
THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER SUBJECT ON THE PERSONA “WE” FROM REAGAN’S POEM *LIFE*

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ABSTRACT

Written by young Reagan, *Life* is a poem with a distinctive discourse as a literary work in the beginning of American modernism. The study of *Life* in the present article focuses on the interpretation of “we” and is contextualized within the historical narratives of the Puritans and the spirit of American Dream in the 20s. The analysis of the poem’s representations of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the Truth presented here is a Žižekian reading of the subjects “we” in the poem’s text who appear to get themselves into a pseudo activity in relation to the narratives of the Founding Fathers as the chosen ones in the holy journey of establishing America. The speaker of the poem, which is part of “we,” reflects the spirit of American Dream and reminds his fellow Americans to keep going amidst the feeling of alienation caused by the modern capitalism that is expressed by words “suffer”, “struggle”, “weep”, “drench”, “break”, “jade”, “sorrow”, “warp” and “pain” 15 times in only 8 stanzas/32 lines. The speaker’s sense of Americanism becomes the only Truth for the “we” until they grow their own Cynical Awareness.

Keywords: subjects “we”, American Dream, pseudo activity, cynical distance, Žižek

INTRODUCTION

The ‘tale’ of American Dream had shifted since the second period of industrialization burgeoned in the 20th century in America. This shifting indicates the change of the subject of American Dream as well, which is the Americans. Since America began to widely promote its business expansion in the era of Modernism and succeeded in making import deals of agricultural products with most of European countries in WWI, the spirit of American Dream had been dwindling under the clout of what was known as the Gilded Age. It was a monumental history of “The Good times, Wild times (O’Callaghan, 2004: 92).” America had everything and did not have anything at the same time. The economic gap was so high. There were a fair number of rich people who could afford cars and luxurious lifestyles, yet on the other side of the city, a lot of people had died of famine.

The Roaring Twenties was America’s Golden era yet immensely fragile and vulnerable. The complexity was generated by a movement in the 20s that *celebrated* the inequality of the marginalized race in the period known as the Jazz Age. The musical pattern of the genre of Jazz epitomizes African-Americans’ struggle to break the domination of classical music structure created by the dominant race. The genre’s significance during the peak of the Jazz Age is clearly represented in Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* through its narrative description of a fresh and modern lifestyle. Fitzgerald’s readers, especially those who observe the great life of Jay Gatsby, will learn that the story in the novel signifies the spirit of American Dream that has not only shifted but also been corrupted by the kind of people who no longer believe in the ethos of hard work to achieve great wealth and status. Tyson (2006)

argues that:

If Gatsby is the novel's representative of the American Dream, however, the dream must be a corrupt one, for Gatsby achieves it only through criminal activity, a fact that severely deflates the image of honest, hardworking man that the dream is supposed to foster. (Tyson, 2006: 73)

The Roaring Twenties turned the idea of American Dream further away since businesses had massively contributed to changing of Americans' lifestyles by promoting consumerism. Under Warren Harding's presidency, three most powerful businessmen in the US took part in legislation: Herbert Hoover as the Secretary of Commerce, Charles Hughes as the Secretary of State, and Andrew Mellon as the Secretary of the Treasury. For President Harding, those businessmen exemplified "The Best Minds". Marx's theory about Office that has been infiltrated by entrepreneurs is that "As soon as feudalism is fully developed, there also arises antagonism to the towns (Marx, 1976: 34). It marks the beginning of a small percentage of people becoming the market's invisible hand of the nation. Businessmen who also work as government officials create a chance for themselves to secretly manipulate policies to make higher profit for their own businesses. Two economic breakthroughs during Harding's incumbency were *Laissez-faire* policy and Trickle Down policy, which had been formulated in the Secretary of Treasury's book *Taxation: the People's Business*.

