Portrait by Barnaby Conrad (Courtesy of Steinbeck Research Center)

John Steinbeck
ARTICLES

Warren French 9 The "California Quality" of Steinbeck's Best Fiction

Peter Lisca 21 Cannery Row and the Tao Teh Ching

Roy S. Simmonds 29 John Steinbeck, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Edith McGillcuddy

Martha Heasley Cox 41 In Search of John Steinbeck: His People and His Land

Richard Astro 61 John Steinbeck and the Tragic Miracle of Consciousness

Martha Heasley Cox 73 The Conclusion of The Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck's Conception and Execution

Jaclyn Caselli 83 John Steinbeck and the American Patchwork Quilt

John Ditsky 89 The Wayward Bus: Love and Time in America

Robert E. Work 103 Steinbeck and the Spartan Daily

INTERVIEWS

Webster F. Street 109 Remembering John Steinbeck

Adrian H. Goldstone 129 Book Collecting and Steinbeck

BOOK REVIEWS

Robert DeMott 136 Nelson Valjean. John Steinbeck: The Errant Knight

Joseph Fontenrose 139 Howard Levant. The Novels of John Steinbeck

142 Notes on Contributors
5 Acknowledgements
6 Announcements
144 Subscription Information
Acknowledgments

The publication of San José Studies is possible only through the support of its benefactor and patron subscribers. The Trustees and Staff of SJS would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following supporters.

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In addition, a number of anonymous donations have been received.

AN INVITATION

To establish San José Studies as a viable publication, we need your continuing support. Please consider sending us your subscription today. (Additional information and a subscription form appear on page 144.)
Announcements

The November 1976 issue of San José Studies will feature articles pertaining to the bicentennials of the United States of America and the city of San José, California. Manuscripts from all disciplines will be welcomed and should be submitted to The Editors by May 1, 1976.

San José State University will co-sponsor a conference on Interamerican Women Writers to be held April 10 and 11, 1976 at San José State University, San Jose, California 95192. Inquiries may be addressed to Yvette Miller, Latin American Literary Review, Department of Modern Languages, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania 15213 or Celia de Zapata, Department of Foreign Languages, San José State University, San José, California 95192. Deadline for submission of papers: February 15, 1976.

Articles appearing in San José Studies are indexed or abstracted in the following publications:

America: History and Life
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Historical Abstracts
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Language and Language Behavior Abstracts
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MLA Abstracts
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Sociological Abstracts
Women Studies Abstracts
“The black pines that guard the landward limits of Monterey.”
*Tortilla Flat*
The Steinbeck House—"an immaculate and friendly house, grand enough but not pretentious."

*East of Eden*
The "California Quality" of Steinbeck's Best Fiction
Warren French

"It was surprising that Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment."
Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage

JUST about all commentators agree that there was a marked decline in the artistry of John Steinbeck's fiction after World War II, specifically in the short period during the dying days of the war between his writing of the wistfully ironic tragi-farcises Cannery Row and A Medal for Benny (film, 1945) and the first appearance of the ponderously allegorical The Pearl as "The Pearl of the World" in Woman's Home Companion for December, 1945. There has been no agreement, however, about the causes of this precipitate deflation of our most powerfully emotional protest writer since the nineteenth-century's Henry Thoreau and Harriet Beecher Stowe into a heavy-handed scourge of affluent decadence, best lumped with such already half-forgotten moralizers as Frederic Wakeman (The Hucksters) and Philip Wylie (A Generation of Vipers).

Steinbeck's "decline" has been principally and reasonably linked with the sudden loss of his influential friend and advisor, marine biologist Ed Ricketts (although Ricketts was not killed in an accident until 1948), the break-up of his first marriage, and the problems of a short-lived second marriage during which he fathered two sons, his only children. In John Steinbeck (1961), I acknowledged the possible influence of these events, but I stressed the effect of Steinbeck's moving from California to New York City, a gradual process during the war years, as the cause of his increasing penchant for the kind of two-dimensional allegory that George Orwell and William Golding have produced. As Lawrence William Jones has illustrated in John Steinbeck as Fabulist (1973), Steinbeck devoted himself after World War II almost exclusively to "fables" rather than fuller-bodied "novels."

As one of those who had fallen under the spell of his earlier work, I wrote fifteen years ago that "Steinbeck unquestionably started downhill when he
left California”; and no new evidence or theories since that time have changed
my mind. “His best books deal with persons and places he knew intimately,”
I went on; but I argued that in the books beginning in 1945, “allegory
overwhelmed experience.”¹ I did not have the space in that book to develop
this concluding observation. In a completely revised version of John
Steinbeck published this year (1975), I felt compelled to concentrate on
delineating a change in Steinbeck’s fiction from “Naturalistic” in the 1930s
to “drama of consciousness,” beginning with The Grapes of Wrath. While the
psychological forces involved in Steinbeck’s changing conception of man’s
potential for controlling his destiny are unquestionably related to other
changes—especially the decrease in the emotional and aesthetic impact of the
narratives—I again did not have the space to deal adequately with the specific
effects that moving from rural Northern California to New York City had
upon Steinbeck’s vision. I think these effects can be quite precisely specified,
and the publication of this critical journal in the region that was the setting of
most of Steinbeck’s best fiction provides the occasion for doing so.

Willa Cather—whose life and point of view afford many parallels to
Steinbeck’s (as I have suggested in the new edition of John Steinbeck) told a
reporter during the 1920s that she could never join the then fashionable
expatriate movement because she could not create “her kind of thing without
American speech” around her.² Her finest works resonate with vivid sensory
impressions of the sights and sounds, even the smells and feelings, of the
Middle Western prairies and Southwestern mountains and deserts. When she
chose remote subjects in Sapphira and the Slave Girl and even in the touching
Shadows on the Rock, her work becomes quaintly charming rather than
idiomatically powerful.

Steinbeck never similarly acknowledged the influence of first-hand impres­
sions on his work; but as I argued in the original edition of John Steinbeck,
he is not a writer “who can satisfactorily summon an emotionally charged
remembrance of things past. Like other scientists, he must move his eye
constantly back and forth between his specimen and his sketch pad. When his
eye is too long off its subject, his reproductions lose fidelity” (p. 162). This
explanation does not adequately specify, however, just what “emotional
charge” Steinbeck received from his California experience that gave his
fiction from To a God Unknown through Cannery Row such singular power
that it remains today vividly alive while other emotional responses to the
turbulent world of the 1930s have dried into museum specimens.

The answer is to be found, I believe, in Steinbeck’s first published effort to
editorialize metaphorically on the specific impact of the California landscape
rather than to concentrate upon characters’ inner psychologies as he had in
Cup of God and To a God Unknown. I refer to the first and twelfth chapters
of The Pastures of Heaven (1932) which constitute a prologue and epilogue
framing ten longer stories and linking them into an ironic, episodic novel
similar in theme and structure to Dos Passos’s U.S.A., Fitzgerald’s The Great
Gatsby, and Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury—all of which developed in
the late 1920s from sensitive Romantics' disillusionment about the promise
that was America.

The first chapter reports the discovery of the valley by the Spanish
corporal who gave it its name: "'Holy Mother!' he whispered. 'Here are the
green pastures of Heaven to which our Lord leadeth us.'" But he cannot
linger in this place of "serene" beauty that makes him feel weak because he
must return some captive Indians to enforced labor. Though Steinbeck
reports that the corporal "always intended to go back," because "like most
violent men he looked forward with sentimental wistfulness to a little time of
peace before he died," he cannot because he dies locked in a barn of a pox
that "an Indian woman presented him." The last chapter pictures a group of
tourists gazing into the peaceful valley from a distance and speculating
wistfully on the golden prospects of life there. A bus driver sums up their
sentiments, "I always like to look down there and think how quiet and easy a
man could live on a little place"; but the intervening stories have shown
readers that those who followed the first squabbling squatters into the
Pastures of Heaven failed to fashion a life to match its tranquility. "There's
ambition to think of," as a young bride ponders in the epilogue. "You can't
run away from responsibility and cover up your head in a place like this."

All of Steinbeck's successful fictions through the end of World War II were
in some measure variations upon the theme announced in these passages. As
the epigraph for this article suggests, the perception of the disenchanting
contrast between the natural landscape and what man, festering with petty
ambition, has made of it has fostered frequent complaints, especially since
the Industrial Revolution. We find Dickens in *Hard Times* describing
Coketown as a community "of unnatural red and black like the painted face
of a savage" and T.S. Eliot lamenting in *The Waste Land* the contrast between
the Thames upon which Elizabeth and Leicester rowed in "a gold shell" and
the later river sweating "oil and tar." Steinbeck is far from unique—indeed he
probably owes much of his popularity to the typicality of his sentiments—but
there is something about the particular landscape that shaped his early life
and early fiction that gives his vision an impelling force.

This vision is most articulately embodied in Chapter Twenty-Five of *The
Grapes of Wrath*:

The spring is beautiful in California. Valleys in which the fruit
blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea . . . . The
full green hills are round and soft as breasts . . . . [But] the sweet smell
is a great sorrow on the land. Men who can graft the trees and make the
seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their
produce . . . . And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow
. . . . There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a
sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that
topples all our success (pp. 473–77).
Steinbeck has been moved here to the crowning culmination of his most impassioned work; yet this powerful passage looks Janus-faced both back on his earlier triumphs and forward to later failures, because, goaded beyond his artistic patience by outrage at immediate evils, he finally abandons metaphor for editorial. While he may never have given less unmistakable voice to his despair and anger, he has earlier left readers free to discover his sentiments from metaphorical embodiments; later, in less inspired writing, he will succumb to sustaining the preachy tone which appears only for moments in The Grapes of Wrath.

The tangled histories of the writing and publishing of To a God Unknown and The Pastures of Heaven—ill-starred works of an unknown young writer trying to find both his own distinctive artistic voice and a solvent publisher during a period of national collapse—make it impossible to denominate indisputably Steinbeck’s first “California novel.” But what is certain is that the two are products of drastically different sensibilities. Although the characters in To a God Unknown are attracted to California from New England by the greater promise of the West, the novel—like Cup of Gold, set in Caribbean countries in the seventeenth century, and “Saint Katy the Virgin,” set somewhere during the Middle Ages—makes little point of ironic contrasts between natural beauty and man’s behavior. Even the strange old man who makes a sacrifice each evening as he is the “last” in the Western world to see the sun go down is only in the most literal geographical sense even aware of the world outside his own head. Steinbeck is still entirely concerned with the kind of introverted characters who resurface in such later disasters as Burning Bright and Sweet Thursday, who are little influenced by an external reality they are little in touch with; and he even presents sympathetically a character like the old man who has picked “out of his experience . . . the thing that makes him happy.”

The Munroe family in The Pastures of Heaven similarly project their narrow preconceptions upon Nature instead of allowing its beneficent powers to broaden their vision; but in this book Steinbeck turns viciously upon such an introverted rejection of the beauties of Nature as an affliction like that of a typhoid bearer who remains untouched himself while infecting the innocents around him. The Munroes project an oversimplified mixture of meretricious morality and unimaginative greed that serves as their mental map of reality for the lush beauty of the valley called “Pastures of Heaven” with disastrous consequences for such more admirable characters as Junius Maltby, the Lopez sisters, schoolteacher Molly Morgan, and John Whiteside, who share the reverent respect for the land best articulated by a tenant farmer in The Grapes of Wrath: “If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it’s part of him, and it’s like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn’t doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he’s bigger because he owns it” (p. 50). Although Steinbeck sees the triumph of the Munroes as probably inevitable, he deplores it; for with their unbounded self-confidence
that is directly disproportionate to the rigid limits of their vision they are prototypical threats to the environment. *The Pastures of Heaven* should be honored as an early effort to spur the work now carried forward by the Sierra Club—as a fictional equivalent to the Club’s stunning documentaries.

At the same time that Steinbeck was working on *The Pastures of Heaven*, he was also creating the parts of what remains one of his finest works, *The Red Pony*. The inadequacy of man’s response to nature is one of the themes of this powerful quartet of related stories. Young Jody Tiflin’s fit of pique at the end of the first story dramatizes the child’s impatience with natural frustrations; but Jody grows beyond his fretful hurry to train his horse and his petulant killing of a buzzard as he becomes involved in the third story, “The Promise,” in the sometimes tragic miracle of birth. The other two stories are even more complex works. While Steinbeck evokes sympathy for two exhausted and frustrated old men, he does not acquit them of contributing—like the doomed Pepé in the short story “Flight”—to their own undoing because of the inability of their egos to be fittingly humble before the wonders of nature.

Questioned by Jody about “the great mountains,” the old Mexican who has come home to die can report only that he thinks they were “quiet” and “nice,” and he impatiently closes the conversation with the reply that he never wanted to visit them again. This response, while vaguely appreciative, is inadequate; Jody’s grandfather, on the other hand, even in his admirable fostering of the spirit of “Westering,” has seen nature only as something to be consumed. As the eulogy of the winning of the west that he has abetted, he observes, “There’s a line of old men along the shore hating the ocean because it stopped them.” This is the view of those who have exercised no restraint in the exploitation of available resources and who turn bitter when the supply is exhausted. They have been supplanted by prosaic men like Jody’s father Carl, who rarely even lift their eyes from the daily round of chores to wonder at the magic landscape. As William Faulkner’s old Ike McCaslin meditates in “Delta Autumn”: “No wonder the ruined woods I used to know don’t cry for retribution! . . . the people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.”

*Tortilla Flat*, *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and most of the stories collected in *The Long Valley* are Steinbeck’s explicit fleshing out in fiction of Stephen Crane’s ironic observation about nature’s tranquility and man’s devilment. Although the whimsical tone of *Tortilla Flat* contrasts with the grimness of the two later novels and most of the short stories, all end up tragically; and in each the impact of the tragedy is heightened by the idyllic surroundings in which it occurs, even though in these works the conflicts are rarely the direct consequences of man’s insensitive exploitation of nature—as they are in *The Pastures of Heaven* and *The Red Pony*.

*Tortilla Flat* attributes Danny’s downfall to his giving up his old life in the woods when he is tempted by the middle-class respectability of owning property. When Danny begins to live in clock time, he becomes bored; but he
has too far separated himself from his old natural life to return to it, so that
he is doomed by forces that he has not sufficiently respected.

"Man's inhumanity to man" becomes more specifically Steinbeck's subject
in the protest works that follow. Most of the short stories lack any specific
social, economic, or political implications. The women in "The White Quail"
and "The Harness," for example, like the tinker in "The Chrysanthemums,"
engage in bitchery for its own sake; even explanations of their behavior as
psychopathic seem rationalizations. Mary Teller in "The White Quail" is
specially significant because her devotion to her garden seems to suggest an
affinity for nature; but her garden is a contrived thing, actually a defense
against the wild woods where Danny in Tortilla Flat had lived before his
tragic domestication. Steinbeck writes of the garden: "It was utterly calm and
eternal out there. And then the garden ended and the dark thickets of the hill
began." Mary called these dark thickets "the enemy," "all rough and tangled
and unkempt" that her fuchsias keep out. Her garden has no relationship to
the natural landscape.

Socio-political elements begin to surface in some of the stories. The
anti-Chinese prejudice mirrored in "Johnny Bear" leads to the unnatural
behavior of those regarded as "the community conscience," who have lived
sequestered from any healthful realtionship with natural processes. "The
Raid" and "The Vigilante" are trial sketches for In Dubious Battle and Of
Mice and Men, in which Steinbeck depicts both the legitimate economic
aspirations of some migrant workers and the idyllic dreams of others doomed
to a rootless life wantonly destroyed by the short-sighted greed and gross
vulgarity of thoughtless people who will smash anything that threatens the
small measure of security they have managed to achieve. While California's
orchards and ranches provide only a backdrop for the re-enactment of
timeless patterns of behavior, again the very beauty of the settings accentuates
the squalid devilmint of the human actors.

Steinbeck's ironic use of the California landscape reaches its peak—as we
have already observed— in The Grapes of Wrath. Then it figures once more
prominently in Cannery Row. Steinbeck's invocation of some of the principal
characters in the second chapter establishes the principle that is illustrated in
the succeeding chapters, especially the nearly mythological account of a frog
hunt:

[Mack and the boys] are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the
hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where
men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in their fight to secure
certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable
about them. . . . What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and
come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostrate, and
bifocals? . . . Our Father who are in nature, who has given the gift of
survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the
house fly, and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for
no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys.

Examples could be multiplied, but my effort is not to provide an exhaustive catalog but to indicate that during the fifteen years when Steinbeck produced what has generally been recognized as his best work, he made powerful use of the extraordinarily beautiful rural California landscape in which he had grown up. His immediate contact with this land inspired him to see it as a devastatingly ironic backdrop for his haunting tales of man's stupidity, sadism, and frustration. The brilliance of the landscape provided an expressionistic background for the expressionistically exaggerated behavior of many of his characters. One finds in his work of this period almost the hysterical contrast found in Vincent Van Gogh's paintings between the radianc of fields and olive groves and the unnaturally lighted "Night Café," in which the painter himself explained he "tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin himself, go mad, or commit a crime." (The striking parallels between Van Gogh's work and Steinbeck's are too extensive to trace here, except to observe that Van Gogh began in his early works where Steinbeck did in *The Pastures of Heaven* and moved only late in his life into the introverted fantasies of *To a God Unknown.*)

Steinbeck never again found an inspiration to equal the Northern California landscape. Whatever the merits of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Steinbeck writes of outer Long Island as a lately arrived summer visitor; and when he does return to California for remembered settings in *The Wayward Bus, Sweet Thursday*, and the Petaluma "Egg King" passages in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, he has been too long removed to create a sense of immediacy. The Hamilton passages in *East of Eden* are uncomfortable efforts to grasp a fading reality that means much more to the artist than to his audience, while the Trask passages turn his native state into an erotic Disneyland for the delectation of supercilious New Yorkers.

Why did Steinbeck give up his California life of the 1930s—the life of Mack and the boys "avoiding the trap" to which many seek to return today—for the big city? The very language of his report of his discovery that he had become a New Yorker is symptomatic:

> It was on Third Avenue. The trains were grinding over my head. The snow was nearly waist-high in the gutters, and uncollected garbage was scattered in the dirty mess. The wind was cold, and frozen pieces of paper went scraping along the pavement. I stopped to look in a drug-store window where a latex cooch-dancer was undulated by a concealed motor—and something burst in my head, a kind of light and a kind of feeling blended into an emotion which if it could have spoken would have said, "My God! I belong here. Isn't this wonderful?"

This picture hardly presents the city's loveliest face. Steinbeck avoids the defensive tactics of many who are uneasy about the dehumanizing aspects of
urban life yet ambitiously magnetized toward the city and find their "escape valve" in the pseudo-pastoral charm of Central Park (where one dares no longer venture at night or even wander off beaten paths in the daytime). Steinbeck has confronted, rather than evaded, the very frustrations that plague him by embracing the very squalor of the city.

I suspect that as Steinbeck aged and found that the world had not improved in response to his protests and urgings, he began to find too much beauty painful—the irony of its presence in a darkening world unbearable. "Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal," E.E. Cummings titles a sarcastic poem that is not fully relevant here; yet the wording precisely describes the condition of the middle-class, middle-aged American who finds capitulation easier than continued resistance to a seemingly inescapable state of things. The difference between the world's promise of beauty and the fulfillment of this promise in the individual's life becomes at last too much to bear; the difference drove Van Gogh mad. It drove Willa Cather back into the past, out of touch with the days of her years. It drove J.D. Salinger, a later artist who resembles Steinbeck in many ways, into an apparently permanent hiding place of inexhaustible beauty in the hills of New Hampshire, where he can shun man's devilment. As Steinbeck's later editorial pronouncements in bittersweet works like America and Americans suggest, he had too touchy a social consciousness to follow the aesthetically-oriented Willa Cather (in the wake of W.B. Yeats's sailor to Byzantium) out of passing time or the hermetically conscientious J.D. Salinger out of changing place. The only compromise compatible with his sanity was giving up his sensitive response to beauty. My argument here draws strongly upon the analyses of Lawrence William Jones in John Steinbeck as Fabulist and Howard Levant in The Novels of John Steinbeck (1974), who point out the ricketiness of the structure of Steinbeck's later works and the increasing heavy-handedness of his language.

Can one thus blunt one's own sensitivities? Of course, one can. Thousands of Americans do so daily in their capitulation to the "rat-race"! Man can seemingly commit any enormity. The rare thing is to be able to transcend his world—"to die," like the speaker in one of Emily Dickinson's poems, "for beauty." One need not be the victim of outside oppressors to have one's sensitivities deadened; one can do so with any of the physical, intellectual, or moral narcotics that we have used our technology to produce in abundance. New York offers many compensations for the loss, as Steinbeck explains in "The Making of a New Yorker": "Once you have lived in New York and it has become your home, no place else is good enough. All of everything is concentrated here, population, theatre, art, writing, publishing, importing, business, murder, mugging, luxury, poverty" (p. 66). The narrowness and ambiguity of the list is an adequate comment upon itself. This "everything" is not enough for some. Many today—like Salinger, I am sure—are simply driven up the wall by city life and gladly retreat to the landscape that Steinbeck relinquished. The "California quality" of his best fiction derives, I argue, from his youthful sensitivity to the extraordinary landscape of his native
region in the Northern valleys of the state and his rare possession of the talents to communicate something of the impact of this scene to others through lyric fictions. This “California fiction” will remain his best and will remain among our most popular so long as audiences can respond to natural beauty and can deplore man’s inability to meet the challenge of what F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby most memorably describes as “an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired.”

Finally, we should notice that this “California quality” is not unique to Steinbeck’s fiction; nor is it first displayed in his stories that appeared during the great national depression when the grayness of America’s national prospects clashed particularly with the colorful beauty of our once vaunted El Dorado. It characterizes the urgent lyricism of most of the state’s important writers. It first appears in protest fiction in Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona (1884), endowing that novel with an even more powerful impact than the author’s earlier non-fictional A Century of Dishonor (1881) which had expressed her outrage at the Spanish and Gringo treatment of the Indians—a sentiment that also provides the impulse for Steinbeck’s first ironic voicing of despair in The Pastures of Heaven.

As Sybil Weir brilliantly documents in the first issue of San Jose Studies, Gertrude Atherton’s best work results from her manipulation in her novel The Californians (1898) of the often cruel contrast between California’s golden promise and man’s betrayal of it. Though we rarely think of Mrs. Atherton as a “protest” writer in the Helen Hunt Jackson-John Steinbeck tradition, “conservative” protest may differ from “liberal” only in the underlying philosophical tenets shaping it; both may find the same vehicle for their concern in man’s despoiling nature. Sybil Weir shows Mrs. Atherton’s grotesque use of the contrast (which also concerned Steinbeck) in a fable from The Californians: “California is the Princess Royal of her country . . . and at her birth all the good fairies came and gave her of every gift in the stores of the immortals. Then a wicked fairy came and turned the skeleton in her beautiful body to gold; and, lo! the princess who had been fashioned to bless mankind carried, hidden from sight by her innocent and beneficent charms, a terrible curse” —a sentence that out of context one could easily mistake for a statement of the theme of The Pastures of Heaven or The Grapes of Wrath.

Kevin Starr describes in his significantly titled Americans and the California Dream, 1850–1915 how in Jack London’s autumnal work Burning Daylight (1910), the curiously named title character “wonders why Californians have abandoned lovely Sonoma Valley and fled to crowded cities” and at the novel’s end “is seen carrying a set of milk pails into the Sonoma sunset, redeeming himself and California’s unfinished work.” Robinson Jeffers was driven to even more exasperated outbursts by his observations of the California scene. Could poems with the unique and shocking power of
Tamar and The Tower Beyond Tragedy have been shaped under any influences but those of the demoralizingly beautiful Carmel coastline and the awesome majesty of lonely Point Sur and the Big Sur country? Jeffers's "Original Sin"—a horrifying description of "ground-apes" roasting alive a captive mammoth from which even tough-minded critics have averted their eyes—is perhaps the extreme conceivable statement of the force that animated Steinbeck's early fiction:

Wet rocks were shining, a little wind
Stirred the leaves of the forest and the marsh-flag flowers;
the soft valley between the low hills
Became as beautiful as the sky; while in its midst,
hour after hour, the happy hunters
Roasted their living meat slowly to death.
These are the people.
This is the human dawn.

I could go on and suggest the influence that the contrast between California's stunning natural beauty and the plagues of human predators who have descended upon it has exerted upon the fiction of Upton Sinclair, Nathanael West, Henry Miller, James M. Cain, Jack Kerouac, and Myron Brinig (Joseph Henry Jackson appropriately climaxes an anthology of California fiction with the apocalyptic slipping into the sea of Los Angeles from Brinig's novel The Flutter of an Eyelid). It is enough, however, to recall Steinbeck's most memorable predecessor, Frank Norris, whose The Octopus (1901) stands with Ramona, The Jungle, and The Grapes of Wrath as the handful of valuable protest fictions after Uncle Tom's Cabin. Norris concludes his novel with the meditation of the poet Presley (who much resembles Edwin Markham, yet another California protest writer) that foreshadows Steinbeck's anger at the failure of man's vision to match this beautiful, fruitful land:

Men—motes in the sunshine—perished, were shot down in the very noon of life, hearts were broken, little children started in life lamentably handicapped.... In that little isolated group of human insects, misery, death, and anguish spun like a wheel of fire.

But the WHEAT remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic; resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves.

Can we imagine a writer in dank New York or London, for example, being inspired to conceive of men primarily as "motes in the sunshine" as the means of stressing the human failure to measure up to the challenge of the natural order? The language in this passage and the peculiar intensity of feeling behind it is a specific response to a specific situation—the same
response that we find in Steinbeck’s lyric outbursts in *The Grapes of Wrath*. California has provided a singular inspiration, both for the better in its landscape, and for the worse in the glimpses of the “human swarm’s” selfishly inadequate response to its “Nirvanic calm.”

In Steinbeck, and most especially in *The Grapes of Wrath*, this inspiration found the fictional vehicle for its articulation. If Steinbeck failed to maintain this response, we must ask if anyone could have? His decline may be no cause for wonder and should surely cast no shadow over his earlier work. It is questionable how long anyone could function at the level of emotional intensity Steinbeck achieved while writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. We do know that this effort exhausted him. It might be more romantic if he had literally died for his vision, like the speaker in Emily Dickinson's poem (or as Dylan Thomas can be said to have done), but we cannot fault him for choosing to live and even to become increasingly involved in the society that Willa Cather and J.D. Salinger wisely rejected. We should value the “California quality” of his best fiction for the rare thing that it is, and not be guilty of the very greed that is the undoing of many of the immature characters in his narratives by demanding, “more, more.”

