*” (Steinbeck, 108). This is the core of this Dream. This is the main desire of these Dreamers. Although Candy minimized this dream as he used the word “*something*” indicating that he does not ask for much, this dream is almost every time destined to stay as a dream. Because with the amount of money a migrant worker can save, having a property or owning a land will happen to be rather unrealistic.

## **2. STEINBECK’S LANGUAGE**

The remarks of Steinbeck’s language in *Of Mice and Men* can be encountered within many aspects of the novel, as the simplicity of the language is the most outstanding feature of all, there lays, the rich descriptions of the settings, the detailed delineations of the characters, the usage of natural elements, the linguistic devices, and the meticulously created diction contribute to the overall themes of the novel in distinct ways. Under the title of *Steinbeck’s Language*, all the effects and outcomes of these remarks of the language will be delved, through direct examples from the novel.

## 2.1. THE PLAINNES OF THE STORY AND ITS REFLECTION TO THE SIMPLICITY OF THE LANGUAGE

Steinbeck is known for his transparency. To extend this term: the basic language, even colloquial language and the realistic perspective. Steinbeck uses the language in almost the most basic form he could use, yet still holds onto the profound impact the book leaves on the reader. *Of Mice and Men* is the story of reality, it does not comprise of ball dresses, or glorious houses, but it is all about the harshness of time, because George and Lennie, have to work all their lives to survive, they always have to hide so that no one will notice what Lennie is capable of, how he innocently kills rabbits and dogs and even human beings. That is why there is no easiness in this story, and the language is the consequence. Steinbeck's characteristic is to choose a down-to-earth story from real life and write this story with the same easy and earthy style. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck sticks to the characteristic of his and he narrows down the language to its basis, adding flavors of West, as the setting is in the West region of United States: "*I knowed they was going to before I ever eat'em.*" (Steinbeck, 70). Steinbeck used "*knowed*" instead of "*knew*", he used "*I ever eat'em*" instead of "*I had never eaten them*". The language and the context has become a one united piece, that is why the language does not grab the attention, instead the spotlight is taken above the story.

## 2.2 SETTING DESCRIPTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON FORESHADOWING AND THE DELINEATION OF THE CONTEXT

Since this is a story of no embellishment, the language is out of beautification, but the rich descriptions, the similes used and the meticulously chosen adjectives contribute to the profoundness of the language. *Of Mice and Men* is bountiful of detailed descriptions, and imageries when it comes to setting delineations. Steinbeck opens up the story with an exceedingly comprehensive setting depiction: *"A few miles South of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank, and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight, before ranching the narrow pool."*(Steinbeck, 18). Although through these two sentences much of the setting was already drawn in the mind of the reader, Steinbeck went on further and gave an almost two pages long description upon the place near Soledad. Steinbeck did not eschew going into the core of "details". He, in the beginning of the novel, just like he is wanting the reader to draw the picture of the place Lennie and George is in right now, first gives the position: *" a few miles South of Soledad"*, and where the Salinas River flows. *"Soledad is located in one of the primary wine grape growing regions of California. It is seated at the heart of one of the most economically productive and technologically advanced agricultural regions in the world "*<sup>1</sup>. As Steinbeck chose such a setting to put Lennie and George, the reader, will immediately get the clue why these two men are out in this place: to migrate towards the affluent lands and opportunities of California. Besides giving a hint upon the aim of these two

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<sup>1</sup> (U.S. Geological Survey Geographic Names Information System: Soledad, California)



fellows, Steinbeck, also foreshadowed the context of the text, as migrating to West, to places like Soledad, is seen in the time of the American Dream.

### **2.3 USAGE OF NATURAL ELEMENTS**

In the rich descriptions, the signs of the heavy usage of natural elements are constantly encountered with. This is also another well-known earmark of Steinbeck, as it was mentioned before Steinbeck chooses stories from unaesthetic and homely lives, and these lives almost always comprise mightily of nature. *“The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight, before ranching the narrow pool”*, in all the descriptions of the setting a piece of nature is so possibly came across with, and this contribution of nature in the setting results in both strengthening the relation between the context and the place and accentuating the appeal to the senses of the reader, in this case the sense of sight and touch. As Steinbeck uses adjectives like *“warm”* and *“yellow”* and *“green”*, he appealed to the reader’s sense of both touch and sight. As Steinbeck gives the warm and soothing nature of the Salinas River, or describes the deepness of it through the color green or visualized the sands, he established to create a setting of nature in the reader’s mind.