The consumerism 'virus' and democracy justification inherit an economic chain that reaches its peak in the postmodern era, approximately in the beginning of the 21st century, during which the inflation rate went up to 10.3% and unemployment was recorded at 8.3%. The era is also known as the period of flourished homelessness in America. The historical narrative says that this situation became one of the reasons Ronald Reagan was elected in 1981. Reagan's republican campaign strongly proposed new economic laws that were centered on domestic issues. Reaganomics intended to have a huge tax cut from 70% to 28% and reduce government spending. Reaganomics was the first revolutionary tax policy in American history with which the government took a bold action of cutting taxes without gradual changes. Reagan's credibility in managing economic

strategies was proven by his followers' unwavering loyalty until his second incumbency. He gained supports not only from the Conservatives but also from the Democrats that called themselves *Reagan Democrat*. Given the revolutionary nature of his laws during his presidency, Reagan became one of phenomenal and popular nationalist figures in 1981-1989. He was considered to hold the key to American establishment in the beginning of postmodernism. However, a study by Komlos revealed that the tax cut scheme which was promised to increase blue collar workers; welfare, was actually just a long-term strategy to make the white-collar workers a dominant workforce in economic sectors. He argues that after 20 years, Reaganomics' legacy engenders a group of oligarchy with 1% of businessmen controlling America's policies, which helps create a plutocracy during Donald Trump's presidency (2019: 15). Reaganomics also contributed to the perpetration of racial discrimination, particularly that which targeted African-Americans. Similar to the Jazz Age, there was an emerging popularity of particular musical genre taking part in cultural reactions against social inequality in America, namely Hip-Hop. Hip-hop music produces narratives of marginalized people living in poverty, their struggle to survive, and their ways of coping with harsh environment that leaves them highly vulnerable to drug abuse, especially from a lot of parties they go to, because the authorities do not seem to care about their well-being (Weeks, 2004: 29). A leading figure whose popularity grew along with the period when America embarked on the era of postmodernism, Reagan was lauded for his revolutionary ideas, and his eloquence in expressing his thoughts could already be seen at a young age such as the one evident in his poem titled *Life*.

The novelty and significance of this research lie in the idea of observing American Dream from Reagan's point view in the context of modernism. Komlos' study (2019) concludes that Reagan's thought ends up reducing Reaganomics to an oligarchy. His research is economic based, thus he doesn't include American Dream in his discussion. A study related to American Dream, "*The Enduring Myth of the American Dream: Mobility, Marginalization, and Hope*," conducted by Wyatt-Nichol mostly explores the horrified structure of capitalism. The study's hypothesis concurs with the perspective that "people do not downsize themselves; organization elites do" (Wyatt-Nichol, 2011: 262).

Another study by Jones and Rowland (2015) analyzes Reaganomics and its relation to American Dream, but the focus is on Reagan's strategy to gather voters through his speeches. None of those studies try to understand the ideology of American Dream affected Reagan's unconscious mind. Reagan's books and his biographies will not be suitable sources to support the study of such subject because it is highly likely that they contain political agenda. Unlike those sources, literary works will be more suitable since they can be considered the creative manifestation of unconscious mind (Karim & Butt, 2011: 237). A literary work by Ronald Reagan would be less likely to contain political agenda. Most of his creative works were poems, which were written in his youth. Many of his poems have been studied by researchers, but most of the studies focus on the figures of speech he uses in them. Thus, there has been no research examining how Reagan's poems reveal his unconscious perception of American Dream.

The present research adopts a qualitative method in analyzing the subject "we" that was described as drowning into alienation in the poem's text. The interpretation of "we"—with the structure constructed by the 'big Other'—in the analysis is based on Žižek's dialectical materialism perspective in conjunction with Lacan's conception of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. Žižek believes that the subject will not bear its own desire. Rather, it is manipulated by 'big Other's desire. Therefore, it is also important to look at the manipulated desire which leads to the pseudo activity that the subject does. The symbolic and imaginary aspects of the poem are specifically examined to discover the realm of the 'big Other's desire. Specific evidence from the poem's text were selected in accordance with the focus of scrutiny and interpretation. In short, the present article presents a descriptive qualitative study of Reagan's *Life* focusing on the poem's text.