Notes

6 Quoted in “Gertrude Atherton: The Limits of Feminism in the 1890’s,” *San Jose Studies*, 1 (February 1975), 30.
“Lee Chong’s Heavenly Flower Grocery”

_Sweet Thursday_
After returning from his five-month tour as war correspondent in October of 1943, Steinbeck was so depressed that he refused his publishers' obviously profitable suggestion that he edit his dispatches for publication in book form. (They did not appear in book form until 1958 as Once There Was a War.) Rather, in less than two months he wrote *Cannery Row*, the first of three novels in quick succession, varying widely in materials and techniques but each exploring some reaction toward a society whose basic values had plunged it in turn from eleven years of extreme economic depression into the massive aggression and destruction of World War II.

In *Cannery Row* (1945) this reaction is one of escape into a counter-culture superficially reminiscent of *Tortilla Flat*, except that whereas the
earlier novel was a light, tongue-in-cheek affair, the new novel (for all its humor) is a philosophically based and impassioned celebration of values directly opposed to those dominant in Western society. Looking through “another peephole,” Steinbeck discovers that what normally might be called “thieves, rascals . . . bums” are just as truly “saints and angels and martyrs and holy men.” For, as Doc expresses it, the traits leading to success in our society are frequently “greed, acquisitiveness, meanness,” whereas failure may be the result of “kindness, generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling.”

Unlike some tendencies in his “proletarian” novels of the 1930’s, Cannery Row offers neither a detailed anatomy of this society’s “mangled craziness” nor a program for changing it. Rather, it brings into being a new world to replace that which was in the process of self-destruction. It is a world not of whole cloth, but of bits and pieces, varying in chronology, recollected in nostalgia and lovingly assembled, like the patchwork quilt presented to Doc by the girls of Dora’s whorehouse, or one of the fantastic collages done by Henri, the novel’s own eccentric artist. Thus, while one episode concerns the death of the American humorist Josh Billings (1885), in another, Model T Fords are in common use; while Henri follows “feverishly . . . in periodicals the latest Dadaist movements and schisms,” Sam Malloy’s historically contemporary Chalmers 1916 piston and connecting rod is a rare antique; elsewhere in the book, the year 1937 is clearly referred to as in the past. In addition to this free mingling of specific time levels, there is also a haunting effect of timelessness, achieved in part by the relative lack of plot (movement) and in part by the recurrence of specific descriptions and acts. The mysterious old Chinaman is said to go down to the sea every evening at 5:30 and return every morning. The rhythmic flopping of the loose sole on his shoe, normally a temporary phenomenon, through its presumed continuance accents that timelessness. These two qualities of the novel’s time sense are the very essence of homesickness, out of which Steinbeck said he wrote the book; his close friend Ed Ricketts, the original of Doc, described it as “an essay in loneliness.” Cannery Row brings together again in the unchanging world of art those qualities of life which (hastened by the war) had passed to return no more, and for which he felt a deep nostalgia. In this respect, the novel shares in those qualities which, after William Empsom, we have come to recognize as essentials of the pastoral tradition.

In the novel’s preface, addressing himself to the problem of setting down Cannery Row “alive,” Steinbeck proposes an analogy which resonates through all aspects of the novel, for as its time sense is in free flux, so also are its other qualities. His comparision of the writing of his book to capturing whole the fragile and delicate sea worms extends to both content (stories/sea worms) and method or form (“let the stories crawl in by themselves”/“ooze by themselves”). And as the seawater in which the specimens are held has no necessary shape but that given by its container, so the novel seems equally arbitrary in its form. It is extremely episodic and its plot is but a tenuous
thread consisting of Cannery Row's efforts to give a party for Doc. In fact, only about half of the thirty-two chapters pick up this thread. Alternating almost regularly with these are "the little inner chapters" (as Steinbeck once called them) which either add to our knowledge of the main characters or introduce material of no causal relationship to these characters or their plot—chapter 4, on the mysterious Chinaman; 12, on Josh Billings; 14, on the two soldiers and their girls; 26, on Willard and Joey; 31, on the gopher; etc. Generally, however, all of these inner chapters serve in some way as comment or contrast to the novel's major themes. Sometimes this function operates upon an immediately previous or succeeding chapter (7/8, 13/14, 18/19), and other times more widely upon the book as a whole (6, 10, 12, 24, 26, 31). The climax of the novel is the successfully riotous party in chapter 30. This is followed only by the inner chapter about a gopher and a concluding chapter returning to Doc on the morning after the party.

This openness and freedom of the novel's structure is the formal expression of those same qualities in the Cannery Row community itself, upon which no convention or authority imposes conformity or direction. It has instead the natural order of a biological organism, manifesting its own inner dynamics. The lines of interaction between individuals and even between institutions proliferate in all directions—Frankie and Doc, the laboratory and the whorehouse, the Chinese grocery store and the Palace Flophouse, Petrarch's Laura and Dora's prostitutes. Those relationships normally expected to be exploitive or repressive are mutually beneficial—the jailor and Gay; McKinley the diver and the Prohibition Agents and the bootlegger; a landowner and trespassing bums; the police and a riotous party; even the whorehouse and the Ladies' Anti-Vice League. This rich variety of viable relationships is possible because all elements of the community share a quality which is most explicit in Steinbeck's description of Mack and the boys. He calls them "the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces" because in a world of greed and rapacity—"ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals" they "avoid the trap" of ambition. To this imagery of sick animals is opposed a version of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which Mack and the Boys "dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the seagulls of Cannery Row." Their lack of material gain is not seen as lack of ability. Doc is certain that these "bums" can "get money." But "they just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting." To Hazel's observation that Mack could have been president of the U.S.A. if he had wanted, Jones replies, "What could he do with it if he had it?"

Although this lack of worldly ambition may bring to mind the Sermon on the Mount, the novel's informing spirit is actually a work frequently compared to some aspects of the New Testament—the Tao Teh Ching of Laotzu, a Chinese philosopher of the 6th century B.C. Like Cannery Row, the Tao Teh Ching was written in a time of brutal war ("Period of the Fighting States"), and, in reaction to those conditions, presented a system of
human values devoid of all those qualities which had brought on that war. It is interesting in this connection to quote from the prefatory remarks of two well-known editions of the *Tao* published just before *Cannery Row*:

For Laotzu’s book... teaches the wisdom of appearing foolish, the success of appearing to fail, the strength of weakness...if I were asked what antidote could be found...to cure this contentious modern world of its invertebrate belief in force and struggle for power, I would name this book....[Laotzu] has the knack of making Hitler and other dreamers of world mastery appear foolish and ridiculous.

(Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of China and India*, 1942)

And the Western world might well temper its characteristic faults by taking Laotzu to heart...[quoting from another scholar] ‘Laotzu is one of our chief weapons against tanks, artillery and bombs.’

(Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life*, 1944)

That Steinbeck was familiar with Laotzu’s little text of forty or so pages is certain, and most probably with the Lin Yutang edition, although several others were also available. Significantly, Ed Ricketts, to whom *Cannery Row* is dedicated, and whose similarity to Doc is attested by Steinbeck in his essay, “About Ed Ricketts,” was much attracted to Taoism and refers to it several times in his letters and unpublished papers. He once ranked Laotzu with Plato and Christ. In Chapter 2 Steinbeck speculates that Lee Chong, who takes up most of the first chapter and with whose name (similar to that of Laotzu’s famous disciple Chuangtse) that chapter begins, is “more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good—an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register....” Doc himself sometimes reads aloud to Lee Chong, in English, from the poetry of Li Po, a figure associated with Taoism. In this context, even the novel’s ancient and mysterious Chinaman is suggestive.

It cannot be the point here to quote all the pertinent passages or detail the seventy-odd (division varies) brief, epigrammatic “chapters” of the *Tao Teh Ching*. Basically, they are variations on a few simple ideas. Briefly, Taoism rejects the desire for material goods, fame, power, and even fixed or strong opinions—all of which result in violence. Instead, man is to cultivate simple physical enjoyments and the inner life. To be obscure is to be wise; to fail is to succeed. In human relations force defeats itself, and even laws are a form of violence. The moral life is one of inaction. These principles generally are obvious throughout *Cannery Row*; frequently the consequences of their absence are illustrated in the “little inner chapters.” In addition, however, much of the novel seems to illustrate specific passages of the *Tao*. Sometimes there is even a similarity of expression. Steinbeck writes in Chapter 2: “The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing
again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas.” Surely Steinbeck’s meditation upon his own creative act is reminiscent of Genesis, but its similarity to the very first passage of the *Tao Teh Ching* is more striking:

Existence is beyond the power of words
To define:
Terms may be used
But are none of them absolute.
In the beginning of heaven and earth there were no words,
Words came out of the womb of matter;
And whether a man dispassionately
Sees to the core of life
Or passionately
Sees the surface,
The core and the surface
Are essentially the same,
Words making them seem different
Only to express appearance.
If name be needed, wonder names them both:
From wonder into wonder
Existence opens.

(the Bynner translation)

There are other parallels of statement between the two works. Steinbeck’s “Virtues and Graces” live with “no money, no ambitions beyond food, drink and contentment” whereas most men “in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their target.” Laotzu says, “There is no greater curse than lack of contentment./ No greater sin than the desire for possession./ Therefore he who is contented with contentment shall always be content” (Lin Yutang, XLVI). Steinbeck’s “another peephole,” through which Mack and the boys seem changed, may be a version of “Who understands Tao seems dull of comprehension;/ who is advanced in Tao seems to slip backward;/ . . . Great character appears like insufficient;/ Solid character appears like infirm” (Lin Yutang, XLI). When Mack and the boys will not even turn their heads to look at the Fourth of July parade because “they know what will be in the parade,” they illustrate the Taoist principle that “Without stepping outside one’s doors,/ One can know what is happening in the world” (Lin Yutang, XLVII).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Doc himself clearly embodies the traits of a Taoist Sage. He is free of all ambitions. He is a consummate “wordless teacher” to the entire community. In listening seriously to Mack’s schemes or Henri’s illusion he illustrates the Taoist principle that by not believing people you turn them into liars. His involvement in the welfare of the Row
demonstrates that "the Sage is good at helping men"; his care and kindness toward Frankie shows that for the Sage "there is no rejected (useless) person" (Lin Yutang, XXVII). In his study of the tidepool or even a stinkbug, he conforms to the Taoist precept that one should look to Nature to know oneself, one's real human nature. "He didn't need a clock . . . . He could feel a tide change in his sleep." He is at one with his total environment—including the whorehouse, Lee Chong's, the Palace Flophouse—and thus in communion with the harmonious balance of Tao. At the height of his birthday party, Doc is seated calmly on a table, crosslegged in the oriental posture of meditation. "The Sage dwells in the world peacefully, harmoniously./ The people of the world are brought into a community of heart/ and the Sage regards them all as his own children" (Lin Yutang, XLIX).

The world into which Cannery Row escapes is not a perfect one; not everyone lives according to the Tao. There is even a long series of misfortunes on Cannery Row, caused seemingly by some vague natural force which "there is no explaining." But there is not in Cannery Row the kind of evil men bring upon themselves through "greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest"; or through the desire to impose one's own standards on others; or even a single standard on oneself. The poet Wallace Stevens could be quoting Laotzu in his well known line, "A violent order is disorder"; and his corollary statement that "A great disorder is an order" could be the epigraph for Cannery Row. For Steinbeck's created world is characterized by its rich variety, its benevolent disorder: "Cannery Row is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream . . . . tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries . . . . [etc.]" The same rich variety is evident in all its parts: Lee Chong's grocery store, with its hodgepodge of every conceivable commodity ("but one," Dora's), in and out of season; the Carmel river, which, though short, has a long and varied list of characteristics—"everything a river should have"; Doc's lab, with its scientific apparatus, double bed, phonograph, cookstove, poetry books, and lady visitors; Eddie's "wining" jugs, containing bourbon, wine, scotch, beer and even grenadine together; the great tidepool (a microcosm of "the cosmic Monterey") in which Doc collects his specimens, in which is found such a variety of life-forms and modes of survival: all are paradigms not only of the rich community of Cannery Row, but of the novel itself—both form and content.

In this light, Steinbeck's prefatory analogy of letting the stories ooze into the book by themselves, like delicate sea worms into a collecting jar, rather than forcing them into an order, becomes also a moral statement. (There is no formal order to the Tao Teh Ching, either.) Mack learns that the first party failed because "we forced her," and that the second will succeed if they just "let it happen." Steinbeck tells us that those celebrations which are "controlled and dominated" are "not parties at all but acts and demonstrations, about as spontaneous as peristalsis and as interesting as its end product." William commits suicide because, unlike Alfred, he tries to force
himself on people and fails. Henri can love boats and be happy because he does not drive himself to the logical conclusion of finishing his boat and thus having to go upon the water, which he fears. On the other hand, Mrs. Malloy is unhappy because she wants to do such things as “force” lace curtains upon the windowless boiler in which she lives. The ambitious wife of the “Captain” in the frog-hunting episode fails as a wife because she forces her compulsive neatness upon her husband. The hitch-hiker is ejected from the car because he expects everyone to hold the same opinion about drinking that he does. Doc knows he is a “free man” because he can indulge the rich variety of his inclinations without fear of contradictions—Bach and Debussy, Faust and “Black Marigolds”; even, at the same time, Palestrina masses and sexual intercourse. In fact, he looks “half Christ, half satyr.”

The twin themes of Cannery Row, then, around which the novel’s characters and events casually but effectively arrange themselves, are the escape from Western material values (the necessity to “succeed” in the world), and the escape from Western activism (the necessity to impose order or direction). In the Tao Teh Ching Steinbeck found these two escapes elaborated into a system of “Virtues and Graces.”
"Doc was collecting marine animals in the Tide Pools."
*Cannery Row*
John Steinbeck, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Edith McGillcuddy

Roy S. Simmonds

On September 1, 1879, the twenty-nine-year-old Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, exhausted and ill after almost a month of hardship spent crossing the Atlantic and the North American continent, journeyed from Salinas to Monterey on the little narrow-gauge railway that linked the two towns. A few weeks later, John Steinbeck’s fictional Edith McGillcuddy, bribed with an all-day red sucker by Susy Nugger, “a girl of [her] age but not of her class,” made the same journey as uninvited mourner at ‘Tonio Alvarez’s funeral and, while in Monterey, met the Scottish writer.

John Steinbeck’s short story “How Edith McGillcuddy met R.L. Stevenson” has received virtually no attention from critics and scholars. It is not even mentioned in the full-length critical studies of Liska, French, and Fontenrose, other than in the bibliography of each book, although Pascal Covici regarded it as significant enough to deserve inclusion in the 1946 edition of The Portable Steinbeck. Admittedly, the story is one of Steinbeck’s minor works, but it is by no means undeserving of serious examination and comment, particularly as a comparison of the manuscript version and the published version reveals the young Steinbeck’s methods of composition.

The narrative itself is slight and may be briefly summarized. One Sunday morning in the summer of 1879, twelve-year-old Edith McGillcuddy was given five cents for the collection plate by her respectable parents in Salinas and pointed toward the Methodist church. On the way she fell willing victim to the attractive temptations of Susy Nugger, who bribed Edith with a huge all-day sucker to accompany her on a special funeral train to Monterey where one ‘Tonio Alvarez was to be buried. The exciting train journey over, Edith walked to the graveyard, attended the funeral, and faced the long wait until the trip back at four in the afternoon. Ungraciously deserted by Susy, Edith followed the delicious scent of the ocean to the beach, where she met a dirty little scamp by the name of Lizzie who promised Edith two treats: a look at a
lady in town who smoked cigarettes and a nickel for a bucket of huckleberries from the cigarette-smoking lady's friend, a young man with long hair who paid five cents for almost anything taken to him by local natives, even abalone shells. The unprincipled Lizzie filled the bucket half full of leaves before the two girls picked the huckleberries for the willingly gullible stranger who promptly paid the five cents that was asked. The gentle, long-haired man conversed playfully with Edith and Lizzie, the latter of whom ran off with the five cents, while the woman sat smoking. After enjoying a cup of cambric tea with her host, Edith heard the high scream of the locomotive and ran off to catch the train returning to Salinas. "And that was how Edith McGillicuddy met Robert Louis Stevenson."

In his Introduction to the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1942, Herschel Brickell refers to the work as "a tender and touching story." Certainly, the story has much period charm, it makes pointed but unmalicious social comment, and it is infused with the gentlest of black humor. Throughout, it is potently atmospheric: the whole episode is drenched in sunlight and imbued with a sense of the wide unlimited sky above. It has a typically abrupt Steinbeckian ending: the final paragraph is, in fact, a single sentence of ten words.

The story is only a slight embellishment of fact. For Stevenson, the seventeen-mile train ride was the final leg of the six-thousand-mile journey which was to bring about his eventual reunion with Fanny Osborne. He had met and fallen in love with Fanny—a married woman, ten years his senior—while he had been staying in the small French village of Grez-sur-Loing three years previously. They, together with Fanny's two children, Belle and Lloyd, spent an idyllic two years in each other's company. Inevitably, Stevenson and Fanny became lovers. Fanny's sojourn in Europe, however, cut short because of financial difficulties, and she went back home with the children to East Oakland and to her philandering husband, Sam. After a year of uneasy and intermittent existence together, during which time Sam installed her and the children in a house in Monterey rented from a Senora Bonifacio, they discussed a divorce, albeit somewhat half-heartedly. Fanny sent a cable to Stevenson who had, in the interim, returned to his parents' home in Edinburgh. The cable has not been preserved, but whatever it contained—a cry for help, news of the impending divorce—it motivated Stevenson's instant decision to join Fanny in Monterey, guiltily conscious all the time of the pain he was causing his parents by his behavior. Already he was referring to Fanny as "my wife."

He sailed from Greenock on August 7 on the Anchor Line vessel Devonia, arriving in New York on August 18. The evening of the following day he boarded an emigrant train and after eleven days of "extreme discomfort" which left his body "all to whistles" he arrived in Oakland and crossed on the ferry, as day was breaking, to San Francisco. The next day he took the Southern Pacific Railroad to Salinas and there boarded the narrow-gauge to Monterey and to his beloved Fanny and her children.
The sea voyage and the rigors of life on the emigrant train had almost completely sapped his health. A suspected tubercular, he had lost considerable weight during the weeks he had been traveling. What is more, the reunion with Fanny obviously was not all that Stevenson had expected of it. Writing to his friend Sidney Colvin a month or so later, he admitted: "I was exhausted by the journey and anxiety below even my point of keeping up . . . ."  

1 The anxiety was caused by Fanny's continuing state of indecision regarding the divorce. Within a week of his arrival Stevenson took himself off gypsying in the hills behind Monterey. This expedition nearly cost him his life. "I am living at an Angora goat-ranche, in the Coast Line Mountains, eighteen miles from Monterey," he wrote Colvin. "I was camping out, but got so sick that the two rancheros took me in and tended me . . . . They are both true frontiersmen, and most kind and pleasant. Captain Smith, the bear-hunter, is my physician, and I obey him like an oracle."  

2 It was a fortnight before he was well enough to ride back to Monterey. He appreciated only too well how close he had been to dying; it was now that he wrote the first draft of his famous "Requiem" which was to be inscribed on his tombstone fifteen years later. Fanny, too, realized that she had almost lost him forever. The knowledge finally determined her to go ahead with the divorce.

Stevenson had difficulty in finding lodgings in Monterey, for landladies were alarmed by the "itch" on his hands. Eventually Dr. J.P. Heintz, who together with his wife ran the French Hotel, an old adobe house, befriended him. "I now live with a little French doctor," Stevenson reported to Colvin. "I take one of my meals in a little French restaurant; for the other two I sponge." 3 The owner of the restaurant was Jules Simoneau, "a most pleasant old boy with whom I discuss the universe and play chess daily." 4 His letters to his friends back home during this period are full of his natural preoccupations with his health, the uncertainty of the immediate future, his writings, and his desperate need of money.

By mid-October, Fanny, taking the children with her, had returned to East Oakland, to attend to the arrangements necessary for the divorce and to be more conveniently near at hand when the proceedings were going through the courts. "I am now all alone in Monterey," Stevenson wrote Colvin on October 21, "a real inhabitant, with a box of my own at the P.O." 5 He was working furiously on a novel and a short story. At the beginning of December he sent Colvin "the first part of the Amateur Emigrant . . . , by far the longest and the best of the whole." 6 He also told Colvin: "I am a reporter for the Monterey Californian, at a salary of two dollars a week! Comment trouvez-vous ca?" Within days of writing to Colvin, he was again a sick man. News had come to him that Fanny was seriously unwell and the effect of this news, together with his own continuing precarious state of health and the advent of the seasonal cold fogs, laid him low. "I received your book last night," he wrote to Gosse on December 8, "as I lay abed with pleurisy, the result I fear of overwork, gradual decline of appetite, etc. . . . I have been sweated not only out of my pleuritic fever, but out of all my eating cares, and
the better part of my brains (strange coincidence!) byaconite. I have that peculiar and delicious sense of being born again in an expurgated edition which belongs to convalescence . . . . I am going on for thirty now; and unless I can snatch a little rest before long, I have, I may tell you in confidence, no hope of seeing thirty-one . . . . It is a pity in one sense, for I believe the class of work I might yet give is better and more real and solid than people fancy. But death is no bad friend; a few aches and gasps, and we are done . . . .”7 A week or so later, he had left Monterey for good and found lodgings in San Francisco to wait out the time until Fanny would be free.

It was, then, against this emotional background that the brief encounter between Stevenson and the little girl from Salinas as told by Steinbeck in his story “How Edith McGillcuddy Met R.L. Stevenson” took place. According to the postscript Steinbeck wrote for the Rowfant Club edition of the story, the incident was true. The living counterpart of Edith McGillcuddy was apparently a certain Edith Wagner, nee Gilfilan, presumably a relative of Steinbeck’s boyhood friend, Max Wagner.8 In the Rowfant postscript Steinbeck quotes from a letter Edith Wagner wrote him after she had read the story: “There are three terrible inaccuracies but how could you know that? There were no black stockings in those days—they were striped, there were no nickels and, more’s the pity, no all-day suckers. Otherwise that is the way it happened.”

In Steinbeck’s story there is no indication of the specific date on which the incident occurred. The day of the week is stated, for Edith is diverted from her intended attendance at Sunday school by the wiles of the grubby Susy. However, if one takes the sequence of events composing Stevenson’s stay in Monterey as a rough guideline, it is possible and perhaps fair to make the assumption that the meeting took place sometime during the period covering the last week in September and the first two weeks in October, 1879—in other words, sometime after Stevenson’s return from the Angora goat-ranche but prior to Fanny’s final departure for East Oakland.

Steinbeck begins his story with a brief description of Edith’s home town, the town in which he himself was born twenty-three years later and in which he was to spend the early years of his life:

Salinas was a dirty little California cow-town in 1879. There was a small and consistent vicious element; there was a large wavering element, likely to join the vicious element on Saturday night and go to church repentant on Sunday. And there was a small embattled good element, temperance people, stern people.

Twenty saloons kept the town in ignorance and vice while five churches fought valiantly for devotion, temperance, and decency.9

By 1879 Salinas had been in existence for a mere twelve years. The city was incorporated in 1874 and by 1877 the population had swollen to 4,000.

Stevenson would have had to cross the whole width of Salinas to get from the Southern Pacific Railroad depot to the depot serving the Monterey and
Salinas Valley Narrow-gauge Railroad. He describes the town in his famous essay on Monterey: "The new county seat, Salinas City, in the bald, corn-bearing plain under the Gabelano [sic] Peak, is a town of a purely American character." This laconic description would surely have pleased whoever of the inhabitants of Salinas who may have read it. The anonymous newspaper historian of The Salinas City Index certainly would have been pleased, for Stevenson almost echoes the words printed on the front page of the paper’s issue for Thursday, January 18, 1877:

Salinas City is a monument of genuine American grit and enterprise, and a living example of how much can be done by a few sterling men acting in unity and making the welfare of their town paramount to all other interests . . . . The traveler will be struck by the line, extending over a mile and a half, of substantial houses, churches and buildings, and the numerous trees within the limits, more especially if he should remember the juvenile age of the town. On entering he finds that nearly all the business houses are concentrated on one street, which is enriched by several very handsome and noble-looking piles of buildings . . . . Owing to its healthy and enjoyable climate, Salinas City can hardly be excelled for residence purposes. The healthy children standing in merry groups around the flower-wreathed trellises of the pretty cottages speak volumes without quoting from statistics . . . . Social life in Salinas is a happy one, and throughout the live-long year balls, surprise parties, literary and other entertainments ring a continuous chime of merry changes . . . .

But it is Monterey, of course, not Salinas, which is the focal point of Steinbeck's tale and it is in his description of Monterey that Steinbeck has so triumphantly evoked in so few words "the spirit of place." For example, here is his description of the approach into Monterey on the narrow-gauge railway:

The train left the yellow fields and entered the bleak country where the earth is dark sand and where even the sagebrush grows small and black. And then the round, sparkling bosom of Monterey Bay came into sight.

In a few short sentences Steinbeck manages to bring alive the sights and sounds of the Monterey streets. With beautiful economy, he sketches in the contrasting elements of the scene as Edith and her new "friend" Lizzie make their way towards the Frenchman's:

They trudged through the dirt streets of Monterey. A few horsemen idled about and a few rigs were tied to the sidewalk hitching posts. A barouche passed, bearing a sad lady in black satin, and the polished spokes of the wheels flittered in the sunshine.
In addition to the items mentioned by Edith Wagner, Steinbeck is inaccurate in at least one other respect in his story. Lizzie tells Edith that the "lady who smokes and a man with long hair live up to the Frenchman's." In fact, only Stevenson resided at the Frenchman's; Fanny and the two children remained where Sam Osborne had established them, long before Stevenson's arrival, at Senora Bonifacio's. There was enough talk around the town as it was. As one Stevenson biographer, J.C. Furnas, has recorded: "the more respectable strata of Monterey—which did not include Simoneau's customers—gossiped eagerly about this untidy and dejected stranger's devotion to that pretty Mrs. Osborne who smoked cigarettes... whose husband came down fairly often but mark my words, something mighty queer is going on there. Chewing over Fanny and Louis in later years, Monterey developed some lurid fictions, one of which ignored the facts of human gestation and the calendar..."12

The original manuscript of Steinbeck's story, held in the Humanities Research Center Library, the University of Texas at Austin, is written on six pages of an old quarto desk diary.13 It has the appearance of having been written at white-hot speed, the punctuation often erratic and the spelling occasionally wild. Steinbeck's minute handwriting is, for all that, neat and legible. Additions and revisions are minimal: eleven words have been deleted and thirty-two added. The title of the story, "How Edith McGillcuddy Met Robert Louis Stevenson," is written in pencil and was possibly entered at a later date, although there is no indication as to when.