## 2.4 THE ROLE OF DICTION AND LINGUISTIC DEVICES ON THE CREATION OF THE CHARACTERS

The language dives deep in details also when it comes to characters. As Steinbeck tells and depicts, the characters are gradually formed up in front of the eyes of the reader: *“The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked the opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders: and he walked heavily dragging his feet, a little while, the way a bear drags his paws.”*(Steinbeck, 19). The intention of Steinbeck when giving such a detailed delineation was not only to manage to make the reader imagine George and Lennie the way Steinbeck envisaged them, but also to show the conflict between these two characters, that was even reflected to their outer looks. George and Lennie, have a rather peculiar relationship as Lennie is a mentally disabled man. This is the reason that there is a massive gap between the two characters, actually between Lennie and the rest of the society. Lennie is unable to fit neither the society he came from nor the society of Soledad which they are leading to, nor any kind of society at all. For Lennie, the world is chunked up to two categories, one in which him and George lives along with their dreams about the ranch that they will own “one day”, and one in which the rest of the people live according to their norms and rules, that Lennie has never come up to acquiesce with: *“ ‘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. Tella bout that, George.”*

(Steinbeck 32). For Lennie, life means petting soft things, playing with cashmere, dogs and rabbits, he only gets to understand the dream that both George and Lennie are chasing after, he can only make this stay on his mind, as he constantly repeats the same sentences over and over. On the contrast, George does not have any traits that do not fit the society. The abnormality of Lennie, and the abnormality in his relationship with George is most obviously seen in the physical delineation of the two characters, even the image of these two workers walking side by side is irritating, even the way Lennie looks bothers the reader as Steinbeck chooses words like “*huge*”, “*shapeless*”, “*pale*”, and “*large*”. When describing George such words were not elected, and after the description of George, Steinbeck changes his tone rather immediately. After depicting a normal figure, he gave a brief introductory of this shift as he stated “*Behind him walked the opposite*”. Through this line, Steinbeck, prepared the reader to the strangeness in this relationship between the man walking in the front and the one that follows him from behind. Later as he chose the words that were listed, Steinbeck created a disturbing image in the reader’s mind. A tall and fat man would have not intruded the reader but a “*large*” man, with this “*shapeless*” face, with this “*huge*” posture drew a bothersome picture. Also Steinbeck resembled the way Lennie walks to “*the way a bear drags his paws*”, as he named Lennie a bear, as he called his feet “*paws*”, and labeled his style of walking as “*dragging paws*”, Steinbeck suddenly destroyed all the human related features possessed by Lennie. Further on many other similes and metaphors have been extendedly used to accentuate the deformity of Lennie even more: “*Slowly, like a terrier who doesn’t want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again. George snapped his fingers sharply, and at the sound Lennie laid the*

*mouse in his hand.*"(Steinbeck, 26). Besides being resembled to a bear, Lennie is a terrier who does not want to bring a ball to its master, in this case George. None of the metaphors or similes resemble Lennie to an individual of humankind, instead he is repeatedly resembled to animals, first the bear, then the terrier. Through this usage of language, Steinbeck draw the usual scene of Lennie and George, in which Lennie always misbehaves, is always under the commands of George, in which he can never know what is good for him, or discern what is right, and in which George is in a way a mother figure, who is destined to run after her little kid, punish him when he is naughty, or a master who snaps his finger to call his "*terrier*", who drags his "*bear*" behind him.

### **3. THE WORLD OF STEINBECK AND *OF MICE AND MEN* AND LANGUAGE'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE FORMATION OF THIS WORLD**

The language is the backbone of *Of Mice and Men*, not only it helps to understand George and Lennie, or the setting, but the society and the context behind all these occurrences too. This is the reason, the reader is rather impressed by this earthy story, because even though there is no happy ending, or any kind of elaboration, the story still manages to leave an intense impression. The language first seems basic, but as it captures the story, it is understood that the alluring nature of Steinbeck, through the hidden foreshadowing, and the detailed descriptions, forms up the deepness of the story. In this part, the world Steinbeck created through this language will be examined showing the way each character functions in the novel, the aim of their presence and how they are represented.

### **3.1. SIMULATION OF A CASTE SYSTEM**

Steinbeck, the author of *Society*, has taken the reader to the center of the caste system of the farm. There is an invisible pyramid that lies under this farm that sharply sorts out all the classes, classes of race, gender, strength and money. Caste system is a type of a society structure in which each individual belongs to a group according mainly to his or her financial force, and the borders that surround these groups are very articulate, in a way that any interactions and exchanges between groups are impossible. Such a social structure eventually forms up this huge pyramid in which the one that belongs to the bottom of the large triangle is always destined to be crushed under all, and the one at the top, is guaranteed to stay at the top. A system so similar to this is actually present in the setting near Soledad.

### **3.2 THE RELATION BETWEEN MONEY AND THE PLACEMENT IN THE PYRAMID OF SOCIAL CLASSES**

In this pyramid the top belongs to the boss, the owner of the farm, since he is the one that owns the land, and so owns all of the men working on his land. As we go down a step from the boss, there lays the son of him, Curley. Although Curley first seems to be the strongest and most powerful man after his father, he is actually at the same time one of the victims of this pyramid, because this pyramid does not only take into account the amount of money the person has in his pocket, or the amount of land he owns, but it also considers the strength, or in other words the manliness.