Life was written in 1928 when Reagan was a teenager. It was the period when America was getting closer to The Great Depression. The poem is viewed as young Reagan's vision of America's Greatness that he expresses between the lines. It is to be understood by the ways the symbolic and imaginary dimensions are used in the poem's text. There are three points of consideration in this matter. First, the persona of the poem is the plural subject "we." The "we" acts as the speaker or the narrator or the voice of a certain group.

However, instead of voicing the group's desire, "we" wants to 'speak' to them. Second, the word "we" is repeated 20 times in the text, and it is mostly present in lines that express the struggle of fighting. However, because there is no mention of an opponent or an enemy in the poem, the expression of the struggle can be interpreted that the speaker intends to awaken the spirit of fighting for a purpose in the group he belongs with. The speaker glorifies the struggle as a persuasive invitation. Third, Reagan writes "When life should be a song" (line 4, stanza 1), and the song metaphor appears again in line 3 and 4, stanza 4: "He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge// For an eternal life of song." Surprisingly, Reagan used the song metaphor in his second inauguration in 1985: "It is the American sound. It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic-daring, decent and fair. That's our heritage, that's our song. We sing it still". The similarity between particular lines in his poem and the abovementioned sentences in his speech makes the topic in this article worth researching. This similar way of expressing thought between the young Reagan and the old Reagan may indicate the consistency of his vision that he carried into his presidential leadership. It was manifested in his Reaganomics policies that had marked the beginning of modernism in America.

Reagan's "Life" (1928)

I wonder what it's all about, and why
We suffer so, when little things go wrong?
We make our life a struggle,
When life should be a song.

Our troubles break and drench us,
Like spray on the cleaving prow
Of some trim Gloucester schooner
As it dips in a graceful bow.

Our troubles break and drench us
But like that cleaving prow,
The wind will fan and dry us
And we'll watch some other bow.

But why does sorrow drench us
When our fellow passes on?
He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge
For an eternal life of song

What is the inborn human trait
That frowns on a life of song?

That makes us weep at the journey's end,
When the journey was oft-times wrong?

Weep when we reach the door
That opens to let us in,
And brings to us eternal peace
As it closes again on sin.

Millions have gone before us,
And millions will come behind
So why do we curse and fight
At a fate wise and kind

We hang onto a jaded life
A life of sorrow and pain
A life that warps and breaks us,
And we try to run through it again.

DISCUSSION

Subject of the Ideology

In his short essay titled *The Poetic Torture-House of Language*, Žižek perceptively argues that a language that promises a space for peace, mediation and consolidation, has, in fact, a blind spot where it cannot speak what is spoken. Nevertheless, when a language speaks, it is spoken (2014: 565). The blind spot is what Žižek calls a place for the 'big Other': "*status of language, of the 'big Other', as the subject's torture house. ... The most elementary form of torturing one's language is called poetry*" (2014: 565-566). To analyze the 'big Other' in a literary work, one needs to explore the subject who *moves* because the existence of the 'big Other' has to be identified. The subject of *Life* is the persona "we" (including the speaker of the poem). Before discovering what kind of truth that the 'big Other' constructs or its true desire, the subject's state must be revealed first. The poem narrates the struggle of "we" with the emphasis on line 2 stanza 1: "*We suffer so, when little things go wrong?*". There are 15 words in the text that represent a recurring sense of emotional strain of coping with the struggle. They are "suffer", "struggle", "weep", "drench", "break", "jade", "sorrow", "warp" and "pain." There is no explanation for those expressions, but it is made clear that the "we" is the ones experiencing the suffering: "We make our life a struggle," (line 3, stanza 1). The subject's activities and movement are prompted by the 'big Other' represented in the first stanza of the poem. The stanza can be interpreted as a clause that signifies the

'big Other's influence or power, and the 'big Other' is the Real that humankind, including the whole subject of the poem, has overlooked. Nonetheless, it cannot be the Real if its intention is to manipulate the subject for which it occurs as a pseudo activity.