From an examination of the other Steinbeck material contained in the diary, always assuming that the items were indeed written in the order in which they appear, it is possible to fix roughly the date of composition of the story. The first item in the diary is the manuscript of the short story "The Great Mountains," which was first printed in the December 1933 issue of the North American Review. Since Steinbeck, at this period in his career was having some difficulty in placing his short stories, this particular work was probably written some time before it was eventually published. Two unpublished humorous verses, "Patriotic Song" and "Reader's Confession," written on the verso of the first page of this manuscript, can be ignored for our purposes. The Edith McGillcuddy manuscript immediately follows that of "The Great Mountains" and is itself followed by a two-page draft of the preface to Tortilla Flat, beginning: "This is the story of Danny and of Danny's friends and of Danny's house..." According to Peter Lisca, Steinbeck was already planning Tortilla Flat in January of 1933 and sent the completed manuscript of the book to his agents before the end of the year.14 It can therefore be fairly safely deduced that the Edith McGillcuddy story was written either late in 1932 or early in 1933.

One can only conjecture why, having written the story in 1932–33, Steinbeck did not seek its publication until 1941 when it appeared in the August issue of Harper's Magazine. It is possible though unlikely that he did not attempt to place it through his agents at an earlier date. After the
publication and success of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935, there was an enthusiastic growing demand for his work. There would probably have been little difficulty at that time securing magazine publication of the story. It is, however, more likely that the story lay forgotten in the 1905 diary for a number of years and was then reworked by Steinbeck sometime during 1940 or early 1941.

Although the diary manuscript with its very few revisions and additions shows evidence of the creative assurance of its young author,\textsuperscript{15} the revisions and additions to the published version are those of the careful, meticulous artist. At first reading, there appear to be few variants between the manuscript text and the published text, and this impression would seem to be borne out by a straightforward word-count. The manuscript contains approximately 3,700 words, the published version just under 4,000 words. However, 570 words were deleted from the manuscript text and 850 words added in the published text. Some of these deletions and additions are, of course, merely the correction of spelling or grammatical errors or amendments necessitated by the alteration of punctuation. But a considerable amount of dead wood and awkwardly constructed syntax has been pared away and much new material added, all to give greater depth, clarity, and atmosphere to the work.

Compare, for example, the manuscript and published versions of the description of the McGillcuddy family:

**Manuscript Version**

The McGillcuddys belonged by right and by inclination to the good element. Mr. McGillcuddy passed the plate at the Presbyterian church and Mrs. McGillcuddy labored over the trousers that were sent twice a year to Africa and the Sandwiches [sic] Islands to curb the immorality of backward peoples.

**Published Version**

The McGillcuddys belonged by right, by race, and by inclination to the good element. Mr. McGillcuddy passed the plate in the Methodist church; for the McGillcuddy family had joined the Methodists at a time when anyone who wasn't a Presbyterian was automatically an atheist or an idolator. Mrs. McGillcuddy labored at making the trousers that were sent twice a year to Africa and to the Sandwich Islands to curb the immorality of those backward peoples.

In the published text the McGillcuddys' standing in the community is precisely but subtly established. The addition of the phrase "by race" in the published text was perhaps intended by Steinbeck to give oblique recognition that there was a non-Caucasian community in Salinas.

Another otherwise insignificant variant also possibly throws some light on the then contemporary areas of sensitivity regarding racial matters. In the
manuscript version of the story the little girl who persuades Edith to go to the free funeral is named "Susy Blum"; the girl's surname is changed to "Nugger." In 1941, with the horrors perpetrated in Nazi-dominated Europe, anything that smacked of anti-semitism was to be rigorously avoided. Edith's other erstwhile "friend" also underwent a change of name, though of no apparent significance. "Lucy" is "Lizzie" in the published version.

A comparison of the two versions of a passage describing part of the train journey from Salinas to Monterey provides an excellent example of the manner in which Steinbeck worked to achieve the clarity of expression and the distinctive rhythm which is the hallmark of the best of his prose:

**Manuscript Version**

Through the ripening country they tore at twenty miles an hour, and the sparrow hawks flew up from the squirrel holes and the blackbirds soared away like dark curtains blown by the wind. The wind was warm and perfumed with funeral flowers, and with smoke from the engine. The sun shone brilliantly down and the little train raced on through the hayfields.

**Published Version**

Through the ripening country the train tore at twenty miles an hour. The sparrow hawks flew up from the squirrel holes and the blackbirds soared away in flocks like wind-blown black curtains. The wind was warm and it was perfumed with the funeral flowers and with the black smoke from the engine. The sun shone brilliantly down; the little train raced on through the hayfields.

The revisions, however, do not always serve to qualify or extend a particular passage. The penultimate paragraph has been cut by over a third in its transition from manuscript to printed page:

**Manuscript Version**

At that moment a high scream filled the air. Edith grew tense. The scream was repeated. "I know," she cried, "It's the train going back." She jumped to her feet. "What's a free funeral," the young man demanded. Edith was already starting to run. But she stopped a moment and turned around. "That's where you get a free ride and take your lunch." She ran wildly out of the big open gate. She kited down the hill and the train was just beginning to move when she climbed aboard.

**Published Version**

At that moment a high scream filled the air. Edith grew tense. The scream was repeated. "I know," she cried. "It's the train going back." She ran wildly out through the big gates and kited down the hill. The train was just beginning to move when she climbed aboard.
The published version is undoubtedly the more convincing of the two. Edith’s panic when she heard the train whistle makes it most unlikely that she would have paused at the gate to answer the man’s repeated question. Nothing would have stopped her in her headlong flight back to the depot.

Edith is a well-rounded and sympathetically drawn character, though she is certainly a very class-conscious and weak-willed little girl. In the manuscript version we are told that although she was born “to the better element, her instincts were bad.” Steinbeck, however, modifies this somewhat sweeping statement on revising the story for publication: “Born to the good element, her instincts were bad in the matter of the company she kept.” The additional eight words make a world of difference, suggesting as they do that it is only Edith’s judgment that is at fault, not her inherent morality. In the published version, too, we are told that Edith accepted the red sucker from Susy but, before she put it in to her mouth, “rubbed it a little on her sleeve to prove she was still dainty.” It is a subtle gesture that reveals much about Edith and her parents.

Steinbeck wisely refrains from drawing full-scale characterizations of Fanny and Stevenson, reproducing instead the rather vague impressions that Edith would have gained of the two strangers. Indeed, Fanny is a comparatively shadowy figure in the story, simply “a lady in a white dress smoking a cigarette.” Her reactions to events are strangely muted. When Edith and Lizzie arrived with the bucket of huckleberries, Fanny “did not change her expression; she just looked blankly at the two little girls.” Even after Lizzie has snatched and run off with the coin Stevenson proffers in exchange for the half-filled bucket, abandoning Edith to explain and make peace with the two strangers, we are again told that Fanny’s “face had not changed. A little spurt of smoke escaped from her nose and writhed in her dark hair.” When Stevenson addresses her directly, she looks “annoyed.” She speaks only once and then in a tone of accusation and admonition, telling Stevenson: “They just take you for a fool. They make a fool of you.” Steinbeck’s story reveals no evidence of the passion the two lovers must have felt, only a sense of the uneasy tension between them. Indeed, it almost seems as if the relationship is wavering towards its end, rather than—as it was—moving fitfully towards eventual marriage. Certainly, one gets the distinct feeling that Edith was more impressed by Fanny’s cigarette smoking than by Fanny herself.

On the other hand, Stevenson is portrayed vividly enough as “a long-haired young man with a lean, sick face and eyes shining with fever.” Steinbeck makes no attempt to reproduce Stevenson’s Scottish accent, merely noting that when he spoke “some kind of a memory rippled in Edith’s head.” Later, she identifies the memory: “you talk pretty near like Granma McGillcuddy,” she tells Stevenson. His reaction is immediate. In his current circumstance, ill, far from family and friends, and uncertain about his future with Fanny, he must have felt wretchedly homesick. Any reference to his native country, however vague and remote, would arouse his interest and perhaps lend some momentary illusion of stability. Edith experiences no awe in the presence of
this stranger who, after all, she had come to defraud and, after Lizzie's treacherous departure, she talks with him in her best grown-up manner and apparently without inhibition until she hears the train whistle. She leaves precipitously, without even discovering the name of the man with whom she has been so freely conversing while sedately sipping her cambric tea.

After its initial appearance in Harper's Magazine, the story was reprinted in America on several occasions, including both The Best American Short Stories of 1942 and the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1942. The Rowfant Club published a limited edition of 152 copies which reproduced, as a postscript, a facsimile of Steinbeck's brief history of the story's source. The story was subsequently reprinted in the April 24–29, 1944, issue of Senior Scholastic and, complete with the Rowfant postscript, in the revised 1946 edition of The Portable Steinbeck. It was omitted, however, from the 1971 edition of The Portable Steinbeck, edited by Pascal Covici, Jr.

The publishing history of the story in England has not been such a happy or satisfactory one. It originally appeared in the Strand Magazine for June 1942. The text deleted 117 words, including seven complete sentences. The inevitable Anglicizing of certain words occurred: "station" for "depot," "gangway" for "aisle," "snivel" for "sniffle," and so on. The text of The 1943 Saturday Book is identical to the Harper's version except that in one place the word "Granma" is replaced by "Grandma." The story was reprinted in the March 1943 Argosy and in the April 1943 Lilliput. Both are heavily edited texts, the Argosy version shortened by 501 words, the Lilliput version by 1,230 words—just slightly under one third of the whole! In both versions the most severely cut sections are those describing the train journey on the little narrow-gauge railway from Salinas to Monterey, thus destroying completely all Steinbeck's sympathetic but humorous social comment as reflected in the behavior of the official and unofficial mourners. The 1943 Saturday Book is now a fairly rare collector's item. Thus, Steinbeck's British readers have been denied access to the definitive text of the story, a situation which one hopes may soon be remedied.

Notes

3 Letters, I, 248.
4 Letters, I, 251.
5 Letters, I, 254.
6 Letters, I, 257.
7 Letters, I, 258–60.
8 Wagner is mentioned in the Introduction to Once There Was a War and figures prominently in another of Steinbeck's short stories also evidently based on a true-life happening, "The Summer Before," Punch, 128 (May 25, 1955), 647–51.
9 Harper's Magazine 183 (August 1941), 252–58. Quotations from the published and manuscript texts of the story are used by permission of the Steinbeck Estate. Quotations from the manuscript text are also used by courtesy of the Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, which kindly made available to me a Xerox copy of the manuscript for the purpose of this study.


11 Quotations from The Salinas City Index are used by permission of Salinas Newspapers Inc. The front page of the issue for January 18, 1877, was reproduced on p. 7A of the Centennial Edition of the Salinas Californian, October 11, 1971.


13 The diary is bound in black cloth and has a leather back strip. On the front cover are stamped the words “Standard, No. 362, Diary 1905.” There are no indications as to who was its previous owner, but there are a number of pencil erasures throughout the volume which appear to relate to court cases. It is therefore extremely probable that the diary originally belonged to the novelist’s father. The manuscripts of several of Steinbeck’s early works are contained in his father’s old business ledgers. A number of pages have been removed from the diary, and the manuscript of the story accordingly does not appear on leaves covering a consecutive sequence of dates. Page one of the manuscript appears on the diary page for Thursday, February 16; page two on Friday, February 17; page three on Monday, February 20; page four on Tuesday, February 21; page five on Sunday, February 26; and page six on Tuesday, February 28. I am indebted to Mrs. June Moll of the Humanities Research Library at Austin for providing me with details of the diary and manuscript.


15 Charles Chaplin has recalled the speed at which Steinbeck worked in those days, producing approximately 2,000 words, with few revisions, per morning, as well as the neatness of his manuscripts. See Chaplin’s My Autobiography (London: The Bodley Head, 1964), p. 422.
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA

Steinbeck Country

San Jose State University

Jonas Brothers

Tortilla Flat
Sweet Thursday
Cannery Row

CARMEL VALLEY

Point Lobos

CARMEL

BAY

MONTEREY

PACIFIC GROVE

MONTEREY

To the
San Joaquin Valley
Grapes of Wrath

SALINAS

Spreckels

SALINAS

To A God Unknown

The Red Pony

The Long Valley

KING CITY

East of Eden

BRADLEY

PASO ROBLES

SAN LUIS OBISPO

SAN LUCIA MOUNTAINS

BIG SUR

Flight

The Sea of Cortez

The Sea of Cortez

Steinbeck Research Center

Jessie Ericson

Steinbeck Research Center
The Salinas Valley is in Northern California. It is a long narrow swale between two ranges of mountains, and the Salinas River winds and twists up the center until it falls at last into Monterey Bay.

—East of Eden

Steinbeck's stage for most of his California fiction is the long, narrow, windswept corridor extending from Watsonville on the north to King City on the south. This valley lies between two ranges of mountains, the Gabilans on the east and the Santa Lucias on the west. The sights, sounds, and scents of this land inform Steinbeck's fiction and give it meaning as he depicts the relationship between man and the world he inhabits—and creates or destroys.

Environment-as-meaning is, of course, not new in the fictional mode, for man's interaction with his environment is indeed the very essence of fiction itself. But Steinbeck's romantic attachment to his country and its people is, in his best work, transmuted into authentic emotion, revealed in vivid, evocative passages which are distinctive. Couched in prose reminiscent of romantic poetry, they arouse sensations which unfold in dramatic action often destructive of dreams, hope, and even life itself. The combination of sinister forces at work in a benign land give his fiction a subtle tension and an ironic force. The beauty and bounty of the outerworld is a corrective to the inner turmoil of the individual and both harbor and guide for the sufficiently sensitive. The aura of wonder which permeates the early work suggests some larger and calmer spiritual world outside the confines of desperate existence and implies some mysterious good for those who can distinguish the ways of humanity from those of God—or nature.

Steinbeck's people, his family and the friends of his youth as well as most of his early fictional creations, have their roots deep in California soil. In one

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of his last works, *America and Americans* (1966), Steinbeck recalls that a migrant worker from Oklahoma, unaware of Steinbeck's origin, once told him that he looked like a Californian. In that book, Steinbeck states explicitly his recognition of the importance of place in molding an individual:

There is no question in my mind that places in America mark their natives not only in their speech patterns but physically—in build, in stance, in conformation. Climate may have something to do with this, as well as food supply and techniques of living; in any case it seems to be true that people living close together tend to look alike. Why not? If a man and his dog become the same in appearance, why not a man and his neighbor?

Though the definitive biography of the novelist has not yet been written, we can garner many details, primarily from Steinbeck's works, about the region where both he and his forbears dwelled. We can visit the actual sites he describes in his fiction and identify possible prototypes for additional settings, remembering always that the writer of fiction is free to change and create at will. A tour of Steinbeck country confirms the accuracy of Steinbeck's eye and ear as the land, though changed by man and time, still casts its spell over the observer.

**SAN JOSE**

San Jose, the northern gateway to the land John Steinbeck made famous, is closely linked to Steinbeck's life and work. Both his mother, Olive Hamilton, and his first wife, Carol, whose father, Wilbur Henning, was in the building-and-loan business and resided a few blocks east of San Jose State University, were born in San Jose.

San Jose is frequently, though not always favorably, mentioned in Steinbeck's fiction. Molly Morgan, the young school teacher in *The Pastures of Heaven*, attended Teachers College there, undoubtedly the old San Jose State Teachers College, which is now San Jose State University. Other inhabitants of the heavenly pastures came to the not so Edenic San Jose too: George Battle's epileptic wife, after twice attempting to burn their house, was confined "in a little private prison called the Lippman Sanitarium" in San Jose; the financially astute Shark Wicks with his phantom fortune knew that the San Jose Building and Loan paid six per cent interest. Mr. Rattle (Cannery Row) embezzled a client's money and ran off to San Jose, where "he was caught with a high-hair blond and sent up within ten days." A former resident of the Bear Flag, a restaurant in Cannery Row which did not specialize in food, fared better; she married well, moved to San Jose, and sang alto in the Episcopal church choir (*Sweet Thursday*). Characters in *East of Eden* sometimes compared the growing metropolis of Salinas to San Jose. Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck's grandfather in fact and fiction, pondering the
effects of sewers and inside toilets, arc lights on street corners, and telephones in Salinas, wondered "whether people would be happy when all that came," then decided that such progress "didn't sound so silly when you heard what they were doing in San Jose." During the first World War when "San Jose had a spy scare," Salinas residents knew that "Salinas was not likely to be left behind—not the way Salinas was growing."

San Jose today is the site of the Steinbeck Research Center, located in the John Steinbeck Room in the San Jose State University Library. Plans for the Center grew out of a Conference and Film Festival held on the campus in 1971, a three-day celebration of the man and his work which attracted more than eight hundred registrants from sixteen states, Canada, and Japan. The Steinbeck Room was formally dedicated in March, 1974, with Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men the central focus of a weekend conference during which the film, play, and operatic versions were presented on the University campus.

The Steinbeck Collection, housed in the Steinbeck Room, now consists of more than one thousand items, including books, manuscripts, periodicals, photocopies of literary criticism, portraits, and memorabilia. Among the books are first editions of all of Steinbeck's principal works, including signed presentation copies and rare limited editions. Manuscripts include an early copybook containing an incomplete and unpublished play, Steinbeck's first attempt at the genre; an unpublished humorous account of Steinbeck's reflections on the film industry and its products, written when MGM expressed interest in filming Tortilla Flat; the article which Steinbeck wrote on the death of Ernie Pyle, and a number of letters. Photocopies of Thomas Collins' reports to the Farm Security Administration, which contain several incidents Steinbeck incorporated into The Grapes of Wrath, are also among the holdings. Collins, the model for the manager of the Weedpatch Camp in Steinbeck's novel, is the Tom of Steinbeck's dedication "To Tom, who lived it" and was a friend of the author. The Center also owns prints and final shooting scripts for several films adapted from Steinbeck's works. The collection includes, too, significant variant editions of Steinbeck's novels, foreign language editions, critical books and articles, newspaper stories, copies of letters, photographs by Peter Stackpole of Ed Ricketts and the Cannery Row of the 1940s, and forty photographs of Steinbeck, a recent gift of Mrs. Elaine Steinbeck. In addition, the University of Virginia has recently placed microfilm copies of its extensive Steinbeck Collection, including the manuscript of The Grapes of Wrath, in the Research Center.

Furnishings in the Steinbeck Room include six chairs which belonged to the author and were donated to the Center by Mrs. Gwendolyn Steinbeck. Two of the chairs were once the property of the Bank of England; the other four are copies of the originals which Steinbeck had made in Ireland. Colored photographs of Steinbeck Country; a watercolor painting of Cannery Row by Edith Herron; a portrait of Steinbeck by Barnaby Conrad; and an oil painting, a caricature of Steinbeck by his friend Pepe Romero, decorate the walls. The caricature belongs to Mrs. Gwendolyn Steinbeck and has been placed in the
room on indefinite loan. The Steinbeck Room is open to the public afternoons from one to four Monday through Saturday.

LOS GATOS

In the 1930s when Steinbeck was working on *Of Mice and Men*, he built his first home a mile or two west of Los Gatos. Located high in the Monte Sereno Hills on a sloping site of more than an acre, the board-and-batten structure was set well back from Greenwood Lane behind an eight-foot grapestake fence erected for privacy. Steinbeck’s study, in which he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, was located at the far end of the house where he hoped to work undisturbed. He sometimes wrote too on the south side deck which overlooked the canyon below the home. The house and grounds which, according to Steinbeck’s letters to his editor, Pat Covici, cost him nearly $7000, has been expanded and remodeled. Described by a real-estate copy writer as “the only estate of its kind in California,” it was offered for sale in 1974 “most reasonably priced at $225,000.”

When nearby lots were sold and neighbors began to encroach, Steinbeck, disturbed by building noises, vocal exercises, radios, and other invasions of privacy, searched for another hideaway. Reluctantly, he and Carol put their home up for sale. Steinbeck was elated when the first person who saw the house—Miss Burke of Burke’s School in San Francisco—bought it, and he was spared further interference from potential buyers as he completed *The Grapes of Wrath*. Meanwhile, the Steinbecks had found their ideal ranch—“the most beautiful I have ever seen,” Steinbeck wrote Covici—five miles from Los Gatos in the Santa Cruz Mountains just below the summit. Off winding Hebard Road, the property, known as the Old Biddle Ranch, consisted of forty-seven acres and an old farm house, built by Alexander Logan in the late 1860s. Though the house had no floors and no inside water, the Steinbecks lived there until their new dwelling was completed. Later they turned the old home into a guest house. The new house, built partly of weathered timbers and boards from an old oil derrick located on the property, contained a ceiling-high, cone-shaped, copper hood over the fireplace in the living room, which was designed by Steinbeck. In addition to redwoods, oaks, firs, and madrones, the property contained its own spring-fed lake, apple and pear orchard, vineyard and pasture, and a sweeping view of the valley. The Steinbecks built a swimming pool and filled it with water from their own lake.

WATSONVILLE

Located near the Santa Cruz Mountains where Steinbeck owned his small ranch, Watsonville is the most likely spot for the site of Steinbeck’s strike novel, *In Dubious Battle*. Mac described the location of the strike: “Here’s the layout. Torgas is a little valley, and it’s mostly apple orchards. Most of it’s
owned by a few men.”

Though Steinbeck said that the strike and strike site were composites of several strikes and valleys, one was undoubtedly Pajaro Valley, where apple orchards were started in 1853 and apples and other fruits are major crops. “The Raid,” a Steinbeck short story, has a similar setting.

HOLLISTER

Hollister was named in 1868 for Colonel W.W. Hollister, owner of the San Justo Ranch on which the town was established. Incorporated in 1872, Hollister became the San Benito County seat in 1874, the same year John A. Steinbeck, the novelist’s grandfather, arrived and opened a flour mill there. His family left Massachusetts to join him for Thanksgiving that year. They bought land nearby on which they planted fruit trees and quickly established a reputation as honest, hard-working people.

SALINAS

Salinas was a dirty little California cow-town in 1879. There was a small and consistent vicious element; there was a large wavering element, likely to join the vicious element on Saturday night and go to church repentant on Sunday. And there was a small embattled good element, temperance people, stern people.

—“How Edith McGillcuddy Met R.L.S.”

Salinas was the county seat, and it was a fast growing town. Its population was due to cross the two thousand mark any time. It was the biggest town between San Jose and San Luis Obispo, and everyone felt that a brilliant future was in store for it. —East of Eden

Steinbeck was born in Salinas on February 27, 1902, in a many-gabled, mid-Victorian, two-story dwelling located at 132 Central Avenue. To get to the house from U.S. Highway 101, take the Main Street Exit, turn right on Market Street, left on Lincoln Avenue, and right on Central Avenue. The house is on the northwest corner of Stone Street and Central Avenue. In East of Eden, Steinbeck describes “the high white house of Ernest Steinbeck”:

It was an immaculate and friendly house, grand enough but not pretentious, and it sat inside its white fence, surrounded by its clipped lawn, and roses and catoneasters lapped against its white walls.

Still enclosed in a white picket fence, the fifteen-room house has been painted a gray-beige, its original color, and is surrounded by orange and yellow calendulas, yellow marguerites and other colorful plantings. With its
stained glass front door, scroll work, and gingerbread, it still looks immaculate and friendly.

J.J. Connor built the house in 1897 and sold it to Steinbeck’s father three years later. Mrs. Marie Klute bought the house in the mid-1930’s and, upon her death, deeded it to the Catholic diocese of Monterey. Members of the Newman Club, a Catholic student group at nearby Hartnell College, lived in the house for a while and began its restoration. In 1974, it was purchased by the Valley Guild, a volunteer women’s organization of Salinas who, with the help of the local historical society, have continued as authentic a restoration as possible. The Guild now operates a restaurant in the house, using the proceeds to maintain the property and support local charities. Lunch is served Monday through Friday, by reservation only, at 11:45 and 1:15. The one-price $3.00 luncheon may be Tortilla Flat green enchiladas, a Cannery Row seafood casserole, or another entree named for one of Steinbeck’s books or characters. On some Thursdays a sweet lemon chiffon dessert is on the menu too. The house is available for tours by large groups provided reservations are made in advance.

The restaurant’s reception room, to the left as one enters the front door, was once a bedroom, the room where Steinbeck was born and where his mother died. Steinbeck describes the room, “off the wide front hall,” in *East of Eden*. Then occupied by Liza Hamilton, the novelist’s grandmother, it was “a pleasant little bed-sitting room ... crowded with photographs, bottles of toilet water, lace pincushions, brushes and combs, and the china and silver bureau-knacks of many birthdays and Christmases.”

John and his younger sister Mary were christened and baptized in the parlor. Located to the right of the entrance hall, the parlor, from which young John was usually barred, and the adjoining larger living room, a sitting room where the family gathered after dinner most evenings while the parents took turns reading aloud to the children, are now dining areas. With gold felt draperies and lace curtains at the windows, they are decorated in earth tones. One of Steinbeck’s sisters recalls that the walls were an oatmeal color when the Steinbecks lived there and that two pictures hung on the parlor walls, one of Mount Vesuvius and “The Gleaners.” A picture of John, his parents, and grandmother taken in their sitting room now sits on the mantel over the fireplace in the present dining area. The room which once served as the library is now The Red Room. Bridge clubs frequently reserve the room with its ice-cream parlor red and white decor for luncheons and their afternoon games. Another dining room, reserved for men only, is accessible by a side entrance. It contains a display case filled with Steinbeck memorabilia: his harmonica and glasses and numerous photographs. One of its walls is covered with sardine can labels; the empty sardine cans serve as ashtrays.

Steinbeck remembered that one of his sisters was married on the staircase, off the wide front hall which leads up to the front bedroom, directly above the reception room. This room was Steinbeck’s boyhood bedroom. A
neighbor remembers that a light frequently burned far into the night in the other finished upstairs room, however, and surmises that Steinbeck wrote there. If so, during the day he could see his beloved Frémont's Peak, from the window in that room as he wrote. The rest of the unfinished attic, which the Newman Club turned into apartments, was then a playroom. Steinbeck's friends recall roller-skating there on rainy days with John and Mary and other friends, and one remembers being incarcerated in the basement on one occasion. The Guild uses the basement as a boutique and book and art shop called "The Best Cellar," open 11–3.