### **3.3 THE RELATION BETWEEN POWER AND THE PLACEMENT IN THE PYRAMID OF SOCIAL CLASSES**

Even though Curley has the money, has the land has the title of “the son of the boss”, he still cannot manages to pull off a place just under his father in this pyramidal ranch. Curley is a small man of size, he is short, he has made an unsuccessful marriage, his wife is regarded as a “troublemaker”, he has to live under the shadows of his father, and most importantly he is not as strong as Slim, both physically and socially. Slim is the head of the workers on the ranch: *“His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim...His ear heard more than was said to him and his slow speech had overtones not of thought but of understanding beyond thought”* (Steinbeck, 56). The endless and prodigious authority was what pulled Curley down from the place he could have been at, and instead put Slim just under the boss. As Steinbeck created such an unusual shift in this caste system, he managed to show that in a ranch, although at first everything seems to depend on the land and the money, the social authority sometimes can beat these two financial powers.

### **3.4 RACISM IN THE PYRAMID OF SOCIAL CLASSES**

The bottom layer belongs to Crooks. The “black” guy in the book., black is in quotation marks, because this is the only reason that puts him to the very bottom of this society. There is racism, there is slavery, and there is superiority in this era. Still the signs of this “color” discrimination are present: *“Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you*

*stink to me*" (Steinbeck, 100). Crooks, is destined to be separated from the rest of the society, from all the other workers, who have the same financial situation, and strength and manliness, but through their whiteness are positioned much above the bottom.

### 3.5 THE POSITION OF FEMALES IN THE SOCIETY

There is an important factor indicated before that affected the steps in this pyramid besides financial force: *manliness*, disregarding the position of females. Except one, the sign of females is almost inconsequential in the novel. That one exception is Curley's wife. Even this title can be efficient in understanding the place of woman in this society, because there is no place, there is not even a tiny step above or below Crooks in this pyramid for women, and that is why the name of Curley's wife will stay unknown until the end of the novel, instead she will always be named as "*the wife of Curley*", which is her only title. Curley's wife, just like Curley is a victim of the society, she has married a man for whom she has no love or romance for, she has left her house because she could not stand the restrictive life her mother granted, yet in her new life she is still discontented and sated, as she has no one to talk to, as all the workers see her as a trouble-causer: "*Sure I got husband. You all seen him. Swell guy, ain't he? Spends all his time sayin' what he's gonna do to guys he don't like, and he don't like nobody. Think I'm gonna stay in that two-by-four house and listen how Curley's gonna lead with his left twice, and then bring in the ol' right cross?*"(Steinbeck, 110). The adverb "*playfully*" is used many times to describe the way Curley's wife's acts, she, many times, was viewed nothing but a one way ticket to be sacked from the ranch in the

eyes of all these workers. Her inner out-break is seen, how she is so fed up with loneliness, that even the “*nigger*” that seems to be the lowest on the pyramid refuses to talk to her.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Steinbeck is the author of ironies. The whole novel is an irony by itself, between the meaning and the style, between the content and the message, there lays irony. The characters seem simple, as the main characters are two migrant workers, and the setting seems ordinary, the language is simplified, but at the same time these two “ordinary” characters happen to have the most extraordinary story of Soledad, of this “humdrum” setting. George and Lennie, two man of many controversies, have walked in the same road for all their lives, but they actually belong to the most divergent paths as George can fit in the society, fit in the norms, while Lennie is constantly out casted, while his differences are reflected to his appearance, while he has a prodigious force that he is unable to control, who likes fluffy and soft things, who lives in dreams of petting rabbits and dogs. In *Of Mice and Men*, the reader explores this irony, sees how Steinbeck gave such an extraordinary story with such a simple language, is constantly dragged up and down in the pyramid of social classes, and hears the stains of many American Dreams.

Steinbeck lived in the era of The American Dream, the time when Wall Street has collapsed and when the working class was in the hope of making it to the upper classes. There laid a social pyramid in that era, with strict and impassable borders, that resembled a caste system. One of the most prominent factors that affect one’s



placement in this pyramid is money and strength, so the boss stood up in the first place, followed by Slim and Curley, whose places are determined with strength. The middle ranges of the pyramid comprises of the typical migrant workers like George, who are destined to have a negligible amount of money that only lives up to going to cat house and having a few shots of drink. The bottom consists of Crooks and Curley's wife, one who is alienated because of his skin color, and one who is labeled as a "trouble-causer", who has to live under the harsh burden of being a "woman" in 1937. On the other hand, Lennie, does not belong to any part of this system, as he functions in showing how the misfit, the "different" is eventually removed.

Steinbeck through his rich descriptions, through his plain language, down-to-earth style, through metaphors and similes, through the remarks of natural elements simulated a 1937 world, a Great Depression, an American Dream world.

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