On the basis of Žižek's theory that language is the dwelling which tortures the subject, the choice of persona "we" in the poem, in which the speaker belongs with, can be observed as a decision to choose who is supposed to undergo the suffering, and the blind spot in the dwelling put the subject in a position that make it realizes that "we" is the one who causes its own suffering. If the text is interpreted within the context of the American period when the young Reagan expressed his vision in the poem, the suffering that the speaker is talking about can be considered as referring to the Great Depression. However, Žižek asserts that fiction is not a representation of reality because it creates its own reality (2011: 33). Therefore, the suffering of the subjects "we," which is considered as an insignificant and common or normal feeling, is in fact the sign of complex emotional experience. It keeps the lines going and making meanings while leaving some words unspoken. The most significant message is how the "we" assures themselves that they are the cause of their own suffering.

Furthermore, the subjects "we" condition themselves to keep the circle of pseudo activity. Pseudo activity or false activity is categorized as the aftermath of inter-activity or inter-passivity. Inter-activity is a state when an activity is occurring because the subject relies on the Other, whereas the inter-passivity is a state when the occurring activity is actually conditioning the subject to continue doing the activity as well as "to prevent something from happening, so that nothing will change" (Žižek, 2011: 26). The inevitable condition in which "we" makes "their" own suffering encourages the subjects to seek another possibility that leads them to sorrow. In short, the speaker of "we" is engaging in the activity of realizing a purpose that results in the "we" going round in circles of self-blaming.

The first stanza of the poem signifies the ideological structure with which the subjects "we" as a group 'listen' to what the speaker has to say to them, that is the thoughts he expresses through the words from the second to the last stanza as an avowal of truth. In this sense, the second to the eighth stanzas of the poem are the 'lines' of the controlled/conditioned.

The big Other closely operates on an ideology in the sense of what Žižek calls the utility:

This externality, which directly embodies ideology, is also occluded as 'utility'. That is to say: in everyday life, ideology is at work especially in the apparently innocent reference to pure utility - one should never forget that in the symbolic universe, 'utility' functions as a reflective notion; that is, it always involves the assertion of utility as meaning (2009: 2).

The big Other intends to direct the subjects to a particular activity. In this context, the big Other in the poem acts as an ideology. The big Other in *Life* in the first stanza establishes its position as a manifestation of the 'utility' for the subjects "we" to give it a belief to on despite the 'trap' of the pseudo activity: awakening realization and maintaining the situation. The 'utility' that the big Other wants to generate here compels the subjects to believe the ideas expressed from stanza 2 to stanza 8, and therefore reflects the big Other's power to control its subjects.

Symbolization of the Journey

The big Other's act that is driven by its desire operates in the Symbolic order. The activity in Symbolic order relies on the belief in the sense of immediacy or rituality. The Symbolic order must be represented in a similar way with the raw Real to give the subject a purpose. This is also to prevent the presence of a multitude of 'empty' subjects. Since the big Other is not the Real, it has the characteristic of a derivative tale, and it can neither stimulate the intimate feeling nor arouse other kinds of emotion, although it operates at the belief level of the intimate feeling or ritual activity. Whatever the big Other desires through the Symbolic order of intimate feeling, the subject has to be exactly what the big Other wants it to do, to feel, and to believe.

The lines in the second and third stanzas contain metaphorical signs that most strongly indicate the poem's connection with American history. The second to the fourth lines in stanza 2 and the second to the fourth lines in stanza 3 represent the imaginaries that do not merely describe a meaningless journey on a ship, but a metaphor of a meaningful significant voyage.

Like spray on the cleaving prow

Of some trim Gloucester schooner
As it dips in a graceful bow

But like that cleaving prow
The wind will fan and dry us
And we'll watch some other bow

The choice of metaphors and the repetition of the voyage imagery in stanza 2 and stanza 3 reflect the subjects' recollection of the early period of American history when the Puritan Pilgrims made a voyage to American continent on Mayflower in 1620. For most American nationalists, such as the young Reagan, the Mayflower voyage headed to the Promised Land not only a historical journey of mankind but also a strenuous and transformative journey of American forefathers towards their spiritual truth, true self, and religious purification.