Other points of interest in Salinas are the downtown "original square mile" on South Main Street, where the Dashaway Stables were located and where Steinbeck's father worked as a grain merchant before he became Monterey County treasurer; the Salinas Race Track and Rodeo Grounds on North Main where Jody (The Red Pony) dreamed that he and his colt would win prizes and where Steinbeck's mother took the famous airplane ride she had won by selling Victory Bonds (East of Eden); the Cominos Hotel where Elisa Allen's husband Henry took her to dinner ("The Chrysanthemums"); the Episcopal Church Steinbeck attended as a youth which is now the East of Eden restaurant; and the John Steinbeck Library, with a life-size bronze statue of Steinbeck on the front lawn.

Steinbeck researched some of East of Eden in the old library, now demolished, and Pat Humbert went there to look for pictures of Vermont houses to emulate when he reconstructed his Pastures of Heaven house into the dream home he envisioned Mae Munroe occupying with him. The Steinbeck Collection housed in the new library contains a number of autographed first editions, letters, original manuscripts, photographs, taped interviews, and memorabilia.

The school Steinbeck attended has been torn down and the site is now a parking lot. He did, however, help his father collect objects to place in the cornerstone of the Salinas High School built on Main Street in 1920, the year after Steinbeck, who was president of his senior class, was graduated.

Steinbeck died of a heart ailment in his home in New York City on December 20, 1968. After a memorial service on December 23 in St. James Episcopal Church on Madison Avenue and a private family ceremony on Point Lobos on Christmas Eve, his ashes were buried in the family plot on March 4, 1969. The Hamilton plot is located near Romie Lane in the Garden of Memories Cemetery at 768 Abbott Street. Steinbeck's simple gravesite, under a large oak tree, is identified by a bronze tablet containing only the author's name and dates:

John Steinbeck
1902–1968

The plot also contains the graves of his father, John Ernest Steinbeck (1862–1935); his mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck (1867–1934); his
younger sister, Mary Steinbeck Dekker (1905–1965), and an uncle, William John Hamilton (1864–1930).

In another Hamilton plot, a short distance from Steinbeck's grave and directly opposite the Mausoleum, are the graves of Steinbeck's maternal grandparents, Samuel Hamilton (1831–1904) and Elizabeth Hamilton (1831–1918), his uncle and aunts, Thomas Scott Hamilton (1855–1912), Dessie Hamilton (1857–1907) and Euna Hamilton Anderson (1862–1898).

All are significant figures in both Steinbeck's life and literature. While writing East of Eden, Steinbeck assured his editor that all the stories he recounted there about his family were true: “I can tell all I want about them now because they are all dead and they won’t resent the truth about themselves.” Their characteristics in the novel and Steinbeck’s comments about them in Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters reveal Steinbeck’s understanding, love, and admiration. His father, “a singularly silent man” who “admired anyone who laid down his line and followed it undeflected to the end,” had no heart for life after his wife’s death; his mother’s “theology was a curious mixture of Irish fairies and an Old Testament Jehovah whom in her later life she confused with her father. Heaven was to her a nice home ranch inhabited by her dead relatives.” His sister “Mary was braver and more ruthless than most. That’s why she won every marble in Salinas.” Will Hamilton, who was “truly beloved of the gods,” could not help making money. Steinbeck wished to show his grandfather Samuel “in a kind of golden light, the way such a man should be remembered.” His grandmother Liza felt that in Heaven there “must be something to take up one’s time—some clouds to darn, some weary wings to rub with liniment.” Una, as her name was spelled in East of Eden, was her father’s greatest joy and the first of the family to die. Her death “struck Samuel like a silent earthquake” and made him “an old man.” Dessie was the “warm-beloved” and “laughter lived on her doorstep,” while Tom was “a strange man, strong and silent and good—very good and confused.” In the Journal, Steinbeck said that the “great story of the Hamiltons is that of Uncle Tom and his sister Dessie and of the death of Dessie and Tom’s suicide.”

In The Log from the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck wrote: “It seems good to mark and to remember for a little while the place where a man died.”

FREMONT’S PEAK

Adam sat looking at the mountains to the east of Salinas with the noble point of Frémont’s Peak dominating.

—East of Eden

Frémont’s Peak (elevation 3,169) is the highest point in the Gabilan Mountains. Eleven miles southeast of San Juan Bautista, it can be reached by a scenic winding road and affords an unparalleled view of the valley.

During his childhood, Steinbeck had played on this mountain where
Captain John C. Frémont built a fort in 1846 and waited four days for Californians to attack, preparing for a battle that never materialized. Steinbeck had hunted for cannon balls and rusted bayonets left by Frémont’s company. He had also envisioned this solitary spot as his final resting place:

I remembered how once, in that part of youth that is deeply concerned with death, I wanted to be buried on this peak where without eyes I could see everything I knew and loved, for in those days there was no world beyond the mountains. And I remembered how intensely I felt about my interment. It is strange and perhaps fortunate that when one’s time grows nearer one’s interest in it flags as death becomes a fact rather than a pageantry.

—Travels with Charley

Steinbeck must have watched the peak closely as a child, for he speaks of it at both dawn and sunset in East of Eden: “The dawn was coming, lighting up the back of Frémont’s Peak so that it stood black against the sky” and “Frémont’s Peak was lighted pinkly by the setting sun and Faye could see it from her window.”

On one of his last trips to California, Steinbeck, with his poodle Charley, paid a final visit to the peak to bid farewell to both his Valley and his memories.

This solitary stone peak overlooks the whole of my childhood and youth, the great Salinas Valley stretching south for nearly a hundred miles, the town of Salinas where I was born now spreading like crab grass toward the foothills.

—Travels with Charley

SPRECKELS

Spreckels, six miles east of Salinas, is a company town founded by Claus Spreckels in 1898, for what was then the largest sugar beet factory in the world. The factory consisted of several red brick buildings clustered in “Hill Town,” as it was called before the marshes were drained and the land leveled. A narrow-gauge railroad, the Pajaro Valley Consolidated Railroad, ran from Salinas to Spreckels at a speed of twenty miles an hour. Horses pulled wagonloads of beets down a boulevard shaded by black walnut trees. A California Historical Marker located at the end of Spreckels Lane now marks the Hill Town Ferry, which crossed the Salinas River from 1867 to 1888.

Steinbeck’s father worked at Spreckels for a number of years, helping his son find employment there as a manual laborer during summer vacations while he was still in high school. Steinbeck also worked there intermittently during the years he attended Stanford, serving as night chemist. During free periods, he would write letters and jot down notes. He listened to stories told
by workers in the hot presses and in the factory yards, and is said to have incorporated characters and incidents he heard there into *Tortilla Flat*. The village called Loma in "Johnny Bear" also reminds local residents of the old Hill Town, though others believe the incident that became that story occurred on Mulligan's Hill west of Castroville.

Film and television versions of Steinbeck's works have been made at Spreckels: The *East of Eden* sequences showing Adam Trask's icing, packing, and shipping lettuce were filmed there, as were parts of the television presentation of "The Harness."

**SOLEDAD**

In the movie version of *Of Mice and Men*, Spreckels Ranch, No. 3, near Soledad, is given as the location for the ranch of Steinbeck's story. Established with the founding of a mission in 1891, Soledad, though later deserted, was the oldest settlement in the valley. Revitalized in 1791, it now has a population of over 4000.

According to Nelson Valjean, Steinbeck worked as a ranch hand for a summer, bucking bags of grain in what is believed to be the Willoughby Ranch, Spreckels Ranch, No. 10, a big ranch between Spence and Chualar devoted to wheat fields and barley. The Salinas River with its overhanging willows and sycamores flowed nearby; the Gabilans "full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation" were on the east; and the frightening Santa Lucias, "dark and brooding—unfriendly and dangerous" on the west. Here Steinbeck lived in the bunkhouse with the other laborers and soon became straw boss. Undoubtedly, it was here too that he stored the memories that would furnish background for *Of Mice and Men*. The novella begins:

> 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 reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees—willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the winter's flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool.

**KING CITY**

King City was founded by Charles R. King, a millionaire lumberman, in 1884. Six years later, in 1890, John Ernest Steinbeck moved to King City, where he became, successively, a bookkeeper, the first agent for the railroad at King City, and the Superintendent of the Southern Pacific Milling Company. There he met and married Olive Hamilton who had begun teaching
school at the age of eighteen. Steinbeck records a memory of their romance in *Travels with Charley*: “And on one of those oaks my father burned his name with a hot iron together with the name of the girl he loved.”

Olive’s father, Samuel, had left Ireland in 1851 and traveled round Cape Horn to California. After a stay in San Jose, where Olive was born in 1866, Samuel homesteaded a 1,760 acre ranch for growing grain and grazing cattle in Hamilton Canyon, a few miles southeast of King City. That ranch was probably the model for the Trask property in *East of Eden*.

Steinbeck’s uncle and Samuel’s son, William C. Hamilton, married Birdie King, the niece of the city’s founder. Will owned the Hamilton Harness Saddlery and was later co-owner of the Hamilton and Gausse Garage (now Stateside Motors, 114 Broadway), the Model T dealership Steinbeck describes vividly in *East of Eden*.

King City is also the setting for parts of *Of Mice and Men* and *To a God Unknown*.

**JOLON**

Nuestra Senora, the long valley of Our Lady in Central California, was green and gold and yellow and blue when Joseph came unto it. The level floor was deep in wild oats and canary mustard flowers. The river San Francisquito flowed noisily in its bouldered bed through a cave made by its little narrow forest. Two flanks of the coast range held the Valley of Nuestra Senora close, on one side guarding it against the sea, and on the other against the blasting winds of the great Salinas Valley.

—*To A God Unknown*

Though south of what is usually considered Steinbeck Country, Jolon, “the Valley of the Oaks,” is the primary setting for an important early mythical novel *To a God Unknown*. Joseph Wayne was “half-drugged and overwhelmed by the forest of Our Lady, whose aisles and alcoves seemed to have meanings as obscure and promising as the symbols of an ancient religion.” In his homestead of “a hundred and sixty acres of land up the valley,” live oaks stood in long grassy meadows “like perpetual senators ruling over the land.”

Now traversed primarily by sportsmen on the way to the Hunter Liggett Military Reservation or by visitors to the mission, the town was a busy stage stop on El Camino Real before the railroad was built between Salinas and King City.

The abandoned mission Steinbeck described in *To a God Unknown*, Mission San Antonio de Padua, is six miles northwest of Jolon on Mission Road. Now authentically restored as an outstanding example of early mission life, it is open daily except Tuesday from eight to five.

At the far southern end a pass opened in the hills to let out the river,
and near this pass lay the church and the little town of Our Lady. The huts of Indians clustered about the mud walls of the church, and although the church was often vacant now and its saints were worn and part of its tile roof lay in a shattered heap on the ground, and although the bells were broken, the Mexican Indians still lived near about and held their festivals, danced La Jota on the packed earth and slept in the sun.

CORRAL DE TIERRA

She looked down on the valley of the Pastures of Heaven. The orchards lay in dark green squares; the grain was yellow, and the hills behind, a light brown washed with lavendar. Among the farms the roads twisted and curled, avoiding a field looping around a huge tree, half circling a hill flank. Over the whole valley was stretched a veil of heat shimmer.

—The Pastures of Heaven

Corral de Tierra, a valley in the hills about twelve miles from Monterey, is the area Steinbeck used as a setting for The Pastures of Heaven. A “fence of earth” where Indians camped and settled, the canyon community is filled with meadows of live oaks where deer sometimes still browse; with buckeyes, willows, and sycamores; with streams and sword ferns.

When one enters the valley, on the clearly marked Corral de Tierra Road—about eight miles from Salinas on Highway 68, the Monterey-Salinas Highway—he sees almost immediately the golf course and country club and the expensive homes Steinbeck’s “successful man” foretold:

If I have any vision, I tell you this: Some day there’ll be big houses in that valley, stone houses and gardens, golf links and big gates and iron work. Rich men will live there—men that are tired of working away in town, men that have made their pile and want a quiet place to settle down to rest and enjoy themselves.

But today one is also struck by the initial view of the pastures as was the Spanish corporal when he arrived at the top of the ridge and stopped

stricken with wonder at what he saw—a long valley floored with green pasturage on which a herd of deer browsed. Perfect live oaks grew in the meadow of the lovely place, and the hills hugged it jealously against the fog and the wind.

About a mile after the turn-off on the Corral de Tierra Road from Highway 68, a “castle” is visible on the mountain to the left, undoubtedly a site Steinbeck explored often when he picnicked in the valley as a child. He describes such a castle in the short story “The Murder” in The Long Valley:
“At the head of the canyon there stands a tremendous stone castle, buttressed and towered like those strongholds the Crusaders put up in the paths of their conquests. Only a close visit to the castle shows it to be a strange accident of time and water and erosion working on soft, stratified, sandstone. In the distance the ruined battlements, the gates, the towers, even the narrow slits, require little imagination to make out.” The castle described in “The Murder” is near “oak-wooded canyons, heavily brushed with poison oaks and sage.” Below this castle, at the bottom of the hill, is a meadow of live oaks, where deer browse.

The general store and post office which, in Steinbeck’s version, stood in the “center of the valley” no longer remain if, indeed, they ever existed except in the novelist’s imagination. But the site of the “hacked and much initialed schoolhouse” which stood beside the stream could well be that of the existing school house, for it stands beside a stream in the same location as the old school it replaced.

The remaining horse and cattle ranches along the Corral de Tierra Road could be those that were inhabited by the Munroe and Battle families in Steinbeck’s novel. One can easily imagine that one farm on the northern flat was the prototype for the Raymond Banks’ farm, “the prettiest place in the whole country,” with its five thousand white chickens and one thousand white ducks. Even the Christmas Canyon, where Helen Van Deventer had her log home constructed, is a part of the real Corral de Tierra.

In the late afternoon, one can view the pastures from a ridge peak, as did Steinbeck’s bus load of tourists, and listen to its sounds:

They climbed stiffly from their seats and stood on the ridge peak and looked down into the Pastures of Heaven. And the air was as golden gauze in the last of the sun. The land below them was plotted in squares of green orchard trees and in squares of yellow grain and in squares of violet earth. From the sturdy farmhouses, set in their gardens, the smoke of the evening fires drifted upward until the hill-breeze swept it cleanly off. Cowbells were softly clashing in the valley; a dog barked so far away that the sound rose up to the travelers in sharp little whispers. Directly below the ridge a band of sheep had gathered under an oak tree against the night.

CARMEL VALLEY

Mack and the boys drove Lee Chong’s old truck from Cannery Row to Carmel Valley on their famous frog-hunting expedition. The valley, now a residential and recreational area with a village post office surrounded by galleries and gift and speciality shops, is traversed by Carmel River, which Steinbeck describes in Cannery Row:

In Carmel Valley the artichokes stood gray green, and the willows were lush along the river.
The Carmel is a lovely little river. It isn’t very long but in its course it has everything a river should have. It rises in the mountains and tumbles down a while, runs through shallows, is dammed to make a lake, spills over the dam, crackles among round boulders, wanders lazily under sycamores, spills into pools where trout live, drops in against the banks where crayfish live. In the winter it becomes a torrent, a mean little fierce river, and in the summer it is a place for children to wade in and for fishermen to wander in. Frogs blink from its banks and deep ferns grow beside it .... It’s everything a river should be.

MONTEREY

Monterey sits on the slope of a hill, with a blue bay below it and with a forest of tall dark pine trees at its back.

—Tortilla Flat

In 1944, after Steinbeck completed writing Cannery Row in New York City, he moved back to California with his wife, Gwyn, and their infant son, Thom. He then bought the historic Casa Jesus Soto Adobe at 460 Pierce Street in downtown Monterey, a house he had wanted since boyhood. Built in 1842, the house had been abandoned for some time and, though partially restored, needed additional renovation. The Steinbecks lived there only a short while, however, and sold the house a year later. It is now a doctor’s office.

Steinbeck had set Tortilla Flat, written more than a decade before, in Monterey. Local residents disagree as to the location of Tortilla Flat, and Steinbeck did not identify the precise site. He does say, however: “The lower parts of the town [Monterey] are inhabited by Americans, Italians, catchers and canners of fish. But on the hill where the forest and the town intermingle, where the streets are innocent of asphalt and the corners free of streetlights, the old inhabitants of Monterey are embattled as the Ancient Britons are embattled in Wales. These are the paisanos.” Afterwards, in a letter quoted by Valjean, Steinbeck said: “When I wrote Tortilla Flat . . . the Monterey Chamber of Commerce issued a statement that it was a damned lie and that no such place or people existed. Later, they began running buses to the place where they thought it might be.”

Though the locale was undoubtedly a composite of several early residential areas, the section near the top of Jefferson Street, site of the Jefferson Memorial Park, is considered the most likely location. If so, the shacks once occupied by Danny and the boys have been torn down now and replaced by colorful cottages, larger homes, and apartment buildings. Some maintain, however, that Tortilla Flat was located on the steep hill above Cannery Row in the section between David and Prescott Streets near what was once known as Huckleberry Hill. They say that a child of Senora Teresina Cortez still lives there on a corner of Jessie Street. The Naval Postgraduate School, located at
Sloat and Third, was once the elegant old Hotel Del Monte, from whose gardens the Paisanos stole vegetables to feed the senora's nine hungry children. It was here, too, that Josh Billings died, according to the account in *Cannery Row*. The screen version of *Tortilla Flat* was filmed at Fisherman's Wharf in 1944.

With the publication of *Cannery Row* in 1945, the twisting mile that begins at the rocks of the U.S. Coast Guard jetty, and ends at Hovden's Portola Cannery became one of the most celebrated streets in the world. Hovden's is the only cannery still in operation of the eighteen that once worked around the clock. Many burned to the ground, perhaps accidentally, perhaps not. Others have been renovated and now house restaurants, theatres, and specialty shops, replacing the large dormitory for Chinese workers, and the small businesses which were once wedged in among the canneries.

On Cannery Row and Prescott, beneath a bronze bust of Steinbeck, the words with which he began *Cannery Row* are engraved:

>Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses.

Its most famous building, the Western Biological Laboratory, or more accurately the Pacific Biological Laboratories, Inc., still stands at 800 Cannery Row. Ed Ricketts' marine laboratory, in which Steinbeck became a partner in the late 1930s, is now a men's private club and is closed to the public. It was the site of many parties in Steinbeck's life and the setting for numerous events both festive and mundane in his work: *Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday, Travels with Charley, The Log to the Sea of Cortez,* and "The Snake." In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck describes the laboratory explicitly:

>It is a low building facing the street. The basement is the storeroom with shelves, shelves clear to the ceiling loaded with jars of preserved animals. And in the basement is a sink and instruments for embalming and for injecting. Then you go through the backyard to a covered shed on piles over the ocean and here are the tanks for the larger animals, the sharks and rays and octopi, each in their concrete tanks. There is a stairway up the front of the building and a door that opens into an office where there is a desk piled high with unopened mail, filing cabinets, and a safe with the door propped open . . . . Behind the office is a room where in aquaria are many living animals . . . .

To the left the office opens into a library . . . . There are chairs and benches in this little room and of course the bed. As many as forty people have been here at one time.
From the outside the laboratory looks exactly as it did when Steinbeck described it in *Cannery Row*. Inside, however, several partitions have been removed and a contemporary kitchen and bar installed. The basement remains, however, as it was in Ricketts' day and the concrete tanks near the water are still intact.

Lee Chong's Heavenly Flower Grocery (the Wing Chong Market) still stands on the "catty-corner right" of Doc's lab at 835 Cannery Row. Owned by Lee Chong in *Cannery Row* and by Joseph and Mary Rivas (Joseph and Mary is Rivas' first name) in *Sweet Thursday*, it was the major source of merchandise—whether crepe paper for decorating, flower bulbs for gifts, "file clackers" for celebrating, or Old Tennis Shoes either to drink or to wear—for Doc, Mac and the boys, and old China town. Now called The Old General Store, the building, still owned by the family of Lee Chong, was built in 1918 and has remained unaltered since before Steinbeck's day. The seventeen upstairs rooms, which were occupied by the family and paying guests, are used as display rooms for the antiques in which the owners now specialize. In memory of Steinbeck, the owners close the store and turn off the Christmas lights on December 20, the anniversary of Steinbeck's death, and burn four candles in the window.

Next door at 851 Cannery Row, Kalisa's International Restaurant occupies the site which was once La Ida's cafe, owned and operated by "Wide Ida" in *Sweet Thursday*.

Though the boilers in which the Malloys and Suzy lived and the numerous pipes Sam rented out to others are now gone from the vacant lot across the street from the laboratory, one now stands on a small lot at the end of the row. Since it does *stand*, however, rather than rest lengthwise on the ground, it would have given Doc ample headroom when he visited Suzy with love tokens. Cementing curtains to its circular walls would have posed a problem for the Malloys, however.

The Bear Flag Building, located in the 600 block of Cannery Row instead of on "the catty-corner left" of Doc's lab, was built in 1929. Dora Flood's bordello in *Cannery Row*, it was operated by her sister Flora—or Fauna, as she preferred to be called—in *Sweet Thursday*.

Where Drake Avenue crosses the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, farther down Cannery Row, Edward Ricketts was fatally injured when the Del Monte Express struck his car on May 11, 1948. Buildings obscured his view at the poorly marked crossing (the warning sign there now was erected after his death), perhaps the noise of his old car drowned out the sound of the approaching train. Steinbeck describes the accident and Ricketts' subsequent death in a profile, "About Ed Ricketts," which he wrote as a preface when *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* was reissued shortly after Ricketts' death.

A cypress at the foot of Irving Avenue is known as the Steinbeck tree and may have sheltered Steinbeck's paisanos.

Though other buildings and establishments on the Row have adopted the name of Steinbeck, his characters, or his works, the connection is not
authentic, for they have no known counterparts in his fiction. In 1957, when Steinbeck, while traveling with Charley “In Search of America,” revisited Cannery Row, he wrote: “I’ve always thought it could be the most beautiful place in the world. The coast line would be perfectly lovely once you got the fish scales out of it and put up some pleasant looking places. Man’s greed killed off the fish. Now they’ve got to ‘kill off’ some tourists to make up for it.” Steinbeck did, though reluctantly, approve the naming of the theatre, The Steinbeck, when he wrote on May 8, 1959: “Your suggestion that you name a theatre for me in Cannery Row is, of course, flattering. I can only warn you that my success in the theatre has not been all rosy . . . . I have thought that my name might suitably dignify a dog track, a bowling alley or a bordello. Theatre had not occurred to me.” Steinbeck did suggest Ricketts’ name, however, for the Ricketts’ Cannery Row Theatre.

Other sites in Monterey are connected with Steinbeck’s fiction. The San Carlos Cathedral on Church Street, where Father Serra established a mission in 1770, is the “Church of San Carlos”; there Pirate, accompanied by his friends, took the golden candlestick to fulfill the promise he made for his beloved dog (Tortilla Flat). The nearby Stevenson home (Houston near Pearl) may have been the “large white adobe house” described in “How Edith McGillcuddy Met R.L.S.” The old jail at the rear of Colton Hall, located at Pierce and King, supplied free room and board for Steinbeck’s paisanos. Colton Hall, Monterey’s City Hall, houses an historical museum on the second floor, and is open from 10 to 5 daily. The Presidio of Monterey, which was established in 1770 by Portola and is now a language school, figured prominently in the life of Cannery Row too, particularly in trade at the Bear Flag. For when a new regiment moved into the Presidio, the soldiers always shopped around “a good deal” before they settled down.

THE GREAT TIDE POOL

The waves were beginning to break over the barrier of the Great Tide Pool. The tide was coming in and little rivers from the sea had begun to flow over the rocks. The wind blew freshly in from the whistling buoy and the barking of sea lions came from around the point.

-Cannery Row

Ed Ricketts frequently collected marine specimens from the Great Tide Pool on the tip of the Peninsula near the whistling buoy off Ocean View Boulevard. Here is a part of Steinbeck’s description of “the Great Tide Pool,” a metaphor which became a motif in Steinbeck’s work. “It is advisable,” he says in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, “to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the stars and then back to the tide pool again.”

It is a fabulous place: when the tide is in, a wave-churned basin, creamy with foam, whipped by the combers that roll in from the whistling
buoy on the reef. But when the tide goes out the little water world becomes quiet and lovely. The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals . . . .

The smells of life and richness, of death and digestion, of decay and birth, burden the air. And salt spray plows in from the barrier where the ocean waits for its rising-tide strength to permit it back into the Great Tide Pool again. And on the reef the whistling buoy bellows like a sad and patient bull.

—Cannery Row

PACIFIC GROVE

Pacific Grove and Monterey sit side by side on a hill bordering the bay. The two towns touch shoulders but they are not alike. Whereas Monterey was founded a long time ago by foreigners, Indians and Spainards and such, and the town grew up higgledy-piggledy without plan or purpose, Pacific Grove sprang full blown from the iron heart of a psycho-ideo-legal religion. It was formed as a retreat in the 1880’s and came fully equipped with laws, ideals, and customs.

—Sweet Thursday

Steinbeck knew Pacific Grove from his childhood, for his father built a three-room cottage there at 147 Eleventh Street in 1903, only one year after the novelist was born. The family spent vacations at the cottage, hiking, swimming, fishing, and gathering wild flowers. Later John and his sister Mary often entertained their friends there during vacation periods from Stanford. In 1923 Steinbeck attended a class in General Zoology at the Hopkins Marine Station, located on China Point.

In the early 1930s Carol and John lived in the cottage shortly after their marriage. Steinbeck’s father gave them $25 a month and free rent while John wrote and Carol worked at a number of jobs to help support them. Steinbeck returned to the cottage once again in 1949 to rest, write, and recuperate, after his second marriage had ended in divorce.

Pacific Grove sites are mentioned frequently in Steinbeck’s fiction. In Cannery Row, he wrote: “From the rocks near the Hopkins Marine Station comes the barking of sea lions like the baying of hounds.” In Sweet Thursday Chin Kee’s squid yard was located on the point, where there was a Chinese settlement. Burton Wayne (To a God Unknown) goes to “the campmeeting town of Pacific Grove” to attend revival meetings and later decides to move there. “That town will grow,” he said. Rudolfo fell into the quarry above Pacific Grove (Tortilla Flat), Doc collected marine specimens at Asilomar Beach, Jody’s grandfather (The Red Pony) went to the Horseshoe Club at Pacific Grove to tell people “how the Indians drove off the horses,” and Holman’s Department Store employed “not a flag-pole sitter but a flag-pole
skater" (*Cannery Row*). The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival is described in detail in *Sweet Thursday*.