The Subject's Truth and True Self

A further scrutiny of *Life* leads to the finding that the word "eternal" appears twice in the text: one is in the fourth stanza, line 4, and the other one is in the sixth stanza, line 3. The first "eternal" is in the line that, together with the previous one, suggests a sacrifice: "He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge// For an eternal life of song" (lines 3-4, stanza 4). The second "eternal" plays an integral part in the meaning implied by line 1 to 3 in stanza 6: "Weep when we reach the door// That opens to let us in,// And brings to us eternal peace." They imply the final destination of the journey that the "we" have embarked on as the chosen ones. A question to raise in interpreting stanza 6 is that whether the subjects are blessed with a privilege of being part of the journey or it is blessed because it has arrived in the right destination that "brings to us eternal peace" (lines 3, stanza 6).

Having eternity "eternal" as a reward for the sacrifice and pilgrimage is the ideal choice for such religious journey that the Puritans had dedicated themselves to. The momentous historical event that contributed to the pilgrims' voyage to America were King Henry VIII and the England parliament's refusal to recognize their rights to remain loyal to the conservative Catholic. Puritan means to purify or "protesting spirit of Protestantism (Foerster, 1980: 3)." For the Puritan pilgrims, their migration to America was not just a voyage. It was a religious voyage for which they made a sacrifice and expected an eternal peace in the future. In other words, in *Life*,

the speaker wants to remind his fellow believers, represented by the subjects "we," that they are the chosen ones because they are the descendants of the Puritans. "We" are divine and blessed, and heaven is the ultimate prize for them. From the second stanza to the last one, the "we" are essentially aiming for the truth because this is what the subjects' true self is.

Justifying Purification

Stanzas 4, 5, 7, and 8 represent rhetorical lines that aim to raise the subjects' awareness of the suffering they are experiencing, especially the fourth line of stanza 5: "When the journey was oft-times wrong?" Death also becomes part of reality that the speaker tries to make the subjects "we" aware of in order that they can fully realize the misery of life that awaits them: "When our fellow passes on?" (line 2, stanza 4); "Millions have gone before us," (line 1, stanza 7). In the lines that follow, the speaker seems to try to normalize the most painful loss, namely death: "When our fellow passes on?// He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge" (lines 2-3, stanza 4); "Millions have gone before us,// And millions will come behind" (lines 1-2, stanza 7). The message is that death is part of sacrifice they need to go through if they hope for a great reward at the end: "At a fate wise and kind" (line 4, stanza 7). This belief holds that sacrifice is the duty that the believers are required to fulfill as a pathway to purification: "brings to us eternal peace" (lines 3, stanza 6).

Justification for heroic purification, undertaken with or without compulsion, had been Americans' greatest zeal that was recorded in history. Motivated by their determination to challenge and separate themselves from the Old Worlds such as England, France and Spain, the Pilgrims, beginning in 1620, traveled on a long journey to the land that they called The New World—their New World. They claimed that the New World offered a better system than the Old World did, and along with the idea, they introduced what was called the American Dream. By criticizing the control deterministic Calvinist hierarchy over the subject's life and after-life destiny and the denial of the citizens' rights to choose beliefs that were different from that of the ruler, American Dream offered its adherents a new world order that was anti-deterministic in nature. It means that subjects can choose and decide for their own life, and they have a chance to achieve a better life through hard work. American Dream not only encouraged a system

that allowed one to choose his or her own destiny but also promised its believers a success in the future just like what Abraham Lincoln had achieved (Cullen, 2003). However, the nationalists, who share the same spirit of breaking free from the Old World system as the Pilgrims had in the past, have gone too far to the point where they marginalize people who are different from them, such as those considered queer. The worst social exclusion recorded in the history of purification is probably the uprooting of indigenous people from their land. One of well-known tragedies related to native Americans is celebrated as Thanksgiving Day. In other words, American forefathers had offered a paradoxical freedom wrapped up in American Dream. Nonetheless, American Dream is upheld as the truth that values individual voice and freedom. It has helped shape American democracy with which the New World was transformed into a country through the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Led by Reverend John Robinson, Pilgrim colonists in 1620 intended not only to establish a constitution that guarantee the rights of the citizens to adopt a religion or belief of their choice but also to spread Christianity in the New World. The earliest history of purification agenda in the New World can be learned by listening to the songs from Native Americans, reading their poems and exploring tragedies happening to them. The political movement and actions to dominate the New World had led to the horrific Indian massacres and one of tragedies that is known as the *Tears of Trail*. Indeed, the purification mission and the desire to force Christianity upon the inhabitants of the land developed to be the reason the Indians lose their identity. Conversion into Christianity required complete belief in Jesus and an understanding that no power other than His that could rightly control the world. His power as the Almighty covers everything on earth. Thus the river, the sea, the forest, the trees, and the soil could not be considered the real source of life, because they sustain humankind under God's will. Christians have the obligation to pray as guided by the Bible, including religious-cultural rituals such as Christmas, Ascension Day, and Easter day. The Puritans believed that conversion into Christianity, particularly for native Americans, involved "sudden realization that salvation can come only through God's grace and not through man's efforts, and finally relief and peaceful assurance that, as a result of this perception, one is

'saved'" (Washburn, 1975: 115). For the Puritans, purification was one of their holy purposes as God's chosen ones, and it was proven when they could survive the hardship of living in the wilderness such as when they had to endure severe illness during their first attempt of forming a colony in the New World.

Life and Americanisms

Looking into the historical period where *Life* was situated, the poem can be contextualized within two dramatic changes in American economy in the 20s, namely the prosperity during the Roaring Twenties and the critical hardship during the Great Depression. There was so much economic turmoil and desperation that affected many Americans' lives captured in many American literary works. One of the most influential works is a 1939 Pulitzer-winning novel written by John Steinbeck titled *Grapes of Wrath*. The novel can vividly portray the struggle of the lower classes (or in Marx's term, the proletariat) through the story of the Joad family, farmers who had no choice but migrating to the city because their landlord had taken away their field, means of production, house, and other important things in their life. The sorrow during the depression period was not only caused by the loss of job and welfare but also the loss of family members to starvation, sickness, and depression. *Grapes of Wrath* portrays how capitalism was growing fast, and modernism was taking shape, but they brought poverty and despair to the lower class. The working class people were increasingly socially oppressed as well as alienated by the dominant system because of their social status. Wyatt-Nichol in his research asserts that industrial prosperity only benefits the elite. The upper classes benefit from their bargaining power that enable them to interfere with government policies. They particularly make sure that the system favors *laissez-faire* policies, and therefore they have more control over their own companies. They can reduce the wages of secondary workers for nothing but to pile up money on their own laps (2011). The hardest time for the subjects (the "we") is when they are at the lowest point of alienation. As a result, another consciousness is necessary to make the subjects maintain their pseudo activity. As cited by Panossian, Žižek sees that "Sometimes, alienation is not a problem but a solution (2008: 7)." In the context of this study, it means that when the subjects begin to experience alienation, the current condition must remain the same until they

realize that they are affected by alienation, and the marginalized laborers agree to unite to break their interactivity or inter-passivity as an attempt to deal with oppression by the dominant group. Breaking away from the vicious circle of pseudo activity is commonly called revolution.

The Big Other in *Life*

The big Other is identified through secondary phenomenon and non-psychological provocation. Secondary phenomenon, according to Žižek, is a new path for returning to the given ideas where the immediate or primary believers have disappeared (Žižek, 2011: 29-30). Therefore, secondary phenomenon means the belief held by the descendants. The big Other's influence lead the next generation to believe naively, but it still give them a purpose to live the worldly life. The non-psychological aspect does not mean that the big Other will not evoke a certain feeling but rather to preserve *that* intimate emotion, or the obligation to be polite as taught by the elders, the non-existent direct storytellers.