**POINT LOBOS**

Now a 1,250-acre National Landmark, the Point Lobos State Reserve served as setting for scenes in *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday*, and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. It is also reputed to be the setting for Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*; in *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck says: “*Treasure Island* certainly has the topography and the coastal plan of Pt. Lobos.”

The reserve, still almost primeval, contains stands of Monterey cypress and many species of plants, animals and birds. It is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and State Rangers conduct nature walks at two o’clock every Saturday and Sunday afternoon.

Doc Ricketts collected specimens in caves at Point Lobos in both *Sweet Thursday* and *Cannery Row*. The Western Flyer, whose trip Steinbeck and Ricketts chronicled in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, passed Point Lobos and Point Sur as it sailed down the coast on its trip to the Gulf of California.

Steinbeck’s family chose Point Lobos as the site for memorial services which they held for him on Christmas Eve, 1968, on a cliff overlooking Whalers’ Bay. It is a beautiful place that Steinbeck and his sister Mary, who had died three years earlier, especially loved.

**BIG SUR**

Steinbeck was a member of the first surveying crew to go down into the Big Sur Country before the road was built in the early 1920s. During a summer vacation from Stanford, he worked for a brief period one summer with a labor gang building the road south of Big Sur. His mother had taught in a little red schoolhouse in the Big Sur area before she married his father.

The short story “Flight” takes place in the Big Sur Country:

About fifteen miles below Monterey, on the wild coast, the Torres family had their farm, a few sloping acres above a cliff that dropped to the brown reefs and to the hissing white waters of the ocean. Behind the farm the stone mountains stood up against the sky.

After Steinbeck’s visit to California in 1960, when he with Charley set out to rediscover his native land, he told his old friend, Johnny Garcia, who owned a bar in Monterey, that Thomas Wolfe was right: you can’t go home again. A resident then of New York for over twenty years, Steinbeck had traveled throughout the world and now found himself a stranger in the
country he had made famous. He felt resentment toward strangers "swamping" what he thought of as his country with "noise and clutter and the inevitable rings of junk." In retrospect, he wrote later of that visit: "The place of my origin had changed, and having gone away I had not changed with it. In my memory it stood as it once did and its outward appearance confused and angered me."

Steinbeck had tried in the interim to expand his burning love of the land to include all of America. In an Afterword to America and Americans, "a book of opinions, unashamed and individual....inspired by curiosity, impatience, some anger, and a passionate love of America and the Americans," he wrote:

Something happened in America to create the Americans. Perhaps it was the grandeur of the land—the lordly mountains, the mystery of deserts, the ache of storms, cyclones—the enormous sweetness and violence of the country which, acting on restless, driven people from the outside world, made them taller than their ancestors, stronger than their fathers—and made them all Americans.

Maybe the challenge was in the land; or it might be that the people made the challenge.
On my latest trip to New York City, I attended a performance of John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* at New York’s Atkinson Theatre and was taken completely by it. Never did Steinbeck seem so vital to me. I have read and written about Steinbeck for almost a decade. But on that night at the Atkinson, his work lived for me as never before. And it wasn’t just me. Leaving the theatre, I walked out behind two college-age people who were talking about how much they enjoyed the performance. I intruded upon their privacy and asked them why they liked the play so much. “Steinbeck’s really NOW,” one of the fellows stated. And when I asked what “NOW” meant, the other said, “Steinbeck has feeling, compassion; he shows people as they really are and he cares about them.”

Funny, I thought. Compassion, feeling, caring about people. Steinbeck has been attacked for those very qualities, particularly late in his career when his works were regarded as period pieces, relics of a simpler, more sentimental age. Danny and the *paisanos*, Mack and the boys—they were the “virtues, the graces and the beauties” of a lost era. And Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Doc Burton, and Mayor Orden were naive spokesmen for an outmoded radical humanism.

When Steinbeck died in 1968, there was not a single full-length biography about him, and no one yet has made a serious effort to issue a standard edition of his writings. There were a number of critical analyses of Steinbeck’s work, but among these only one, Peter Lisca’s *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, is a comprehensive study which views Steinbeck as a major modern writer. And even Lisca largely ignores such important works of nonfiction as *The Forgotten Village*, *A Russian Journal*, *Sea of Cortez* and *Viva Zapata!* Indeed, the general critical view has been that Steinbeck wrote one fine book (*The Grapes of Wrath*), two or three decent ones, and a host of inconsequential novels, short stories, and works of nonfiction. And most critics have echoed the sentiment of Joseph Fontenrose who claims that Steinbeck’s novels ultimately fail because the novelist lacked a workable philosophy of life—this despite his narrative skill and the genuine poetry of
much of his prose. Moreover, most of those who do not find fault with his philosophy of life seem to agree with Howard Levant that Steinbeck had an abundance of "every gift and craft the novelist can have—except an intelligent and coherent sense of what structure is and can do."

In my own work, I have examined and reexamined Steinbeck's philosophy of life and have tried to show that the novelist developed a credible worldview which serves as a meaningful thematic base by which to interpret his fiction as well as his nonfiction. And I have analysed the structure of Steinbeck’s novels and suggested that in his good fiction and nonfiction there is an effective fusion of structure and materials. Indeed, the design of almost all of Steinbeck's novels, short stories, and works of nonfiction is a complex pattern of reality shaped and patterned by the mind of the writer into a coherent creative design. Steinbeck was an original stylist who expressed himself in language that is alive and vital because it is absolutely his own. In sum, I have tried to prove that Steinbeck was a major American writer who in his own time and with his own voice eloquently defined and gave meaning to the uniquely complicated nature of the human experience.

Still, though, I remained troubled. For all my work on Steinbeck, for all the other work done on Steinbeck during the past five years (and there has been an explosion in Steinbeck studies to the extent that critics now spend more time criticizing each other than analyzing Steinbeck's books), I felt that neither I nor most students of Steinbeck's work had tapped the essential truth of his value. Suddenly though, during that night at the Atkinson, things seemed to fall into place. For the first time, I think I understood the main reason why John Steinbeck is among the most significant writers of our age.

I must begin at the beginning. Virtually all of Steinbeck's most impressive works appeared during the 1930's. Of Mice and Men, In Dubious Battle, Tortilla Flat, and The Grapes of Wrath were published within a five year period. The Grapes of Wrath, long in the writing, appeared early in 1939, and with its publication, Steinbeck felt the need for some breathing space. And so that fall, the novelist and his closest friend, marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts, agreed to collaborate on a small handbook about the marine life of San Francisco Bay. Steinbeck had long been interested in marine science. As a student at the Hopkins Marine Station in the summer of 1923, he had come under the influence of the ideas of William Emerson Ritter, whose notion of the organismal conception of life (the idea that wholes are more than the sum of their parts and that wholes exercise determinative control over those parts) was currently in vogue among West Coast scientists and naturalists. Moreover, his interest in the seashore was heightened through his friendship with Ricketts, whom he met in Monterey in 1930.

In the fall of 1940, Steinbeck and Ricketts abandoned the San Francisco Bay project in favor of a more extensive venture to the ecologically rich but largely unknown regions of the Gulf of California. The result of that trip was a volume entitled Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research (1941), which is one of the most important if least understood works in
Steinbeck's entire canon. It is a comprehensive record of the animals collected, preceded by a philosophic-scientific narrative which was published separately in 1951 as The Log from the Sea of Cortez. The first half is an important scientific work—an indispensible aid to students wishing to study the marine invertebrates of the Gulf of California. The narrative is a lucid and poetic account of the thoughts of two men—a scientist and a writer—who fuse art and ethics, science and philosophy into a coherent structure of meaning. Moreover, the Log, if read properly, is valuable for the light it sheds on the thematic design of Steinbeck’s greatest fiction. Indeed, once one determines which sections of the Log were written by Steinbeck and which by Ricketts, one can study Steinbeck’s fiction in the light of ideas and attitudes expressed in Sea of Cortez.

In those sections of the Log written by Steinbeck, one cannot help but be struck by the novelist's statements about man and the human condition which on the surface seem to contradict sentiments expressed in much of his best fiction. Throughout his career (and particularly in The Grapes of Wrath) Steinbeck celebrated “man’s proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit”—his ability to grow beyond his work, to walk up the stairs of his concepts, to emerge ahead of his accomplishments. Indeed, The Grapes of Wrath contains a ringing affirmation of Steinbeck’s belief in human potential—in man’s ability to work and suffer and die for a concept, for a belief. But in the Log, Steinbeck seems less certain of man’s potential for greatness—less sure of man’s ability even to formulate concepts, let alone suffer and die for them. He notes a strange duality in the human which makes for what he calls “an ethical paradox,” in that while we have certain definitions of good and bad—and while we admire the good and dislike the bad—the so-called good qualities are the “concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are the cornerstones of success.” And more: in an attack on modern man’s self-interested materialism, Steinbeck insists that man is the only animal whose interests and whose drives are outside of himself. Man, says Steinbeck, projects himself into his possessions so that “his subjectivity is a mirror of houses and cars and grain elevators.” And here, says Steinbeck, is evidence of a mutation which can end only in extinction.

At the same time, Steinbeck notes that while “man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression toward extinction,” he does possess qualities which keep him reaching, stumbling forward. And this, insists the novelist, is the crux of the human dilemma. “Man,” he states, “might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness. Perhaps, as has been suggested, his species is not set, has not jelled, but is still in a state of becoming, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness.” “The tragic miracle of consciousness”—for Steinbeck it is man’s greatest burden and his greatest glory. And the manner in which Steinbeck portrays this burden and this glory is the ultimate source of the strength of
his fiction. It accounts for the feeling in his work, for the sentiment and the compassion, as well as its extreme, its sentimentality. And it was Steinbeck’s central concern as a novelist, from his portrayal of Henry Morgan’s quest for fame and power in his first novel (Cup of Gold) to his concluding remark in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in which he paraphrased John the Apostle, noting that “In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man, and the Word is with Man.”

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, American novelists were preoccupied with what they perceived as the discrepancy between man’s dreams, man’s desires, and the reality of an increasingly urban-industrial society. And by in large they concluded that man’s inadequacies have been imposed upon him by false traditions and by false institutions. Shocked into an acceptance of human imperfection, such writers as Crane, Norris, Dreiser, and more recently Hemingway and Faulkner, struggled to the optimistic outlook that human weakness (in a modern society that alienates and disinherit) can be transcended if men will not surrender to despair but will do battle against the impersonal forces in the universe and treat their fellows with love and compassion. Along the way, they concluded that innocence has no place in the world of reality, and that while the allegory of innocence lost must be played out, man to survive must grow to a higher level of consciousness so as to be able to face the universe with stoic struggle, knowing that his only reward may be personal dignity.

This belief in man’s ability to transcend weakness and to do battle against the impersonal forces in the universe was central to Steinbeck. Nevertheless, in much of his best work, Steinbeck was less concerned with the means by which man might resist the forces of oppression than with the inherent fallibility of the individual. He was often more preoccupied with the destructive power of man’s dreams, his fantasies, and his illusions than with the methods by which man might transcend his past and grow to higher realms of consciousness. On occasion, Steinbeck writes out of what Marx calls “the pastoral design.” Some of his best works portray simple, inherently decent men and women who wish only to live in peace and harmony in a green pasture, but whose dreams are threatened and ultimately destroyed by their own fallibility as mortals as well as by the inevitable incursion of history.

In the best tradition of American literature, Steinbeck views modern life as a dialectic involving the conflicts and contradictions between contrasting ways of life—between innocence and experience, between primitivism and progress, between self-interest and a commitment to the entire human community. With respect to the belief that personal well-being is synonymous with the free, uninhibited life apart from the complexities of what we call “civilized” society, Steinbeck understands, likes, and effectively portrays an infantile Junius Maltby, a Mack (in Cannery Row), and a Lennie Small just as Hawthorne gives us a Donatello, Melville a Redburn, or Twain a young Huck Finn. But whereas Hawthorne, Melville and Twain show how—through a
series of tensions in their works—innocence gives way to a growth of character that clarifies and enriches experience so that their protagonists become fully developed, multidimensional characters who are able to make the adjustments and adaptations to the way things are, many of Steinbeck's innocents are either completely shrouded in self-deceptions and illusions or are mental cretins who are alienated from the world of possibility.

When Steinbeck wrote *To a God Unknown*, that strange, mystical novel which swings back and forth between what Robert DeMott calls the sacred and the profane, the conscious and the unconscious, he told his agents that the book probably would not sell because his protagonist was not a flesh and blood hero. "Boileau insisted that only gods, kings and heroes are worth writing about," Steinbeck said. "I firmly believe that." But less than a decade later, after he had written the fiction on which his reputation would eventually rest, he affirmed that "present-day kings aren't very inspiring, the gods are on a vacation and about the only heroes left are the scientists and the poor." And it is in Steinbeck's examination of the lives and fortunes of the poor that he explores fully the tragic miracle of consciousness.

Perhaps Steinbeck's most effective rendering of this theme occurs in *Of Mice and Men* (1936), that memorable parable about man's voluntary acceptance of responsibility for his fellow man. In this small volume which was a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection and made Steinbeck a national figure, Steinbeck's heroes are two itinerant ranch workers who demonstrate the frailty of human innocence as they attempt to translate an imperfect dream into reality.

*Of Mice and Men* is the story of George Milton and Lennie Small who wander onto a Salinas Valley ranch where they have contracted to harvest barley. For years they have traveled together and have harbored a dream of "a little house and a couple of acres" with rabbits where they will "live off the fatta the lan'". At one point in Steinbeck's narrative, the dream almost seems plausible when Candy, the one-armed bunkhouse swamper, offers George money to buy the ranch. But the dream is shattered when Lennie, whose brute strength is not under the control of an adult mind, accidentally kills the flirtatious wife of the boss's son. And the story ends when George mercifully kills Lennie to save him from persecution from an angry mob.

One of Steinbeck's most impressive works of fiction, *Of Mice and Men* is a sophisticated and artful rendering of the elemental conflict between two worlds: between the idealized agrarian landscape where George and Lennie might enjoy peace, leisure, and economic sufficiency, and the real world, with its pain, its anguish, and its tensions. It is the story of two men who need each other and who want to live in an Arcadian garden where there is a delicate partnership between man and the natural environment.

But while Steinbeck portrays the beauty of the garden, and even allows his characters the momentary belief that it exists, he does provide the necessary check against our fantasies by showing that George's and Lennie's dream cannot be realized, that the harsh facts of modern life undermine the illusion of harmony in an idyllic pasture.
Actually, what is most painful about *Of Mice and Men* is that Steinbeck provides no reconciliation to his pastoral—just a mood of overwhelming sadness. George survives, the secret of his merciful deed hidden from disclosure. But his vision of an idealized human community has been destroyed because neither he nor Lennie possesses the ability to bring that vision to life. Alone in a world they do not understand, Lennie is destroyed and George is reduced to a life of personal survival. Steinbeck leaves George alone, beaten and powerless. In *Of Mice and Men*, as in nearly all his fiction, Steinbeck assuredly asserts the inherent superiority of the simple human virtues to the accumulation of wealth and power, of life-asserting to life-denying. But his tribute to the Arcadian garden is decidedly ironic.

Perhaps, though, the most ironic of Steinbeck's works is *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), which the novelist based on stories about the people living in a lovely isolated valley community between Monterey and Salinas called the Corral de Tierra. Virtually all of the characters in the loosely related collection of stories which comprise this volume are simple people who have sought the quiet life in the Pastures of Heaven as a refuge from a complex urban society which limited their freedom. But because they are absorbed in personal illusions or self-deceptions which render them unable to adapt to the simple life-patterns of the valley, they fail to achieve the conditions necessary for a full and meaningful life. They are blighted by their human fallibility; they are dreamers whose fantasies are undermined by the hard facts of reality. Indeed, virtually all of the characters in *The Pastures of Heaven* are frail people living on the edge of personal chaos; their lives hang on slender threads to a reality which they do not understand and with which they cannot cope.

There is Shark Wicks, a poor farmer whose life is ruined when his neighbors find out that he is not a wealthy man and an expert in financial matters. There is Helen Van Deventer, who comes to the valley to escape a series of personal tragedies, but who rejects the chance for a personal rebirth when she takes her mad daughter's life. There is Junius Maltby and his son Robbie who moved to the Pastures in flight from the tedium of life in San Francisco where Junius worked as an accountant. Once at home in the valley, Junius and Robbie spend gloriously happy and carefree days sitting beside a stream near their house. Junius's life, Steinbeck notes, became “as unreal, as romantic, and as unimportant as his thinking. He was content to sit in the sun and to dangle his feet in the stream.” In the end, though, Steinbeck portrays Junius as a weak man. For when a group of valley residents give Robbie a gift package of clothes, Junius cannot accept the realization of his own poverty, and he leaves the valley and returns to San Francisco.

There are others: the carefree and good-natured Lopez sisters who give themselves as a reward to customers who buy their enchiladas, but who are driven from the valley to lives of prostitution in San Francisco; the halfwit Tularecito who wants only to dig for his ancestral earth-people who live deep below the ground but who is misunderstood as dangerous and committed to
The state mental facility; Molly Morgan, the valley school teacher, who cannot escape the haunting memory of her father who once deserted her; and Pat Humbert who engages in a futile effort to remodel his old house on the mistaken assumption that the daughter of a valley neighbor will marry him once his work on the house is finished.

Throughout *The Pastures of Heaven*, Steinbeck shows compassion—even affection—for the plight of ordinary people who strive for but cannot achieve happiness. Never does he condemn their innocence, their simplicity, from the standpoint of quaint middle-class values. But he does depict their self-destructive tendencies toward illusion and self-deception; he portrays human fallibility in which, as he noted in the *Log*, man is “limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness.” Indeed, *The Pastures of Heaven* is an ironic novel because in it Steinbeck shows that those pastures—however lovely, however redemptive—cannot be attained by man on this earth.

This same theme—the frailty of the individual—characterizes many of the stories in *The Long Valley* (1938), a volume which contains some of Steinbeck’s best writing. In “The Chrysanthemums,” Steinbeck presents in Elisa Allen a woman with a deep-seated affinity for nature and the natural life, but with a host of sexual and emotional frustrations which are the result of an inadequate relationship with her insensitive husband. At the end of the story, Elisa realizes that her love for her flowers is founded on her own personal neurosis and is the result of her transference of sexual energy from the proper source, and the story ends with Elisa defeated, “crying weakly—like an old woman.” 6 In “The Harness,” which in theme reminds one of the story of Pat Humbert in *The Pastures of Heaven*, Peter Randall’s quest for personal freedom is meaningless because he cannot escape the realization that his dead wife still has him in harness. “‘She didn’t die dead,’ he said thickly, ‘She won’t let me do things.’” (116) And in “The White Quail,” Steinbeck creates in Mary Teller a character so completely engulfed in private fantasies that she is unable to respond in any meaningful way to the natural environment in which she lives. Indeed, in all three stories, Steinbeck clearly demonstrates the “tragic miracle of consciousness,” for while he celebrates the virtues of the natural, rural life which can serve as a source of meaning and understanding to the free, uncluttered mind, he simultaneously shows how when nature is perceived through the eyes of neurotic, illusion-bound individuals, it becomes a mere extension of those persons’ neuroses. Elisa Allen, Peter Randall, and Mary Teller are no more able to live in “the pastures of heaven” than are the Lopez sisters, Shark Wicks, and Molly Morgan.

Though *Of Mice and Men*, *The Pastures of Heaven*, and *The Long Valley* are the three Steinbeck volumes in which the novelist depicts the tragic miracle of human consciousness in the midst of a benevolent, redemptive nature—the books in which simple, decent people who wish only to live in rural peace and harmony are destroyed or driven from the garden because of their own deficiencies—many other Steinbeck works portray individuals who
are unable to attain happiness because of their inability to deal with a world they neither like nor understand.

In *Tortilla Flat* (1935), Steinbeck’s tragic-comic masterpiece about the exploits and escapades of Danny and his *paisano* band, Steinbeck demonstrates the feeble talisman of escape; he shows that however lovable Danny and his friends may be, there is nothing in their “philosophic-moral system” that will enable them to cope with the complexities of modern life. This same theme underlies the gentle humor and feeling of good will in *Cannery Row* (1945), Steinbeck’s post-war novel about the denizens of the waterfront in old Monterey. For though Steinbeck enjoys, indeed loves, Mack and the boys, Doc, Lee Chong, and Dora Flood, he simultaneously shows that they live on an island, surrounded on all sides by a materialistic modern world which will eventually destroy their indolent if pleasant life-styles.

In both volumes—indeed throughout his career—Steinbeck displayed a deep sensitivity, a gentle compassion toward those simple souls who take what they want from life without becoming involved in the petty pursuits which place inhibitions on natural behavior. Indeed, in a very real way, he prefers his vagabonds and his drifters to the neurosis-driven characters in *The Pastures of Heaven* and *The Long Valley* who are incapable of the kind of “understanding-acceptance” approach to life which, in the *Log*, Steinbeck stated is extremely desirable. Mack and the boys and Danny and his friends serve as foils by which Steinbeck can assess the foibles and eccentricities of a world in which, as Doc (the leading character in *Cannery Row*) notes, “the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success.” Still, the novelist shows that these characters are no more successful in dealing with the realities of modern life than are his Pat Humberts and his Elisa Allens.

The fact remains, however, that Steinbeck was a novelist of affirmation; to the end of his life, he refused to surrender to what he claimed was the popular disease of acute literary pessimism. “I don’t have to be ‘in’ or ‘op’,” Steinbeck said in 1965. “And I don’t have to view our times with professional despair.” And while in many of his works Steinbeck depicts characters unable to master the conditions necessary for a full and meaningful life, on occasion he does portray characters who can transcend their inner conflicts and their outer circumstances and so achieve a paradise of the mind and heart.

For Steinbeck, the key to man’s ability to work beyond his personal limitations and through the forces of time and history is a recognition of the wholeness of life and an understanding of the subtle interrelationships which characterize all experience. This he got largely from his interest in marine science, from his training at the Hopkins Marine Station, and from his friendship with Ed Ricketts. Indeed, in his personal orientation to life as well as in his writing, Steinbeck was an ecologist long before the study of
relationships became a national pastime. Gradually, and with Ricketts' help, he developed a fascinating and believable metaphysic in which he integrated those aspects of experience which dualism usually separates: right and wrong, good and evil, personal perception and objective reality. Certainly, he faced squarely the problem of man's frailty and the incompatibility between the pastoral ideal and an increasingly dangerous urban-industrial society, but he also believed in and created characters who do live a deeper reality and who do make sense of the nonsense about them. His world view, as it developed over more than two decades, is not a naive and implausible romantic anarchism, but a philosophically sound holistic system in which certain, strong-willed individuals can work beyond their personal limitation to unite thought and feeling, to fuse intellect and energy and work for worthwhile, purposive goals.

It is again in the Log that one finds Steinbeck's most direct rendering of the inherent unity in the seeming diversity of human experience. For Steinbeck views the tide pool life of the Gulf of California as a micro-field of a complex, interrelated world. He notes how the animals in the tide pools proliferate and extend in all directions against physical limitations and against the restricting effect of competing animals. At the same time, he sees an overall pattern in which everything is related to everything else and he ponders the biological, sociological, and general patterns which underlie this unity, which underscore the delicate equilibrium which exists among all living things.

And in his fiction, Steinbeck shows that the man or woman who recognizes this fundamental unity—who sees that man does not exist in a vacuum and that the survival of one man is intricately connected to the survival of the species itself—can grow beyond his own personal needs. In the Log, Steinbeck notes that the world's greatest leaders, its greatest thinkers—"a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein"—came to their greatness through a "profound feeling" that "man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable." (217) And in his fiction, a Jim Casy, a Tom Joad, a Joe Saul, and an Emiliano Zapata perceive the whole of experience and act responsibly on the basis of their understandings.

In The Grapes of Wrath, it is Preacher Casy's recognition of the fundamental unity of life that leads him to bring together "the folks that don' know which way to turn." It is his recognition that "all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" that occasions his dedication to "go where the folks is goin'," and to lead his fellow migrants in the just and necessary struggle for human dignity and a decent standard of living. And it is Tom Joad's recognition of the interrelatedness of all experience—of the fact that "a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one" that leads him to crack the walls of his own self-interest and to proclaim that "I'll be ever'where—wherever you look." Indeed, it is because Casy and Tom, as well as Ma and several other members of the Joad family, can break through their
own frailty and unite intellect and energy that Steinbeck insists that the migrants will not only survive but prevail. Indeed, the migrants act on the basis of their developing holistic world view to form concepts of social action that will remedy their desperate plight. And says Steinbeck, this ability to suffer and even die for concepts “is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.”

Similarly, in his screenplay for *Viva Zapata!* which Elia Kazan made into one of the best movies of 1952, Steinbeck presents in the character of Emiliano Zapata a man who moves beyond a desire for personal power to the realization that power can never be in the province of one man but belongs to all the people. He rejects the position of authority into which he is cast after his successful revolt against the tyrannical rule of Porfirio Diaz to return to his native hills of Morelos to work along side his own people. He becomes, in fact, the creative rebel who breaks through his own self-interest to work for the greater good. In his account of Zapata’s unending struggle for land reform and his rejection of the power that corrupts, Steinbeck affirms his belief in man’s enduring capacity for greatness of mind and deed.