Besides the symbolization of the historical Puritans, the subjects "we" in *Life* can also possibly be explained in its relation to American Dream ideology. For the subjects "we" American Dream serves as the meta guidance whenever they appear to recognize the following emphasized words: "suffer", "struggle", "weep", "drench", "break", "jade", "sorrow", "warp" and "pain". The Dream is a hope for tomorrow, a reason to overcome any obstacles, a work ethic or a call for hard work, and certainly a divine destination, just like what the American forefathers sought to achieve, the "*eternal peace*". In this sense, American Dream plays the role of 'big Other' which is constructed as an ideology for a utopian Truth for the lower classes to carry on their pseudo activity. The elites do not need the American Dream ideology to control their life because they are not the ones who have been oppressed by businesses' hunt for profit. On the contrary, the blue collar workers are pushed into alienation by continuous oppression, and in that case, *Life* becomes the voice of consciousness. The poem lies within the subjects that know, see, and understand everything that has happened, but it tells them to do nothing more than maintaining *the life*.

The emphasized words "suffer", "struggle", "weep", "drench", "break", "jade", "sorrow", "warp" and "pain" along with the belief in the Dream are supposed

to make the subjects "we" believe the speaker when he says "When life should be a song" (line 4, stanza 1). The word "when" is put in the beginning of the line suggests a sense of certainty about the time the subjects face their destiny. The following stanzas imply the same undertone. The pattern they have in common is that the suffering that the subjects experience will eventually be resolved if the "we" listen to the speaker of *Life*: "The wind will fan and dry us// And we'll watch some other bow" (lines 3-4, stanza 3); "And we try to run through it again" (line 4, stanza 8). These lines express a message about a promising hope for the poor—the "we"—who have been struggling to survive. The words that create imageries that evoke memories of the good old days and the importance of maintaining the ethos of the ancestors strengthen the image of the Dream. The words evoke particular emotion in the subjects and convince them to follow the big Other's way and experience the intimate feeling.

Cynical Distance of the Subjects "we"

The voice in *Life* signifies the subjects' Cynical Distance. Cynic subjects believe in "the efficiency of symbolic fiction, the way this fiction structures our reality (Žižek, 2011: 33)." The symbolic fiction is retold throughout the poem's text, from the first to the last stanzas. It impresses on the subjects the heroic and divine journey of American forefathers, be it the exploration or the purification voyage. In this sense, the symbolic journey creates a fiction that seems like a reality and develops the secondary phenomenon through the spirit of American Dream that is instilled in the subjects "we." The voice of a figure in a symbolic mask will be perceived as the speaker of the truth of whatever embodiment he takes on. The persuasion that the speaker shows in the poem reflects the presence of the big Other via symbolical order, and this speaker, who puts on the symbolic mask, articulates the 32 lines as its embodiment. The speaker of *Life* is part of the group that acts as a spokesman, but he is a spokesman who speaks only to his group. With the affecting history of the Puritans and the Founding Fathers as the overtone, the speaker successfully puts on the symbolic mask, and is therefore believed in as the speaker of truth for Americans. *Life* is a preaching, from the subjects for themselves. In other words, *Life* is a voice from Americans to Americans. Since American Dream functions as the first fundamental

hope and belief, it becomes the truth itself for and in the subjects as Americans. Accordingly, the subjects "we", who have been conditioned at so many levels through the 'big Other' of the Dream, will remind themselves to go back to the pseudo activity cycle as described in *Life* when they begin to realize the oppression and alienation they suffer. However, the influence of the Utopia Dream that has been internalized by the subjects compels them not only to go round in circles of pseudo activity but also to keep their cynical distance where they are well aware of the oppressive and alienating condition but cannot do anything about it.

Americanism that is signified in the poem is constructed via the American Dream ideal that acts as the big Other. The idea of believing the ideological Dream comes from the desire that the big Other provides. Americans have been glorifying their exceptionalism for decades. It is the idealism for which America is perceived as an independent and free land. Being an exceptional nation also means attempting to break the hierarchy of Calvinism and also believing the value of hard work to achieve the American Dream. People who dedicate their life to work hard to achieve the place they deserve do not realize that their desire is constructed under the big Other's control. It is not their desire; it is the big Other's desire. In a sense, they fantasize an ideology. "A fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates; that is, it literally 'teaches us how to desire' (Žižek, 2009: 7)." Several studies have mentioned that Reagan's revolutionary tax cut had made the wealth gap wider. This is closely related to the spirit of nationalism that is represented in *Life* through the young Reagan's vision for Americans. The big Other desires to maintain the belief that working hard means valuing oneself as an American. However, the American Dream does not work according to that expectation. The Dream demands strong work ethic from the working class. Some researchers observe that capitalistic culture has been increasingly pervasive since the postmodern era, especially in the following period after Reagan's presidency. In relation to this phenomenon, Žižek describes the dynamic of political culture as:

The "culturalisation of politics." Political differences-differences conditioned by political inequality or economic exploitation are naturalised and neutralised into "cultural" differences, that is, into different "ways of life"

which are something given, something that cannot be overcome (Žižek, 2008: 140).

The obligation to endure the bittersweet of culturalisation is not merely because the subjects do not understand the situation, but rather, they are trapped in circles of pseudo activity and in a state of cynical distance awareness. By following the messages expressed in *Life* and pursuing the Dream, the subjects “we” continue to work hard and accept their fate even though they know that blue collar job is exhausting, constraining, and alienating while at the same time they are aware that they are American. Rejecting exhausting, constraining and alienating jobs does not fit with the spirit of American Dream. American Dream not only prevents resistance, which may escalate to a revolution, but also offers inter-passivity while the subjects continue to suffer because of the laboring work activities. The inter-passivity represents a desire to be a true American.

CONCLUSION

Besides being the 40th President of the US, Ronald Wilson Reagan was a highly influential figure for his role in regaining the economic stability after the Great Depression. To date, Reaganomics, with the unprecedented massive tax cut it brought in, is considered one of major achievements in the US's economy in the 21st century. A number of studies reveal that the legacy of Reagan Revolution, both the methods and the effects of the policies it has produced, has brought significant changes in America during postmodern times. Close and contextual reading of *Life's* text can be a useful approach to understanding Reagan's vision and mission because he poured his thoughts about the economic roller coaster in the earlier twenties in this poem when he was a boy. Using Žižek's dialectical materialist paradigm, the study of the poem's 8 stanzas has led to an insight related to the political discourse and ideology in which it is situated. Žižek posits that fiction is not a reality because fiction already has its own reality. Based on this perspective, the analysis of *Life* is contextualized in American history to interpret the poem as an expression of belief in American Dream, which acts as the big Other. The poem is a literary metaphor of the Puritans' journey to be the American Founding Fathers. It interprets this part of American history as

a symbolical journey of seeking one's true self and the Truth as a divinely chosen American.

Life represents one part of a subject's self that intends to remind him/herself that the arduous experience, that is signified by the words “suffer”, “struggle”, “weep”, “drench”, “break”, “jaded”, “sorrow”, “warps” and “pain,” is leading to the culmination of alienation during the economic disaster in the 20s. It is a reminder that reflects the controlling ideology of American Dream as the ‘big Other’ and its power to ensure that the subjects maintain their pseudo activity and believe that, in so doing, they have acted as a true America. Moreover, it is also necessary to prevent any kind of revolution from happening. The role that the subjects take, according to Žižek, is called Cynical Distance. In the poem, the significance of the role is emphasized through symbols and imageries that signify Hope and Truth and is instilled into the subjects “we” through the ideological construction of American Dream. The speaker of the poem, who is part of the “we,” eliminates the possibility that the subjects search for the truth other than the one held by such ideology and keep them in the cycles of pseudo activity.

The big Other that operates in the American Dream compels the subjects “we” to follow the ideological construction of the Dream and make themselves a true American as a result. The symbolic journey of the Puritans is also the embodiment of the big Other's control—the American Dream ideology. In other words, the Americans' desire actually reflects the big Other's desire. In relation to the historical background of the poem, the big Other's intention is no other than to convince the subjects to keep working hard, which means maintaining the value of Puritan work ethic, although during the period when *Life* was written, job opportunity was terribly scarce. The big Other does not desire/intend to promote the value of humanity even when the Depression struck. It promises economic growth by offering an illusion that a true American is the one who faithfully believes in the Dream.

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