In *Burning Bright* (1950), Steinbeck’s flawed treatment of the theme of sterility which is really a vehicle for a parable about man’s need to recognize his kinship with the entire human community, Steinbeck presents in Joe Saul a man who “went away into an insanity” of self-interest and then returned to realize that “it is the race, the species that must go staggering on,” that despite all our horrors and our faults, somewhere in us there is a shining.” (130) Similarly, in *The Pearl* (1945), Steinbeck created what he once called “a black and white story like a parable” to present an account of one man’s struggle toward a recognition of the vanity of self-interest. At the end of the story, Kino throws the great pearl which he thought would bring him wealth and happiness, but which has only brought him tragedy and disappointment, back into the Sea of Cortez. He realizes the corrupting nature of wealth, and he chooses the benign natural life as the only practical alternative. Ironically, however, Steinbeck suggests that Kino is not able to choose what his friend Ed Ricketts once called “the region of inward adjustments” until he has attempted to succeed in “the region of outward possessions.” Speaking directly to the issue of the tragic miracle of human consciousness in *The Pearl*, Steinbeck writes that “humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more.” At the same time, though, he insists paradoxically this desire “is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have.” (25)

And Joad, Casy, Zapata, Saul, and Kino are not the only Steinbeck characters who break through to an understanding of a larger reality and work to forge the design of their microcosmic destiny. In *East of Eden* (1952), Steinbeck’s epic tale of three generations, Adam Trask moves beyond his personal limitations to a recognition of man’s ability to choose good over evil. Indeed, *East of Eden* is above all Steinbeck’s affirmation of man’s free
will. For in this important volume, he admits that while “most men are destroyed, there are others who like pillars of fire guide frightened men through the darkness.” 12 Similarly, in The Winter of Our Discontent (1961), Steinbeck’s last novel which is in many ways a “record of the country’s malaise, of the country’s unfulfilled dreams and unmet obligations,” 13 Steinbeck presents in Ethan Allen Hawley a character who, reduced to the contemplation of suicide in a corrupt world, emerges from his personal wasteland by resolving to preserve the family talisman which he will return to his daughter so that “her light will not go out.” And in that famous short story, “Flight,” published in The Long Valley, Steinbeck presents in Pepe Torres an ordinary man who breaks through to a recognition of his own dignity and worth during the course of his painful flight through the forests and desert mountains of the Big Sur.

All of these characters—and others, like Katherine Wicks in The Pastures of Heaven, Doctor Winter and Mayor Orden in The Moon is Down—are ordinary, simple people. All have personal weaknesses and suffer frustrations. And all, at least for a time, fulfill Steinbeck’s thesis that humans are rarely satisfied. But that same dissatisfaction is the source of their greatness. For it leads them to break through to a vision of a reality larger than themselves and on the basis of that understanding to create for themselves and (in some cases) for those around them a world of meaning and worth.

Ironically, pain and suffering are uniform concomitants of this breaking through to understanding. All must go, as Steinbeck notes of Kino in The Pearl, “through pain” in order to “come out on the other side.” (80) Some—like Casy, Orden, Winter, and Zapata—are killed because of their visions. Almost always, the search for paradise in Steinbeck’s novels is coupled with the opposite theme of paradise lost. Nevertheless, a number of Steinbeck’s characters do break through to meaning, they do grow beyond the tragic miracle of consciousness, they do fulfill the novelist’s enduring belief in “man’s capacity for greatness of heart and spirit.”

Throughout his career, from his depiction of Henry Morgan in Cup of Gold to Ethan Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent, Steinbeck believed in people; and he treated their fumbling and only occasionally successful efforts to make sense out of nonsense with feeling, with sympathy, and with compassion. And perhaps this is why we read him in an age which has turned away from a conception of fiction that deals with people—away from novels and short stories which reveal above all the unfoldment of human character. As Peter Copek has so accurately noted, contemporary novelists tell us that their works do not reflect the changing shape of the human community, that the subject of their novels is the novel itself, and that the novel is really no more than a collection of black marks on white papers in which the word, as Anthony Burgess suggests, is simply “what comes between two spaces.” 14 Perhaps, then, in a world of books where a writer’s greatest task is to undercut the realism, to suspend the reader’s belief in the reality of what is presented, some readers (and certainly those two young people whom I
mentioned at the beginning of this essay) feel distanced, detached, cut-off. And perhaps that is why they and so many other readers now enjoy Steinbeck who, as he once said himself, always tried to “make the reader participate in the actuality” and wrote books “not the way books are written,” but “the way lives are lived.”

Notes

1 John Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (New York: Viking Compass, 1962), p. 96. All further citations from the Log refer to this edition and are identified by page number in the text.


6 John Steinbeck, *The Long Valley* (New York: Viking Compass, 1956), p. 116. All further citations from stories in *The Long Valley* refer to this edition and are identified by page number in the text.


10 John Steinbeck, *Burning Bright* (New York: Bantam, 1962), p. 129. All further citations from *Burning Bright* refer to this edition and are identified by page number in the text.

11 John Steinbeck, *The Pearl* (New York: Viking Compass, 1965), p. 25. All further citations from *The Pearl* refer to this edition and are identified by page number in the text.


15 Steinbeck made this remark in a letter to his editor, Pascal Covici. It is published in the Viking Critical *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 858.
The Conclusion of
The Grapes of Wrath:
Steinbeck's Conception
and Execution

Martha Heasley Cox

According to local legend, John Steinbeck completed The Grapes of Wrath about three o'clock on the morning of October 23, 1938, awakened his wife and house guests who had gathered in his Los Gatos, California, home for the occasion, and read them the final pages. That celebrated ending has probably aroused more comment and controversy than the conclusion of any other contemporary novel.

Though Howard Levant, in the most recent book-length study of Steinbeck's novels, exaggerates the negative reaction when he says that the final scene "has been regarded universally as the nadir of bad Steinbeck,"¹ the conclusion has been the subject of at least five separate articles,² none condemnatory, and has been discussed in almost every review and analysis of the novel. John M. Ditsky, in the last published article devoted exclusively to the ending, asserts that the crucial problem of the value and meaning of the final scene remains unsettled and is as deserving of attention as ever.³ For Levant, however, the conclusion is "a disaster from the outset, not simply because it is sentimental; its execution, through the leading assumption, is incredible." He sees no preparation and no literary justification for Rose of Sharon's transformation into Ma's alter-ego.⁴ Both Peter Lisca and Warren French, major Steinbeck critics, have defended the ending. Lisca concludes that the entire final chapter "compactly re-enacts the whole drama of the Joads' journey in one uninterrupted continuity of suspense," in which Steinbeck brings his novel to a close "without doing violence to credulity, structure, or theme."⁵ French believes that the final tableau, instead of halting an unfinished story as some critics have charged, shows that the education of the Joads is completed. They have "triumphed over familial prejudices" and "saved themselves from spiritual bigotry."⁶

No critic shows any indication, however, of having read Steinbeck's unpublished journal, the "Diary of a Book," which he kept as he wrote The Grapes of Wrath.⁷ The journal, in Steinbeck's words, is "a record of working days and the amount done on each and the success (as far as I can know it) of
the day.” In the diary, Steinbeck comments frequently on the symbolic ending and its significance.

Those remarks reveal that the ending was not merely hastily contrived melodrama replete with false symbolism as its detractors have charged repeatedly. Instead, Steinbeck carefully planned and prepared for the conclusion from the time he wrote the initial chapters of the novel. It helped to determine and control character development, symbolic meaning, and thematic structure. It was an integral part, if not the most important segment, of Steinbeck’s design. Steinbeck’s comments, furthermore, provide authorial insight into Rose of Sharon’s act and dispel some of the ambiguity and disagreement which has resulted from varying critical interpretations. Since Steinbeck’s journal was unknown to his critics, it, together with their commentary, provides an opportunity both to assess critical acumen in regard to an author’s conception and execution of his work and to judge an author’s achievement in the light of his intention. A brief examination of the ending and an overview of the critical reaction it elicited may make Steinbeck’s remarks about his conclusion more meaningful.

The final setting for the novel is a rain-blackened barn where the Joad family—or the half that has endured—seeks refuge from the flood. Destitute, hungry, wet, and ill, they have reached the nadir of their devastating experiences: the eviction from their Oklahoma home; the trauma of the trip west with the deaths enroute of Granna and Granpa; the desertions of the sons, Noah and Al, and the son-in-law, Connie; the martyrdom of Jim Casy; the flight of Tom, who murdered to avenge Casy’s death and now continues his mission; and the loss of Rose of Sharon’s still-born child. Ma’s early and worst fears are now a reality. The family unit has disintegrated and only Rose of Sharon, Ruthie, Winfield, Uncle John, Pa and Ma remain. Their meager possessions are under water in the box-car. They have no means of transportation, for the truck, which none of them can drive anyway, is now inundated. It matters little, for they have nowhere to go.

When they have reached the barn, they find it already occupied by other refugees, a starving man and his son. Ma asks them for a blanket for Rose of Sharon and folds the dirty comforter the boy supplies around her exhausted daughter (Steinbeck mentions the comforter five times in the last two pages). In turn, the frightened boy pleads for help, explaining that his father, who had not eaten in six days, could not retain the bread he stole for him the previous night: “Got to have soup or milk . . . . He’s starvin’ to death, I tell you.” The “two women looked deep into each other”; then Ma at Rose of Sharon’s request takes the others into the adjoining tool shed. The girl draws the comforter around her and offers her breast to the starving man. When he slowly shakes his head, she urges, “You got to.” Supporting his head with her hand, she looks across the barn and smiles “mysteriously.” In their ultimate need, Rose of Sharon and the starving man exchange what each has to share. Taking comfort from the stranger, she gives him life.

This final scene was both censured and commended by early reviewers.
Malcolm Cowley considered it “theatrical and inconclusive” and a *Time* reviewer thought it the “most melodramatic” ending in the Steinbeck canon. Clifton Fadiman, who called *The Grapes of Wrath* “the American novel of the season, probably the year, possibly the decade,” denounced the ending, however, as “the tawdriest kind of fake symbolism” adding that “just occasionally Steinbeck’s dramatic imagination overlaps itself and you get a piece of pure, or impure, theatre like these last pages.” Other early reviewers of the novel praised the ending, though, as have most later critics. Charles Poore wrote in his review for *The New York Times*: “The most memorable scene is the last one, where all the ordeals of the journey, from a blighted farm to blighting prospects, are summed up in one final, lucid and completely inexorable view of chaos. In a more sentimental mood, Mr. Steinbeck might have provided soft music and a rosy ending. And if he’d done that he would have invalidated the main truth of his story. Everything in the book leads up to it.”

Steinbeck scholars, who tend to agree with Poore’s early assessment, offer multiple and far-reaching interpretations for this concluding episode. Biblical parallels predominate. Several critics have suggested that Rose of Sharon’s milk symbolizes the Eucharist and thus resurrection (“I am the body and the blood.”); one compares it to the manna given to the Hebrews in the wilderness. Such a reading can be supported by other evidence in the text. Rose of Sharon’s name, which her mother loved to repeat and pronounced “Rosasharn” is from *The Song of Songs* (“I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley”). A further parallel lies in the title’s imagery which informs the entire novel. The figurative grapes, which come from Revelation by way of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” also occur in King Solomon’s song to the Shulamite “Let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy breath like apples; and thy mouth like the best wine.” Steinbeck knew the Canticles and had long been fascinated by them, particularly “the delightful chapter headings which go to prove that the Shulamite is in reality Christ’s Church.” He certainly chose Rose of Sharon’s name, with all its connotations, in the context of this Biblical knowledge. With her act the grapes fermented into wrath are transmuted into mercy.

Several critics have pointed out additional biblical, mythical, and fictional counterparts for the girl. She has been called “another Eve, another Hester Prynne—if you will, another Zenobia or Pocahontas.” Others find thematic significance in Rose of Sharon’s act, saying that it “symbolically transmutes her maternal love to a love of all people”; that it symbolizes “the main theme of the novel: the prime function of life is to nourish life,” that it merges the themes of Christ and the fertility goddess, that it brings together the novel’s two counter themes, education and conversion, in a symbolic paradox: “Out of her own need she gives life; out of the profoundest depth of despair comes the greatest assertion of faith.”

To critics who charge that Steinbeck failed to complete the story or to supply answers to questions he posed, others reply: “Steinbeck finds his
answer in love rather than in revolution”; 20 “It is fitting that the novel ends with the Joad's wiser and more experienced, but still with no sense of belonging, no permanence in the country, no home of their own”; 21 “Steinbeck ends his book on a quiet note: that life can go on, and that people can and must succor one another. If this is an ‘evasion’ of some of the social, political, and ideological directions in the novel, then I suggest that it is an honest, honorable, and even prophetic one.” 22

For some scholars, like Richard Astro, The Grapes of Wrath ends in triumph. 23 George de Schweinitz concurs, noting that the last scene supplies all of the inexplicable, the mystery and the miraculous “that the reader needs in order to feel a heart-stopping resurgence of faith in himself and his fellow man.” 24 He finds Steinbeck’s use of the word “mysteriously” to describe Rose of Sharon’s smile felicitous as it evokes religious art and iconography. But Agnes McNeill Donohue disagrees: “The ritual takes place in a barn—a stable—and although the Earth Mother or Divine Maternity is certainly suggested, the child born to Rose of Sharon is no redeemer, but a stillborn messenger of death. In the fallen Eden of John Steinbeck, no redeemer comes.” 25

Joseph Fontenrose also sees the final scene as ritual, but interprets its symbolic meaning differently: The child that has been born is not that of Rose of Sharon and the selfish Connie Rivers. Instead it is the new collective organism as her final act symbolizes: “It is a ritual act: she who cannot be mother of a family adopts the newly born collective person as represented by one of ‘the people [who] sat huddled together’ in the barns when winter storms came. It is the family unity and strength imparted to the larger unit. In primitive adoption rituals the adopting mother offers her breast to the adopted child.” 26 Wright notes, too, that giving the breast was a ritual of adoption, and concludes: “Up to 1640, few decorous readers would have been startled by Rose of Sharon’s method of preserving a life. And in many parts of the world today, John Steinbeck would be commended for choosing, as his dénouement, a potent example of ‘morall virtue.’ ” 27

Steinbeck should not have been surprised at the clamor his conclusion aroused for he had been forewarned by Pat Covici, his long time editor, who anticipated much of the reaction. On January 9, 1939, when Covici finished reading the manuscript, he wrote Steinbeck that he considered the ending a possible weakness or fault: “Your idea is to end the book on a great symbolic note, that life must go on and will go on with a greater love and sympathy and understanding for our fellow men. The episode you use in the end is extremely poignant. Nobody could fail to be moved by the incident of Rose of Sharon giving her breast to the starving man yet, taken as the finale of such a book with all its vastness and surge, it struck us on reflection as being all too abrupt . . . . As the end of the final episode it is perfect; as the end of the whole book not quite.” Covici thought that the incident needed “leading up to” and “leading away from,” that the meeting with the starving man should not be so much an accident or chance encounter. 28 Steinbeck replied
immediately: “I’m sorry but I cannot change that ending. It is casual—there is no fruity climax, it is not more important than any other part of the book—if there is a symbol, it is a survival symbol not a love symbol, it must be an accident, it must be a stranger, and it must be quick. . . . The giving of the breast has no more sentiment than the giving of a piece of bread. I’m sorry if that doesn’t get over. It will maybe. I’ve been on this design and balance for a long time and I think I know how I want it. . . . The incident of the earth mother feeding by the breast is older than literature.” He concludes: “I know that books lead to a strong deep climax. This one doesn’t except by implication, and the reader must bring the implication to it. . . . There are five layers in this book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won’t find more than he has in himself.”

Had Covici read Steinbeck’s “Diary of a Book,” he would have known how integral the ending was to Steinbeck’s plan and how important to his design. He was not to see the journal, however, until Christmas of 1950, when, more than twelve years after it had been written, Steinbeck sent the diary “an account of a long time ago,” to Covici. In an accompanying letter, Steinbeck made two requests: the journal was not to be printed during his lifetime and it should be made available to his sons, “who were born so comparatively late in my lifetime that it is reasonable to suppose that I will not be around during a large part of theirs” if they should ever want to see it. Steinbeck wrote that his sons might sometime “want to look behind the myth and hearsay and flattery and slander a disappeared man becomes, and to know to some extent what manner of man their father was. And I cannot think of any better way than in this book which was not written for anyone to see.”

Steinbeck started the diary on the same day he began writing, The Grapes of Wrath, Wednesday, the first day of June, 1938. By the end of June, he had completed only Book I, “the background of this book,” yet the ending was firmly in his mind: “Yesterday the work was short and I went over the whole of the book in my head—fixed on the last scene, huge and symbolic toward which the whole story moves. And that was a grand thing, for it was a reunderstanding of the dignity of the effort and the mightyness [sic] of the theme. I felt very small and inadequate and incapable but I grew again to love the story which is so much greater than I am. To love and admire the people who are so much stronger and purer and braver than I am.”

On July 6, Steinbeck wrote in his diary, “Make the people live. Make them live. But my people must be more than people. They must be an over-essence of people.” Two days later, on the completion of the chapter concerned with the first day and night of the trip, including the initial communication with other migrants, he expressed concern about his characters, particularly Rose of Sharon: “I wonder how this book will be. I wonder. Yesterday it seemed to me these people were coming to life. I hope so. These people must be extremely alive the whole time. I was worried about Rose of Sharon. She has to emerge if only as a silly pregnant girl now. She has to be a person.”
Already aware, of course, of the symbolic role Rose of Sharon is to fill in the final scene, Steinbeck also recognized her importance thematically. Rose of Sharon must learn the lesson essential for survival, the necessity of sustaining not only one's self, or one's husband and child, or even one's kindred, but the whole of mankind. To make that lesson better understood within the framework of the novel, Rose of Sharon is then, designedly, not only a silly pregnant girl, but the most self-centered of all the Joads, the one who frets and complains and demands the most. Perhaps it is morally as well as biologically necessary for her to lose both husband and child, before she can undergo what Warren French calls "the education of the heart," which he maintains the Joad family achieves. To make her instruction more convincing, her conversion more dramatic, and her recognition scene more symbolic, her transformation must be traumatic.

As weeks passed, Steinbeck became eager to complete his long labor, but wrote on September 21, "I still can't see the end of this book." Two days later, however, he could say: "The book is beginning to round out. I think they go to Shafter. I think I can begin to see the end. But that time jump is bound to give me trouble. I want this book to be perfectly integrated." By September 28, he had decided: the Joads will go to Shafter, "Will go north for the cotton and will end there: Go to the box car be moved by flood waters. And the book will end there. But there is a hell of a lot to happen yet. I musn't get impatient . . . This is the important part of this book. Must get it down." On October 5, Steinbeck again summarized, in staccato fashion but in slightly amplified form, the events yet to occur: "And my story is coming better. I see it better. Ma's crossing with the clerk and then Tom's going out—meeting Casy—trying to move the men in the camp. Arrest and beating—return in secret. Move. Cotton. Flood. And the end. Tom comes back. Stolen things. Must go. Be around. Birth. And the rising waters. And the starving man. And the end." Several more summaries appeared before the diary and novel were complete. Some included actions or events which Steinbeck either subsequently decided to omit or later deleted when he "repaired" a scene: Tom was to return in the flood bringing stolen food (perhaps that contemplated scene generated the brief episode in which the boy told Ma that he broke a window the night before and stole bread for his starving father) and there was to be a "hint of small pox, measles, measles for Rose of Sharon weakening. Cause miscarriage or rather birth of a dead baby. Breast pump. Then the rain."

Steinbeck's decision to omit some of these projected scenes appears to be cogent. Tom's return after the haunting farewell to Ma could only have been anti-climatic. Rose of Sharon had endured quite enough to make her stillborn child, "the blue shriveled little mummy," completely credible without the added debilitation from measles. And it seems unlikely that the box car or its inhabitants could have supplied a breast pump. Rose of Sharon's milk, moreover, was essential for both thematic and symbolic purposes in the final scene.
On October 14, Steinbeck prepared to write his final interchapter. His remarks here show the exhilaration he felt: "I'm getting excited now that the end is coming up. Rather work than not. I'll be sad when this is done . . . . The last general must be a summary of the whole thing. Group survival."

The group survival theme was not new to Steinbeck. It had been central in, among other works, "The Leader of the People" and *In Dubious Battle*. Now, as he makes clear, it was his major concern in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The October 14 entry continued: "Yes I am excited. Almost prayerful that this book is some good . . . . Now let's see what we have. [Here follows another slightly expanded summary of action to come.] Not so much you see and concentrated tempo. And ending where I thought . . . ." On October 19, he wrote: "I'm on the very last chapter now. It may be fifteen pages long but I can't help that. It may be twenty. The rain—the birth the flood the barn. The starving man and the last scene that has been ready so long." Steinbeck implied here, then, that his dénouement was carefully planned if not actually written long before he completed the novel.

Steinbeck's exhaustion was clear in these final diary entries and he feared it would affect the book's conclusion. The last week's comments, filled with doubts and pain and illness, reveal too his determination to make the ending commensurate with what has gone before. The October 19 entry continued: "I have very grave doubts sometimes. I don't want this to seem hurried. It must be just as slow and measured as the rest, but I am sure of one thing—it isn't the great book I had hoped it would be. It's just a run-of-the-mill book. And the awful thing is that it is absolutely the best thing I can do." The October 20 entry read "my nerves blew out like a fuse and today I feel weak and powerless . . . . I hope the close isn't controlled by my weariness. I wouldn't like that." On October 24 he wrote: "Monday again and I think it is my last week. I'm almost dead for lack of sleep. Can't go to sleep. I don't know why. Just plan for the ending." But the next day's entry revealed that he couldn't work the day before—or that day either: "I don't know whether it was just plain terror of the ending or not. My stomach went to pieces yesterday. May have been nerves. I lay down and slept all afternoon. Went to bed at 10:30 and slept all night may be some kind of release . . . . Can't work today . . . . I think I have every single move mapped out for the ending."

Finally, on October 26, Steinbeck recorded his last day on the manuscript of what was to be his major novel: "Today should be a day of joy because I could finish today—just the walk to the barn, the new people and the ending and that's all. But I seem to have contracted an influenza of the stomach or something. Anyway I am so dizzy I can hardly see the page . . . . If I can finish today I don't care much what happens afterward . . . . I wonder if this flu could be simple and complete exhaustion . . . ." The last line at the end of the page read: "Finished this day—and I hope to God it's good."

Three months were to elapse before Steinbeck wrote Covici: "I'm sorry but I cannot change that ending . . . . I'm sorry if that [its meaning and implication] doesn't get over. It will maybe." He was right; it has. Perceptive
critics have read Steinbeck better, perhaps, than he dared hope. Though their interpretations have differed, most have understood the ending of *The Grapes of Wrath* and many have found it good.

Notes

3 Ditsky, p. 41.
4 Levant, p. 124.
7 Quoted by permission of The Steinbeck Estate and the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. "The Grapes of Wrath Journal," which continues until January 30, 1941, is in the Steinbeck Manuscript Collection in the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.
13 Thomas F. Dunn, "*The Grapes of Wrath,*" *College English,* 24 (April, 1963), 124.
14 In a letter to his agents written in March, 1934, five years before he began *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck revealed his familiarity and fascination with the Canticles. Puzzled at the failure of critics and other readers to recognize his theme in *Tortilla Flat,* Steinbeck suggested that he revise the novel to make it clearer: "What do you think of putting in an interlocutor, who between each incident interprets the incident, morally, aesthetically, historically, but in the manner of the paisanos themselves? This would give the book much the appeal of the *Gesta Romanorum,* those outrageous tales with monkish morals appended, or of the Song of Solomon in the King James Version, with the delightful chapter headings which go to prove that the Shulamite is in reality Christ's Church." Lewis Gannett, "Introduction: John Steinbeck's Way of Writing," *The Portable Steinbeck* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), pp. xiii–xiv.


22 Jules Chametzky, p. 44.


30 This letter is placed in "The Grapes of Wrath Journal" in the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.

31 *John Steinbeck*, p. 107.
Rose of Sharon quilt made in the Mid-west, 1932.
During the Great American Depression years of the 1930s, a woman's fierce compulsion to give comfort to her family through all its trials probably overshadowed most of her other concerns. John Steinbeck defines this quality in his characterization of Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Ma knew that, like her frontier ancestors before her, it was solely up to her to sustain her family: "She seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone."¹ She was, in short, the comfort of her family.

In light of the concluding scene in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the word *comfort* is semantically important. As Martha Heasley Cox has pointed out in her comments on "The Conclusion of *The Grapes of Wrath*," the word is used five times in the last two pages of the novel.² The starving man's son supplies a dirty comfort to Ma to fold about the wet and cold Rose of Sharon, and Rose of Sharon loosens one side of the comfort so that she can bare her breast to feed the starving man, to give him comfort.

The word choice is significant. The covering could be referred to merely as a blanket, as it is when Ma inquires of the boy "You got a dry blanket we could use an' get her wet clothes off?" and when "Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast" (pp. 617-18), but the intervening references are to a *comfort*. Steinbeck is quite surely employing the word for its warm and reassuring connotations. But he may also be using the word to evoke the visual images of a comfort (or a *comforter*, as such a blanket is also called) and, thereby, to reinforce a central theme of the novel. For a comfort is, by definition, not simply a blanket. A blanket is made of a single woven thickness; a comfort is a double thickness of fabric with a soft substance stitched between. In American usage, a comfort is another name for *quilt*.

Like the discarded remnants of fabric that are stitched together into a new unit, whole and interrelated, the discarded and dispossessed characters of
Steinbeck's novel are melded into a new community, their private individualities given over to the common good. "In their ultimate need," as Dr. Cox has stated, "Rose of Sharon and the starving man exchange what each has to share. Taking comfort from the stranger, she gives him life." The quilt or comfort image thus subtly reinforces the deeper implications of the final scene, and of the novel as a whole.

Although references to quilts and quilting do not abound in Steinbeck's works, they occur in sufficient number, even in The Grapes of Wrath, to suggest Steinbeck's awareness of their thematic implications.

When a typical family is preparing to leave for California, one of the persons says, "Now you know well what we can take and what we can't take. We'll be camping out—a few pots to cook and wash in, and mattresses and comforts..." (p. 119). The Joads presumably had comforts, or quilts, for Ma had one to replace the quilt used for Grampa's shroud:

"I was gonna wash Grampa all over," said Ma, "but he got no other clo'es to put on. An' 'course your quilt's spoilt. Can't never get the smell a death from a quilt. I seen a dog growl an' shake at a mattress my ma died on, an' that was two years later. We'll 'rup im in your quilt. We'll make it up to you. We got a quilt for you." (p. 192)

But the best evidence of Steinbeck's familiarity with quilts can be found in the name of the Joad's eldest daughter. "The best known applique pattern of all was the Rose of Sharon—which was almost invariably a bride's quilt." The daughter could, of course, have been named from the Bible itself; but the sensual connotations of the Bible description might well have been repugnant to the morals of country women, who, one commentator has stated, "did not approve of such a plainspoken description of the pleasures of love even though it was part of the Bible, and young maidens were forbidden to read Solomon's Songs, but for generations they continued to make the traditional 'Rose of Sharon' for their bridal quilts."

If Steinbeck's own early observations had not acquainted him with the importance of quilting to women, he could have become acutely aware during his 1936 visits at the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp in Kern County, California, which provided the model for Weedpatch in his novel.

It was the practice of Tom Collins, the manager of the Arvin Camp and the man to whom Steinbeck dedicated The Grapes of Wrath, to make detailed, weekly reports of activities in the camp. He was well aware of the importance of keeping the women occupied while the men searched for labor or otherwise busied themselves and frequently referred to the problems of the women who had no interests other than their families. But after several months he was able to report happily:

Miracle of miracles—we now have an electric sewing machine being repaired for us and for delivery to us. This costs us nothing of
course. We have collected from an overall factory and garment factory all scraps. We have also arranged with a cotton gin to give us a supply of low grade cotton for which there is no market. With the cloth scraps we shall begin our comfort making project with the idea in mind to have at least one big well made comforter for each family group.

A few days later, he reported: "We are now well prepared for the quilting and sewing classes and these will get under full speed this week." A few weeks later he could report that "The clothing and sewing and quilt project continues to attract the attention of the women who are not employed in the packing sheds. They have been doing some very fine work, indeed." Like Steinbeck, Collins seems to use the terms comfort and quilt interchangeably.

One of the events he described in detail, emphasizing the camaraderie of the women as they shared a useful enterprise:

They were having a quilting party. We were attracted to the tent by the happy voices of the singers. On entrance, we found that every time the needles punctured the material a note was sounded, the whole thing blending superbly in the monotonous droll of half song-half ritual—soothing at times, climbing to a high pitch that "squeeked" the ears but ending in the long droll that seemed to fade away on the light afternoon breeze until it was as an echo floating down the wide expanse of prairie all about us.

The ladies looked up as we entered but continued the song to the end. We admired the fine work and passed from one to the other dropping a little word of praise to each and every one until we had spoken to the eleven ladies present.

Steinbeck obviously observed some of these activities, or otherwise became aware of them, for he incorporated references to them in his novel. He mentions that the women "'sew, and a nurse comes out an' teaches 'em. All kinds of things like that'" (p. 392). When the Weedpatch Women's Committee come to welcome Ma Joad to the camp, one of the women suggests, "Le's go to the sewin' room—got two machines, they's a quiltin' an' they're making dresses . . ." (p. 433).

Steinbeck does not tell us that Ma did any sewing or quilting with the women in Weedpatch, but it is certain that she responded favorably to the women from the committee. "Well—" she said, "I ain't been so perked up in years. Wasn't them ladies nice?" (p. 436) And when the Joads left the camp a month later Steinbeck mentions that both "blankets and comforts" were among their possessions (p. 491).

The references to quilts and comforts are seemingly unobtrusive realistic details without significance, but their inclusion adds to the novel an important dimension of feminine Americana. Students of quilting recognize
that "the evolution of the patchwork quilt has always been closely involved with the whole social development of America." 10 Quilting bees were part of the warp and woof of a self-sufficient pioneer spirit, and patchwork quilting "was a craft born of the harshest necessity, a symbol of life of hardship in which money was scarce, material goods were scarcer and all one had to give was labor and time. Patchwork is really the blues of the American women."11 But by the 1920s—when "technology was king—making things by hand had become a sign of poverty, something to be ashamed of. People who still knew how to quilt denied it."12 During the difficult days of the Depression, however, when social workers recognized that dispossessed and displaced women had a need to return to handiwork, "Parks Departments set women to quilting" once again.13

More importantly, however, the image of the quilt either consciously or unconsciously on Steinbeck's part reinforces the theme of community spirit as opposed to the aloneness of the individual. Probably the image is conscious, for it appears elsewhere. In Steinbeck's second novel, To a God Unknown, the women in the Wayne family help Elizabeth make the layette for her baby, line "a wash basin with quilted satin," and teach Elizabeth how to quilt the cover for the lying-in bed: "Elizabeth made it as carefully as though it were to last her life, instead of being burned immediately after the child was born."14 In In Dubious Battle, when Mac and Jim, having just arrived at the camp of the strikers, volunteer to deliver a baby, it is a quilt that covers the woman in labor:

Mac set his lantern down beside the mattress. "Going to be all right, Lisa," he said. Gently he tried to lift the dirty quilt which covered her. London and the white-faced boy looked on. In a panic of modesty Lisa held the quilt down about her. "Come on, Lisa, I've got to get you ready," Mac said persuasively. Still she clutched at the quilt.

London stepped over. "Lisa," he said, "You do it." Her frightened eyes swung to London, and then reluctantly she let go her hold on the quilt. Mac folded it back over her breast and unbuttoned her cotton underwear.15

In Cannery Row, the girls at Dora's express their appreciation for Doc's many kindnesses by jointly fashioning him a gift:

Dora's girls were making him a patchwork quilt, a beautiful thing of silk. And since most of the silk available came from under-clothing and evening dresses, the quilt was glorious in strips of flesh pink and orchid and pale yellow and cerise. They worked on it in the late mornings and in the afternoons before the boys from the sardine fleet came in. Under the community of effort, those fights and ill feelings that always are present in a whore house completely disappeared.16
In these three instances, as at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a quilt or comfort is associated with new life or with a sense of spiritual sharing—appropriate evocations for the name *Rose of Sharon*, whether it refer to a young woman from Oklahoma, the biblical “lily of the valleys,” or a patchwork quilt. As one recent writer has stated:

The quilting bee is as good as any peace table, all parties working toward one goal in a mutual nonpolitical situation where generations can meet and talk. In our search for a road to the past and more peaceful days, or to a future where all people can work side by side happily, productively, and without hatred, as picayune an event as a quilting bee might also just put one more crack in the walls of despair and aloneness. 17

Notes

1 John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), p. 100. Further references to the novel will be cited in parentheses following quotations. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Robert H. Woodward and Dr. Martha H. Cox in the preparation of this essay.

2 See the preceding article.

3 Ibid.


6 Thomas Collins, Camp Manager’s Weekly Reports, Kern Migratory Labor Camp, Farm Security Administration, 1936. Report for week ending June 6, 1936, pp. 5–6. Copies of the Collins reports are in the Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University, and are quoted with permission.

7 Collins, Report for week ending June 13, 1936, p. 4.

8 Collins, Report for week ending July 25, 1936, p. 5.


12 Ibid., p. 10.

13 Ibid., p. 38.

14 *To a God Unknown* (New York: Robert O. Ballou, 1933), p. 175.

15 *In Dubious Battle* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1936), p. 64.


"Pacific Biological Laboratories, Inc., as strange an operation as ever outraged the corporate laws in California."

"About Ed Ricketts"
The Wayward Bus:
Love and Time in America

John Ditsky

In an eastern Pennsylvania town, there has been for some years an exhibit for the passing public called "Roadside America." It is an extensive scale model of a typical rural countryside, the United States of legend, nostalgia, and not infrequently, reality. There is a splendid redundancy that is striking in the concept, there, of people stopping along the road to enter a building to glimpse, in effect, the road they have just left. It is, I think, much like the way in which the fiction of John Steinbeck illustrates this same "Roadside America" in a process of historical change. And because the study of Steinbeck's novels involves the evolving attitudes of the man himself, something of the same sort of doubling of attention to America-in-motion takes place within Steinbeck criticism as takes place within the tourist attraction I have mentioned.

When previous critical attention has been as inadequate as it has been for The Wayward Bus (1947), the situation is especially as I have described it. In this work's usage of the narrenschiff structure and theme, Steinbeck's ongoing revision of his knowledge of a nation on the move is contained. Furthermore, it is a knowledge which, for various reasons, is related at every stage of development to human love, human sexuality. If Steinbeck's attention to that great American theme of "westering," or motion across a landscape, is a typical writer's involvement with a characteristic aspect of American history (perhaps the essence of that history), then The Wayward Bus clearly deserves further study.

The brief critical history of The Wayward Bus has also been a record of reasonable assumptions insufficiently pursued—and occasionally of sweeping presuppositions vainly applied. Peter Lisca, referring to the book's first reviews, goes on to describe Steinbeck's "pitiless examination" of a materialistic American culture, noting certain thematic devices such as the scars worn
by several characters and the sexual longings apparent beneath their surface responses. Lisca considers the bus's journey both from its evident allegorical aspect and also in terms of the "purely visual perception" by which Steinbeck renders scenes as camera-eye compositions.¹

F.W. Watt's brief coverage notes the book's Chaucerian parallels, though Watt also considers Bus a tour de force of "psychological and social realism" that lacks a sufficiently clear "emotional resolution."² Curiously enough, while this British critic finds the level of "meanings" obscured by naturalistic detail, Americans have on the whole tended to devote their attention to the heavy pattern of symbolism in the book. Warren French complains that the volume "lacks objectivity" insofar as Steinbeck's feelings are too evidently another new gospel with Juan Chicoy as an inadequate savior. French considers the novel disappointing, rejecting Lisca's patient willingness to uphold the possibility that it has merit.³ James Gray's Minnesota pamphlet treats The Wayward Bus as an "entertainment" (hopefully in the Graham Greene sense) and gives it little space, concluding that Bus is in summary the indictment of a "fatuous society."⁴ Howard Levant's recent discussion faults the novel in structural terms.⁵

Similarly, Lester Jay Marks's recent volume sees Bus as "bitter" in its "dissection of evil." Because Steinbeck "overtly tells his meanings" instead of leading the reader to them by indirection, he must have "no compassion, nor even mercy, for the lost, ugly creatures" he draws so flatly. Presumably because the book fits into Marks's "thematic patterns" approach, however, some insight into the book's immediate religious and ethical statements is offered.⁶ Lastly, there is Joseph Fontenrose who, calling Bus a "Morality," cannot summon up enough interest to spend much space on it. Quick references to Everyman parallels and to the characters' cravings after sweetness are made, and mention of the roadside ditch as a new ecological image follows, and then Fontenrose concludes that "Steinbeck appears to waver between a limited critique of contemporary bourgeois society and a comprehensive critique of the human condition." Furthermore,

... when we know Steinbeck's philosophy the meaning of his novels becomes clearer. And since it is an inadequate philosophy for a novelist, the central theses of his novels are not likely to carry complete conviction, whatever his narrative and poetic skill.... Steinbeck lacked a genuine theory of society; for the group organism will not do.⁷

Fontenrose objects to the lack of genuine social relationships among Steinbeck's characters, and therefore faults the humanness of his humans, while Marks dislikes Steinbeck for a lack of sympathy.

Whatever the respective strengths of these arguments, there has been a certain confusion between valid perceptions of the book's shortcomings with prior definitions of "allegory," "allegorical novels," "adequate philosophies," and necessary degrees of "compassion." The result has been a failure to give

90
The Wayward Bus the sustained attention that might illuminate its workings without prejudice. This moralizing, long frowned upon in novelists, here remains to prevent full critical judgment of certain works which therefore are quickly written off. But now that fuller attention is being given to the later Steinbeck, it should no longer be possible to toy with a book's "meanings" and then dismiss it simply because those "meanings" are too easily arrived at, or "inadequate," or not humane enough. One would rather get on with the re-examination of Steinbeck's novels as process, rather than as winners or losers of individual critics' private Nobel Prizes. The present article is intended as a necessary transitional exposition of The Wayward Bus with such an objective in mind.

II

Even while illustrating a process of becoming, this novel is rich in the texture of being; Bus is a combination of that institutional motion and that frenetic activity which characterize Roadside America, qualities clearly present even in its seldom-seen film version of a decade later (already an exercise in nostalgia). "There was a hush on the land and a great activity," Steinbeck says, and that paradox of stillness and motion embodied in the land pervades the "plot" and its characters, underlying and justifying their continuing interaction. Ceaseless activity in search of a peaceful state is the human norm, and dreams are the only immediate means of realizing that objective—though often these dreams are disbelieved in even as they are dreamed. All the people in The Wayward Bus are dreamers, and therefore most are also deceivers—of themselves or others, and sometimes both. As in The Iceman Cometh, social relationships become reciprocal and implicit contracts between two or more agents to reinforce each other's dreams. And as in much of American literature, Hollywood, that dream-manufacturing center of the Forties, plays a literal part as the Oz at the end of the road. No criticism of Bus that ignores the function of dreaming in its structure can possibly be valid.

Furthermore, there is the matter of the obvious, often-noted physical representation of dreams as the "sweet things" craved by each character: whether obsessively, as in the case of Pimples' need for cakes, pies, and candies; occasionally, like Alice's need for alchohol, Van Brunt's delight in canned peaches, and Horton's enjoyment of properly buttered toast; or more abstractly, like Norma's cherishing of a Clark Gable photo, Pritchard's vague dissatisfactions with the present and recourse to memories of once having truly lived, Mrs. Pritchard's secret desire for a "little orchid house," Camille's visions of a secure existence with a safe older man or a girl friend, Mildred's thoughts of personal independence, or, finally, Juan's idyllic visions of life back in Mexico. Moreover, some characters wear gold tokens of material ambitions or attainments, though these are not outstanding: Pritchard's gold watch and nail file (25—26), Juan's gold ring and teeth (9), Mrs. Pritchard's
gold wedding rings (part of a ring collection), and even Van Brunt’s “yellowish gold” eyes (52). A certain irony attaches to even the gold wedding rings, given the loveless nature of the Pritchards’ marriage and the incomplete sexual fidelity of Juan to Alice (his ring finger is correspondingly truncated). And finally, as has repeatedly been noticed, several characters bear physical scars upon their bodies.

Postwar America—Roadside America—is lovingly rendered in concentrated detail in this novel, from the initial description of Rebel Corners, the lunchroom and its owners (2–5), to that of the bus (12–13), to small set pieces like the introduction of the salesman Ernest Horton (24–25). Details like the placement of calendar art and the plastic-covered cake dishes in the lunchroom, or the sacramental rite of Juan’s morning attentions to the bus, the mystique of motor-repair (8–17), are simply and absolutely right: still shots that fix a scene in time with total accuracy, and which must be read unexcerpted for full impact. But the inclusion of such materials raises a debate about the amount of realistic detail permissible in an allegorical work. It is the sort of argument we began by trying to avoid; in point of fact, all of Steinbeck’s fictions are “allegorical”—if all fictions are allegorical, Steinbeck’s are more so—yet all are rendered with considerable immediate concrete detail.

Steinbeck’s characters are therefore outfitted with realistic touches designed to place them simultaneously within naturalistic and allegorical systems. Pimples Carson, who has the eyes of a “sleepy wolf” and a “long foxy nose,” and whose “whole system and his soul were a particularly violent battleground of adolescence,” bears on his face both the ravages of adolescence and the inner spiritual conflicts they signify—“times of violent purity when he howled at his own depravity”—making Pimples’ passion for sweets a likely caricature of the deeper yearning for sexual experience (10). “Scratching softly” at Norma’s window at night, Pimples is a sadly “distant relative of Kit Carson” who is capable of acting in a reasonably manly fashion only when the understanding Juan calls him by his famous relative’s name (16, 63). Thus contemporary America’s achievements are weighed against its supposed past, itself seen (by a further irony) increasingly as an effect of the Hollywoodian program of national self-deception.

Norma, with her simple clothes and jewelry, lives in a similar sexual dream-world of longing after Clark Gable, an ideal male as pure of heart and kind as he is handsome. Like Pimples, she has had a sexual history of frustration to date, “wrestling matches” thus far won “by simple concentration” (6). Gable, her imagined perfect future, is a two-dimensional silvered spectacle of wished-for fulfillment; pathetically, she leaps at the chance to obtain a 3-D portrait of him from Horton, one that is “warm and soft-feeling” (34–35)—an almost lustful appropriation. In time, Norma transfers her feelings for Gable to the real Camille, indicating that her real need may have been for a sexual mother, or guide, instead of partner. Pimples, on the other hand, comes to sexual focus on Norma, but after it is too late. The pattern of desire and frustration goes on.
Ernest Horton, the salesman, is a real War hero and Medal of Honor winner who knows the small value of valor in a world of pragmatic Pritchards, but who maintains his sense of personal honor in his dealings with women—except for a wife he left behind as a bad investment. "Earnest" in selling (as perhaps he was "Ernest H." on the battlefield), Horton peddles gadgets of incredible—except that they are unmistakably American—triviality and vulgarity. Were he not happy on the road, Horton might be called a war cripple, selling junk on a corner. His exchanges with Pritchard are dialogues between two vastly differing ethical systems (106–108, 153–155). But when he recognizes the pathetic depth of Norma's dreaming, he treats her plans with respect, even when she begs "Keep my secret inviolate" in her best Hollywood manner (34–38). Finally, it is his frank admiration of Camille that wins him a tentative date with her (208). Ernest Horton is no traveling salesman of folklore, but a walking commentary on plain-dealing.

Pritchard, the organization man Steinbeck limns so thoroughly and so early, is moved by desire for Camille to a near-reversal of form. Tumbling into her lap by "accident" on the bus, he later constructs a dream-vision built around her; but she rejects his offer of a job, and all that she knows it would entail (102, 192–93). He even makes a crisis-gesture totally at odds with his past: he plans to kill a cow for meat, calling it an "expedient" use of others' property (25–28, 190). Rejected by Camille, he then "rapes" his wife, an act for which he expects to suffer long. I am afraid that we are intended to approve this last crow of an old cock who is under the influence of young sexuality, part of Steinbeck's pattern of persons defining themselves through sexual encounters. Pritchard, after all, had been "out of touch" with the "real people" before taking this trip (168), a motive curiously like Steinbeck's own in writing *Travels with Charley*. Pritchard stands for the defects of American Capitalism, and possibly their cure.

Steinbeck may intend old Van Brunt, the "terrier" and "tapir" of the novel, to bear his name in its older, goatishly sexual sense. There is his famous encounter with Mildred, of course, in which he betrays his preoccupation with the bodies of young women (130). Yet *brunt* can have a simpler meaning: Van Brunt is on the brink of death, a dying stroke victim at novel's end, and the one character forced to contemplate the next stage of his existence without illusions of betterment. His premonitions of danger are therefore not without cause, and his approach to death is marked by perversely increased sexual desires, the sudden need to read voraciously, and a sensual pleasure in the coming of "evening" till, dying on the bus, he faces the lights of San Juan and the evening stars—at the end, open-mouthed and open-eyed, yet wordless and unseeing (51–52, 94, 198–201, 211–12). If this book is the story of the several ages of man and woman in their journey through life, small wonder that Pritchard (the next oldest) finds himself hating Van Brunt as he lies dying, for the latter is emblem of Pritchard's own next stage: the baton is being passed.

Just as the men at the bus depot have their ritual of talking of money and
women, so too do the book’s women have their meeting hall, where frank confrontations can take place—the women’s restroom where, as Mildred observes, women were honest with one another because “where there were no men, there was no competition, and their poses dropped from them” (131—35). There Camille begins her motherly reform of Norma’s sad sexual resources, building Norma’s self-confidence and sense of self-definition in the process. Camille, the scarred beauty whose presence causes men to fight “like terriers,” wants to settle down with a nice home and family, but will settle for a stable girl friend; unfortunately, she generally attracts the likes of Louie the bus-driver, all hair comb and sen-sen, compulsively needing to conquer women and then call them “pigs” (66—80). Walking vision of the Hollywood ideal woman, but scarred by birth and life, Camille is rewarded for her honesty with herself and others by being called “tramp” by the likes of Pimples (204). Taking her name out of instinctive appreciation of Rebel Corners’ famous trees, Camille Oaks brings the presence of Nature to the wayward bus; she is Aphrodite of California.

Childish, materialistic, and sexless, Bernice Pritchard is perversely devoted to maintaining her frozen-in-time girlishness in an upsetting world. She is the American child-woman, a walking dolly who demands her way and usually gets it. Repressed sexuality and greed are confused in her; when Camille tells how a friend bought a fur coat by means of sex, Mrs. Pritchard feels “an aching, itching feeling in her legs and stomach” that recalls the excitement of a horseback ride long past (168—173). “Beating herself with words,” she judges the young girls around her to be “animals” (174). And when her husband assaults her sexually, she uses hands and nails to aggravate her wounds, turning his brief lust into a pretext for further self-coddling. She will surely get the “little orchid house” she longs for, even if her selfishness drives Mildred away.

But Mildred Pritchard is a girl who uses sex as a lever to personal independence, and whose previous sexual experiences have been means of separating herself from her loveless household (44—46). Her varied responses to Pimples’ and Juan’s looking at her legs indicate frank respect for undisguised sexual appetite in a manly partner, yet by taking off her glasses when she means sexual business she signifies a desire to be lied to (48—49, 178—83, 196—98). Talking to Juan about Mexico, she feels “weak and sirupy in the pit of her stomach,” while Juan recognizes in her sexual excitement the exploitation of the white-skinned race he might well use his body to avenge (55—58). Misinterpreting Juan’s exuberance over plans to return to Mexico for signs of his “complete manness,” Mildred takes his expression of lust-hate as desire for her (149—50). Literally following in Juan’s footsteps down the road, she merges her desire for self-development with his, just as literally, as California and Mexico meld with their joined bodies.

Like a less sophisticated version of the Doc of *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, Juan Chicoy represents intelligent manliness in balance, a nearly complete personality amidst weaker and less adequate vessels. As driver, he
polarizes the tensions and attractions at loose in the novel. But his fiftyish, scarred appearance is at odds with the passions he feels, a condition Hollywood recognized in casting a younger man in the role—a decision based on naturalistic audience appeal, most likely. But Steinbeck's Anthony Quinn type, Christ-figure by virtue of initials, is meant to be allegorical savior and naturalistic man all in one. Yet it is precisely by being man, son of man, that Juan becomes savior in the religion of Nature—in spite of smelling "like a goat" to Mildred (181), or perhaps because of it (for Steinbeck associated Doc with goatishness, too). His savior's cross is the crossroads where he is bound by consciousness of Alice's love for him (92–93), an unsentimental fact at odds with the "Sweetheart" gushiness of the name with which he has replaced "el Gran Poder de Jesus" on the bus's bumper. Thus Juan represents what remains of authentic Nature-originated love in the wake of Christianity's lapse.

In a sense, the real woman in Juan's life is the Virgin of Guadalupe whose metal figure he keeps in the bus and holds mental conversations with. Yet to Juan she represents motherhood herself, or motherhood in his life (hence, his Mexican past), rather than a specific and theologically significant Mother. Alice Chico, as mistress of Rebel Corners, shares in some of Juan's clear vision of the world; surrounded by calendars and posters with "improbable girls with pumped-up breasts and no hips" who might lead an alien visitor to think that "the seat of procreation lay in the mammarys" (3), Alice herself is "wide-hipped and sag-chested" and does not believe in the girls on the calendar. Yet the mammalian visions on the wall form the basis of male dreaming, Alice knows, and her own decline in attractiveness depresses and even enrages her. Her sexual jealousy makes her lash out at poor Norma and snoop into her private affairs (7, 38–39, 61–63). Though Juan is "an extension of herself" (60), Alice cannot compete with other women for his attentions; though she might be a type of the Great Mother he worships, she is controlled by his authority and dependent on his sense of obligation to keep him with her (39–40).

Alice, it is remembered, is the single important character not to make the bus trip, and critics who pursue listings of the damned might well war over Alice's soul. The earlier Alice of literature, after all, saw her visions after going underground, and Alice Chico goes through a mental hell of imagined fantasy. Still, she sees Truth, and it is Alice for whom flies (easy symbols of the corruption attendant upon sweetness) come to represent all the evils with which she must contend. Young girls, besides being sexual competitors, let flies into her restaurant, and perhaps the two acts are somehow equivalent (5). They create disorder in a world of sweets. Her rage at an individual fly is completed when, after a session of masturbatory self-befuddlement with alcohol, she destroys her own carefully-wrought neatness in a drunken bout with the fly (18–20, 113–22). In the end, the fly strides triumphant into the "sweet, sticky wine." But Alice's mind has been on her inability to have things her way, and the fly of mortality is the drunken "death" of Alice, the dulling of her vision.
Dulled vision is especially important in *The Wayward Bus*, and not merely for Alice. Mildred's need to be lied to by Juan, and Juan's care in calling Pimples "Kit," have already been mentioned; Juan knows how we help one another by steadying each other's self-views. Honest enough to apologize to the Virgin for "cheating" by letting the bus get stuck in the mud, he still gets his passengers where they were going anyway. A terrible irony, however, surrounds the limited vision of the other characters: Pimples, for instance, who plans to go into radar someday (a career of blind flying, of navigation without vision), cruelly calls Camille a "tramp." But *Bus*’s narrator maintains an especially close-focused lens for detailed looks at specific scenes, as we have noted, and for camera-eye panning (with ironically Hollywoodian control) that emphasizes the chain of accidents making all life a "wayward bus." For instance, the fly in Chapter 3 that ends in triumph over Alice is followed as it emerges from Juan's world and moves into hers, taking the reader along (17-20). This bug's-eye view of things, later enforced upon Alice, helps reinforce the book's microcosm-macrocosm pairing of levels. And Alice remembers Juan's hitting her "like a bug" (23), while Norma watches Horton like a "pup watching a bug" (35). It is an interesting and rare image for Steinbeck, in this novel which constantly requires the reader to readjust his perspectives. Few critics thus far have.

Steinbeck's perspectives in *Bus* involve greater interest in individuals than had been the case in such earlier works as *The Grapes of Wrath*, and thus there is emphasis on how individuals' conceptions and enactments of their responsibilities to one another account for the state of the overall social fabric. *Bus* therefore presents a cross-section of persons in varied modes of existence, instead of a species in an ongoing common experience. The bus trip is special and local, however much it represents the All:

On a lopsided ramshackle bus
We ride from day to day . . .

.................

We rattle along,
Rattle along,
And try to find our way.9

Only in this latter sense is the bus worth calling "wayward," for its single trip on a different route hardly deserves the special emphasis; only considered as the unique, the representative human experience (at least for Americans in the late Forties), does the bus earn its special focus. And what brings the party together is metal fatigue, the bus's continued war with its own existence (13-15).
Love and time: on this journey, the role of sexuality cannot fairly be minimized. Steinbeck's own mid-forties' interest in sex results in the total dependence of the novel's crisis upon sexual climax: the paired coupling of the Pritchards (unsuccessful) and Juan and Mildred (successful) occur so close as to counterpoint upon a single page, bring back the sun after the rain, and thus offer whatever hope the novel presents. For we began in Rebel Corners, with its remarkable and conspicuous oaks which "might have their roots in some underground spring which would make them grow large quickly in this semidesert country" (4), landmarks like Chekhov's Cherry Orchard and similarly representative of the life of the nation. These "great white oaks" might make you think there was "no more lovely place in the world," set you to "breathing nervously" and "panting almost sexually," and prove so striking a scene that the book's sex object, Camille, instinctively adopts their name as her own (4, 7–8, 87). Small wonder that the novel begins there, in a time of "quickening earth, frantic with production," and with "a man, and there aren't many of them" (3, 8).

Rebel Corners, which Steinbeck quickly places in customary historical context so that its larger meanings might begin to appear at once, is a sort of Eden in the "semidesert" with roots in the wellspring of life, a crossroads (as for its writer, its protagonist) where rebellion (with sexual overtones, like Eden's in the usual lay interpretation) leads its characters outward on the road of their dreams, but with little knowledge of good and evil, or Truth. Thus: a "wayward bus." And if rebellion in Eden, paralleling that upheaval in American history, that conflict of our adolescence, for which the Corners is named, sends men and women out of the Garden, whither shall they go? Hollywood beckons, a place where "eventually, all the adolescents in the world will be congregated" (4). It pulls Pimples and Norma most directly.

What Pimples and Norma do not know is that the Hollywood version of sexual paradise is a deception and distortion, and that Hollywood's emphasis on breasts is a perversion in which the essence of physical womanhood has been conceptually removed from the productive womb to the unappeasable bust. Concern over breasts, therefore, is one of the novel's keynotes—part of Steinbeck's realization of the changes in America between the breastless, or at least braless, Thirties when Rose of Sharon could offer her breast to a hungry stranger as a fulfillment or completion of her frustrated act of childbearing, and the emerging generation for whom breasts were objects of sexual veneration (and who would think the ending of The Grapes of Wrath grotesque!). Brassieres, then, the flat girl's compensation, are objects of vital concern in Bus, and there is much attention paid to brassieres and broken straps (and their lethal effects). And when Horton hears of Norma's movie plans, he reflects that she "didn't have the buds for it," nor the legs (37). Mildred throws her shoulders back to raise her breasts and thus attract Juan's attention (55). Adolescence delayed is thus the dominant social condition; the nation is on the sugar-tit. Steinbeck was among the first to observe, then, that the braful wonders of the Forties were indications of a social sickness in
which the mind intertered with an organ's natural functioning, distorting itself in the process.

Because these effects are felt primarily in the young, Norma and Pimples play a symbolic function in this novel—not merely as actual young people, but as representative young people, occupying rooms and work assignments in which they are simply the latest in a series of briefly-employed young people to pass through Rebel Corners on the way to maturity—or to loss. “Just as Juan usually had a succession of young apprentices to help him in the garage, so Alice hired a succession of girls to help her in the lunchroom” (5). Both boys and girls learn their respective sexual parts, which are predetermined in a way we would call sexist: the boys are initiated into the mysteries of garage work, the world of the scientific and mechanical—in short, the intellectual; the girls help out in the kitchen and on the counter. In effect, this obsolescent view of the sexes is perfectly apt: what Pimples and Norma are about, actually, is apprenticeship as men and women, and each moves within the sphere of the established adult guide—either the assertedly manly Juan or the emotional and possessive Alice. And just as neat, divergent paths lead to the little “outhouses with trellises” marked “Men” and “Ladies” (4), so too are separate rooms on either side of the Chicoys’ sleeping quarters established for either apprentice. Juan and Alice are masters in their own respective spheres of influence, independent and yet sexually interactive—and thus mutually, if sometimes unconsciously, stimulating:

Alice watched the rear wheels of the bus idly turning in the air and then she went in back of the counter and turned off the steam valve of the coffee urn. (18)

Finally, Juan and Alice are temperamentally different in ways that are sexually determined and representative:

But Juan, now, he could shut everything out and look at each thing in relation to the other. Things of various sizes and importance. He could see and judge and consider and enjoy. Juan could enjoy people. Alice could only love, like, dislike, and hate. She saw and felt no shading whatever. (23)

Anger is Alice’s sexual barometer, and also its obverse.

The movement of the bus itself is an obvious exercise in natural symbolism. The anticipatory time of years and the heavy rains all prepare for the journey into the “rounded, woman-like hills, soft and sexual as flesh” (95)—California trademarks. Juan’s avoidance of a crushed rabbit is a minor rite in American literature (97). Mildred, sexual antennae pointed at Juan, finds the bus’s motion sexually disturbing (98). The bus climbs “between high banks, and the soil of the cuts was dark and dripping with water. Little goldy-backed ferns clung to the gravel and dripped with rain” (102).
Steinbeck has long been adept at this sort of anthropomorphic landscaping, and at the definition of character by means of it—as when Camille, admiring the hills, turns to the task of freeing Norma (103).

The chaotic and wasteful floodtime, seen from Breed's General Store and measured by the great dead black bull it carries along (109-13), leads the passengers of the bus to religious messages on fences, and a great REPENT on a cliffside when they do not turn back (160). Caves below are like "dark eyes peering out of the yellow cliff." In Steinbeck, caves are always a place where persons may retreat and find themselves, but in The Wayward Bus the caves are where the bus gets stuck, Pritchard rapes his wife, and the other characters' conflicts come to a head. Juan visits one such cave as one would a church, momentarily (164).

Steinbeck is less reluctant than usual to use straightforward pathetic fallacy in this work, though Nature's role is otherwise limited to the explication of Steinbeck's views on sex:

The clouds piled in gray threat on threat and a blue darkness settled on the land. In the San Juan valley the darker greens seemed black and the lighter green of grass, a chilling wet blue. "Sweetheart" came rolling heavily along the highway and the aluminum paint on her gleamed with the evil of a gun. Away to the south a bank of dark cloud fringed off into rain and the curtain of it descended slowly (122).

But the implications of this scene are not unrelievedly gloomy, providing Juan as they do with the means for making a break with his situation—walking away from passengers he says are not his business. For Juan's specific dreams of Mexico are followed at once by the "accidental" sticking of the bus in the mud. Yet Juan's "high glee" when he is willing to put his fate into the Guadalupana's hands quickly gives way to a "miserable" feeling as he lies down in the barn where he has taken refuge (148-50, 158-59). He has four quick flashes of remembered "pure joy" which involve sex, religion, and Nature (166-67), and then is joined by Mildred, who is also fleeing memories (of her parents) and planning on running off to Mexico with Juan. Their sexual encounter stops rain, shines sun, and resolves indecision; their barnyard gesture parodies her parents' sexual hysteria, and when juxtaposed with Van Brunt's agony it expresses life's savage irony.

Essentially, then, the novel uses Nature for correlative of a movement from a world of breasts and breast-like forms, fired by springlusts of fertility and adolescence into a region past "two great abutments" into a place of valleys and rivers, roadside ditches where the cycle of life is carried forward and where the water of life runs freely, and, finally, caves dug out by erosion and animals, historical refuges where truth is confronted. That sweet mammalian world gives place to a ferny, wet, vaginal milieu, as Mildred's gift of herself at the moment of her mother's rape reminds one of
her wish for her mother’s death. For Americans, the breakdown of machinery at the caves throws the citizens of a materialistic republic into a literal cave environment, where Pritchard’s rape of Bernice in an excess of pioneer zeal is a parodic “back to the cave” adventure with national implications. Can we survive, deprived of our sweet deceptions?

Small wonder that the trip ends within sight of San Juan de la Cruz, “lost and lonely” in a country bearing “the semenous smell of grass,” with wishing stars overhead (210, 212). It has been a movement from talk, dreams, and cravings to communication, however limited, and satisfaction, however temporary and incomplete—and the restoration of realistically revised dreams. It is a book about the forming of pairs, and about the limits of human experience; and it is finally “non-teleological” in its brutal honesty about the degree to which change is possible. Yet there is movement, motion, development: the crisis passed, sexual teasing turned to real and metaphorical spilling of seed, the lights of San Juan de la Cruz shine out ahead. Did Steinbeck take the name Santa Cruz and interpose his own name, creating a fictional destination? For Steinbeck, once having disturbed a church sermon by calling loud attention to the needs of the body before those of the soul, had been given the nickname “St. John” by his friends.10 More likely, he had one of several poems by St. John of the Cross in mind; several are relevant, and the combination of bodily, sexual ecstasy and striving for non-material union with divine truth does fit:

The savour of all finite joy
In the long run amounts to this—
To tire the appetite of bliss
And the fine palate to destroy.
So for life’s sweetness, all the lot,
I’ll never throw myself away
But for a thing, I know not what,
Which lucky chance may bring my way.11

It is a mystic’s vision, and a sensualist’s: risk the sweetness on the main chance. The Wayward Bus may be saying, The road of love in our time runs this way but once.

Notes

8 New York: Bantam, 1957; p. 93. Because Viking Press has failed to keep *The Wayward Bus* in print, all page references will be to the easily-obtained Bantam edition.
9 *Pipe Dream*, The “Steinbeck musical,” with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, RCA Victor LOC 1023.
So They Don't Like Steinbeck

I just finished reading the best work by California's finest writer, "The Grapes of Wrath", by John Steinbeck.

By now most of you are undoubtedly familiar with its theme—the life of trials of the Joads, a family of Oklahoma sharecroppers. It pictures the story that holds true for the 250,000 other "oakies" living by the sides of California roads, rivers, and irrigation ditches. The story of land foreclosure, the lure of come-on California handbills, a fifteen hundred mile journey of breakdowns, exhaustion, sickness, and death of miseries that make the old pioneers turn in their graves.

And finally in "golden California" the story ends in heartbreak and squalor through all of which runs the well-known Steinbeck "social awareness".

"It is 'great' in the way that Uncle Tom's Cabin was great—because it is inspired propaganda, half trust, half human interest, emotionalizing a great theme."

I had to buy the book. The copy in the library had a list of "holds" that would take a quarter to run out. First I went to the city library to see if I could do better there. Instead I came across the disgusting fact that those who place the orders for that institution feel that "a line must be drawn somewhere" and therefore do not carry a single volume of Steinbeck's writings.

Merely because of the fact that somewhere on the library board sits a moralistic mid-Victorian prude, the readers of this city are forbidden access to the works of California's finest writer, one of the outstanding literary figures of the nation.

It reminds one of the amateur who blatantly judges the master.

The fact that Steinbeck's own community discriminates against his writings is absurd. Of course, his words are tough and often rough, but so are the things he pictures. So are the writings of countless famous men.

But, after all, the nation as a whole is much the better judge. And in that judging Steinbeck, at the moment, stands unequaled. Of that we're proud, proud because he is a member of our community, proud because California has produced another great writer.

In regards to the local institution, which is clearly foible and perhaps frustrated too, that takes it upon itself to judge the greatness of a man already recognized as such we can only hope for an awakening... To save its own face if for no other reason.

—Bob Work

Robert Work

Facsimile courtesy of San Jose State University Library.
Steinbeck and the
Spartan Daily: 1939

Robert E. Work

RECENTLY, through the kind auspices of the Steinbeck Research Center at San Jose State University, I had the opportunity to re-read an editorial I had written thirty-six years ago, in which I severely chastised the San Jose City Library for its refusal to carry the works of John Steinbeck.

The editorial appeared in the San Jose State Spartan Daily on May 29, 1939. It was written shortly after The Grapes of Wrath was published and shortly after I had completed my term as editor of the Daily and was finishing my senior year as sort of columnist-at-large, roaming in print through both the college and Santa Clara Valley scene.

I remember having gone to the college library and found that the several copies of The Grapes of Wrath there were so heavily obligated by a lengthy waiting list that months would have passed before a copy would have been available. And to me this seemed completely appropriate as available evidence certified that the young people of the country had already, and with some vigor, accepted Steinbeck as one of their own and held him close both with their hearts and their heads.

So I turned to the San Jose City Library—only to be told that they carried none of Steinbeck's works. This, I instantly and vehemently decided was most inappropriate—and I said so, loudly and in several different ways.

I remember the nervous anxiety and frustration of that kindly old lady behind the desk who was compelled to hear me out. Although she was most upset at my tirade, she still wanted so much to help, to pacify me if she possibly could and be friendly. But she also had her own convictions in the matter—which were that she knew there was something a little wrong with Steinbeck’s writings—and that the Library Board of Directors had studied the matter and had decided not to stock any of Steinbeck’s writings for their own very good reasons. So there must, indeed, be something wrong with what he wrote.

I wanted to know what it was.
I wanted to know specifically what was wrong.

I wanted to know why the San Jose City Library discriminated against California's finest writer—why *The Grapes of Wrath*, which elsewhere in the country was already being declared a classic of American literature, was banned in San Jose—why the people of this community were being deprived of reading a great American work—one actually written right here in our own community. As I think back it seems there was much more that I wanted to know, but just what it was, other than grist for the editorial already growing in my mind, eludes me now.

I do remember that both the smile and the patience of the librarian became a bit thin—and I'm sure rightly so. Two of her comments are still clear in my mind. "Steinbeck's writings," she said with finality, "are not very nice. They paint a much darker picture concerning our fruit workers than is actually the case." Her other comment was equally simple and completely clear. It ran something like this: "A line must be drawn somewhere, and because so many people in the community disagree with the Steinbeck message it is really an expression of the public will to ban his writings, and perhaps even a community service to boycott his books."

Of course, after all these years the quotations of that kindly old librarian cannot be more than generally accurate. However, they are close enough to satisfy completely my recollection of them. It was 1939—surely they could not have been made even ten years later.

As I left the library and headed back to the campus, many strong words and phrases of what I'm sure I thought to be righteous indignation ran through my mind to be tried on for size and pattern to fit my editorial.

One thought ran strong above all others and had to do with the world's many well meaning but misguided amateurs who blithely and blatantly judge the masters. Another thought had to do with moralistic bias and mid-Victorian prudes who sometimes have the power to guide public thought completely contrary to its own best interests.

And both thoughts did make their way into the editorial.

When the article appeared, it met with some response. The reaction I remember best, because it meant the most, was from that fine department head and capable journalist, Dwight Bentel. "Pretty good column," or some such comment, was his appraisal, and just enough for a considerable, momentary glow. The response of my journalistic student colleagues was also encouraging and very largely to the effect that I should have ridden harder on the city library—raised more hell on a broader front.

And they were probably right.

All in all, in retrospect I have the very strong feeling that Steinbeck had the universal support and admiration from the students and probably from most of the faculty as well, but that in the still heavily laden fruit-grower population of the valley this was not the case.

On the day following the editorial the tempest had outgrown its teapot.

The national news services picked up the story and all over the nation
Steinbeck and his *Grapes of Wrath* enjoyed some considerable publicity. Two and three column headlines appeared here and there about the country. Their jist, as best memory serves, ran something like this:

"College Editor Attacks Library Board."

"San Jose Officials Accused of Bias Against Steinbeck."

"California Library Boycotts Steinbeck."

I remember being very pleased with my journalistic coup and proud of the national coverage, and I particularly remember thinking secretly how pleased Steinbeck himself must be at this considerable exposure.

A day or two later another small wave of response greeted my efforts from the editorial pages of a number of newspapers in both California and elsewhere in the country. As I remember, there was not a word in support of that nice little old lady at the library or the Library Board of Directors who made her decisions. To me it almost seemed as if the country wholeheartedly supported the editorial, and for a few days I basked in my conviction that I had indeed performed an important public service.

Another few days passed, and one afternoon as I sat down to my Spartan Daily desk I found a typewritten note addressed to Bob Work. It said simply:

"Dear Bob:

Thanks—but why?

Sincerely,

John Steinbeck."

At first I thought it a hoax, but I soon came to believe the note was authentic, and that was followed by a growing suspicion that the note conveyed something less than the gratitude I thought in order. But even the note, which I later came to understand much better than I did then, did not quench my Steinbeck crusade against the local officials. I questioned many about their stand on the Steinbeck matter and particularly on the position of preposterous discrimination on the part of the library. A number of people, including most of the library staff, refused to speak to me once I admitted writing the original editorial. So I did some further anonymous querying and in a short time had a composite response that I still believe came reasonably close to the community consensus on Steinbeck as of the summer of 1939—during the very period in which the eloquence of *The Grapes of Wrath* was rising to a national and world-wide crescendo.

In spite of the library ban, in many circles throughout the Santa Clara Valley there was complete accord with this growing acclaim and now and then even evidences of adulation. The Steinbeck stature was growing rapidly, everywhere, even here. His works were already in the process of making their way into the modern literature courses, and there was evidence available at every turn that the youth of the day regarded Steinbeck almost as a spokesman.

But it was also possible to obtain various opinions in strong support of the
library ban. These declared that Steinbeck misrepresented the case of the itinerant fruit and field worker, that he placed California land-owner-growers in a position of disrepute that they did not deserve, and that a man who performed such disservice to the community should not be aided in that disservice by the very community he placed under such vicious attack. All in all it was quite certain that the little old lady at the library was not alone in her position. In the minds of some of the citizenry Steinbeck was a dangerous, leftist advocate of the disruption of our way of life here in fruit-laden, agriculturally resplendent Santa Clara Valley.

As I proceeded to put this type of data together, I had the strong feeling that I had in hand an even more impactful editorial than the first one had been.

But it was never written.

And through the years, even until today, I have often regretted that it was not. It might even have answered the "why" of the thank you note.

I'm sure that the period of which I speak was at least near the end of the era in which such apprehensions over John Steinbeck were possible. In fact it could not have been more than five years later that someone thought to inform me that the works of Steinbeck were now prominent on the shelves of the San Jose Library and had in fact been there for some time.

There was another occasion when Steinbeck became closely involved with happenings on the San Jose campus. It took place as we were planning the program for an end-of-year banquet of Sigma Kappa Delta, the honorary journalism society on the campus at the time. For this occasion I thought it would be most appropriate that we invite John Steinbeck to be the guest speaker.

I remember spending a great deal of time on the letter of invitation. I remember telling him how important the occasion was both to the members and to the entire journalism program on the campus and how his attendance would be such a memorable experience for all these would-be writers who desired nothing in the world as much as to follow in his footsteps. I suggested that here was his opportunity to help guide, to instruct, and to point the way to the future. It was an invitation that I had written and honed as well as I was able. It was an invitation that I knew he would be eager to accept, one that he couldn't refuse.

But he did.

He sent his answer almost immediately. I think he typed it himself—with ample strike-overs and with what I thought was great, simple eloquence.

He graciously and regretfully declined to attend our banquet. He said that his presence "would add no pomp or circumstance to even a flea-circus, let alone such an august occasion as our journalism banquet." He stated that he rarely accepted such invitations and that he was really doing us, and others whose invitations he declined, a great favor by not attending.

Of course the disappointment was extreme and I had little respect and no
understanding for his refusal.

But over the years as I watched his genius grow into global stature and his position as one of this nation’s greatest writers become firm and newly attested to each time he produced another volume, his own words of “pomp and circumstance” often came back to mind.

His presence and his writings accomplished the very thing he disclaimed, for in the very finest sense he added “pomp and circumstance” not only to the American literary scene but to the world-wide literature of his time. His presence added “pomp and circumstance” to the years in which he has been and will be read—to this country—and how very much to our own valley in which he lived and wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*.

To the accompaniment of thoughts such as these I often think of the kind old lady at the library and how wrong she was—and how wrong Steinbeck was, when he said that his presence would add nothing to our banquet. His attendance would, without any possibility of doubt, have made it an occasion that each of us would have treasured above much, no matter how memorable, that was still to befall us.

I am still sorry that he did not come.

But I am happy that I have had this opportunity to recall these Steinbeck related occasions—back from thirty-six years in the past. So I extend my warmest thanks to the Steinbeck Research Center and to its able director Martha Cox, for the opportunity to contribute these recollections to the memorabilia surrounding the life and work of John Steinbeck, who I thought then, and do now, to be among the greatest of American writers.
Webster F. (Toby) Street on Cannery Row

I should like to acknowledge my gratitude to President John Bunzel and to Academic Vice-President Hobert Burns for their support of the Steinbeck Research Center and to the Sourisseau Academy for underwriting the necessary travel and the taping and transcribing of my interviews with Steinbeck scholars and with Steinbeck's family and friends.—Martha Heasley Cox.
Remembering John Steinbeck

Webster F. Street

Webster Street, a Monterey attorney, met Steinbeck in the early 1920's, when both were students at Stanford. They became such good and trusted friends that Steinbeck served as best man at the Streets' wedding in 1925, and Street served as attorney for both Steinbeck and his wife, Carol, when they were divorced in 1942. The friendship between the two men continued for over forty years until Steinbeck's death in 1968. Webster, or "Toby" Street, whom Steinbeck sometimes introduced as "my learned friend at the bar when it's open," remembers Steinbeck in an interview, most of which is printed here, which took place in his law office on Calle Principal in downtown Monterey on March 3, 1975.

Martha Heasley Cox

M.H.C.: When did you first meet Mr. Steinbeck?
MR. STREET: Well, that's something I never can place directly. I matriculated in '22 and I met him within a year after I matriculated.
M.H.C.: At Stanford University?
MR. STREET: Yes. So, it was somewhere in 1922 or '23 and I don't know when.
M.H.C.: And you knew him all of his life?
MR. STREET: Yes, I knew him all of his life. I saw him shortly before he died in New York when I was staying at Sag Harbor and saw him and Elaine. I stayed a week, more than that—ten days, I guess. We had a lot of fun, you know. There was a Whalers' Festival going on there and John was honorary member of that, in charge of fireworks, so we had a lot of fun there.
M.H.C.: From what we hear, he wasn't a very serious student at Stanford. He was more interested in writing than in a degree. Is that the way it seemed to you?
MR. STREET: I guess it's a fair statement. I think he would have enrolled and stayed, you know, and taken some kind of steady dose, but he just could
not afford it. His family didn’t have any money to send him and I think he often was on the campus auditing classes without any registration at all. I think he audited Miss Mirrielees class for a while and I don’t know whether he did Dr. Bailey’s. I don’t think Dr. Bailey liked him very much, so he...

M.H.C.: Margery Bailey?

MR. STREET: Yes, so I don’t think he audited her class, but I think with Billy Briggs he did—and Mrs. Russell and Miss Mirrielees. Oh, several classes I feel pretty sure, and maybe Hank Gray—for all I know—who taught playwriting.

M.H.C.: Was Steinbeck writing much then? Was he interested in...

MR. STREET: Well, sure, sure he was.

M.H.C.: That was his chief interest?

MR. STREET: Well, he had a lot of interests; you know, he had to scrape some money together, so he didn’t have time for writing—to just sit down and write. He had to make money.

M.H.C.: What kind of jobs did he do?

MR. STREET: Well, he worked one summer when he was writing *Cup of Gold*; I got him a job at Mrs. Ebright’s at Lake Tahoe, just caretaking for the winter.

M.H.C.: That’s where the tree fell down and the roof caught on fire?

MR. STREET: Yes, it went right through the kitchen, or something. Yes, I don’t know about that. He didn’t write to me about that. He wrote to me once in a while, but I only had one letter from him from that period. I gave it to Stanford; I don’t even have a copy anymore.

M.H.C.: Did he talk much about *Cup of Gold* as it progressed or discuss it with you?

MR. STREET: No, he was up there all winter and he had worked at Fallen Leaf Lodge the summer before. When summer was over, Mrs. Ebright needed somebody to stay up there, and my mother-in-law got him a job to stay in the house to make sure it didn’t fall apart and then the tree fell on it.

M.H.C.: I read Richard Astro’s account concerning *To a God Unknown* and your early play, *The Green Lady*. Do you still have your play?

MR. STREET: I gave that to Stanford too. I also gave them—I had a first edition of *To a God Unknown* with John’s inscription in it—that I gave them. But I can’t bring myself to sell my friend’s letters. Somehow or other it seems to be wrong; I don’t know why.

M.H.C.: I’d like for you to tell us about your early play. Is that the only thing you wrote?

MR. STREET: Oh no; I wrote all the time. I wrote the junior opera in—what year was it—I was a Junior in ’25; and I wrote the junior opera that Del Daves directed. I was always writing something. I probably wrote about two plays a month, you know, short plays which weren’t very good.

M.H.C.: Did you get any of them published?

MR. STREET: No, but a couple of them were played by the drama department of Stanford.
M.H.C.: No one has copies of those now?
MR. STREET: I may have some someplace, but I don’t know. If I do, they are all in just manuscript, because . . .
M.H.C.: It would be interesting to see them.
MR. STREET: I don’t know. They’re not very good.
M.H.C.: How much do you think Steinbeck used The Green Lady in To a God Unknown?
MR. STREET: I don’t know. I know he used the name of a character. I hadn’t even thought Wayne out.11 I think that was just kind of a trick recollection. I don’t think John was ever conscious of it, except that he has a “Wayne” in his family background someplace. But my play—I haven’t diagnosed it completely—I don’t think it’s anything like To a God Unknown, except that there is a kind of pantheistic streak in it.
M.H.C.: But you did give it to Steinbeck?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, we discussed it. He was discussing it from the standpoint of production as to whether or not I should fill in some—make the dialogue a little more complete instead of being so parsimonious with words. And, of course, that always seemed to me to be the trouble with most plays; they were padded too much.
M.H.C.: Did you think of Steinbeck early as a great writer?
MR. STREET: No, I just thought he was a good friend and we had a lot of fun together and, of course, you know we discussed all sorts of things: Saroyan, and Dos Passos, and Cabell, and all the people that were writing at that time. And well, people got sort of “hipped” on certain authors like Katherine Mansfield, you know—and so we discussed all these things.
M.H.C.: Did he have any favorite writers?
MR. STREET: I don’t know. I don’t think he ever said anything about it—you know John should have been a philologist maybe. He was interested in the etymology of words, because he was always going to get the exact word, you know. And imagine, he was up there writing Cup of Gold and he didn’t have a dictionary! He wrote to me and asked me for a dictionary. Isn’t that funny?
M.H.C.: Did you regard him as a very bright young man?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, I discussed him—Dr. Terman12 and I talked about him once, talking about his propensities—about the scheme of examinations they were pursuing at that time and about inclinations in reading and writing—and he just told me that Steinbeck would have been a good anything. He had formed an opinion of his IQ. So, that’s what he thought. I don’t know whether he could have done better as a physicist—or he could have been anything he wanted to be, when you come down to it.
M.H.C.: How early did you know Ricketts?
MR. STREET: Oh, I didn’t know Ed until I moved down here. Oh yes, I’d met him, because when John and Carol were living here on 11th Street, I’d come down, oh, maybe every month or so, you know, because they were living on very little and I happened to have a lot more than he did, so I’d
come down. We'd bring a couple of jugs of wine and we'd stop in Watsonville
and get some French bread and a big hunk of cheese, and then we'd come
down, and you know, we'd invite everybody over and have a party.

M.H.C.: At their house?
MR. STREET: Yes.

M.H.C.: So they did have lots of parties?
MR. STREET: Oh, sure. They had lots of parties, but we hardly ever
discussed literature. We had friends that we thought were going to make it,
like Carl Wilhelmson,13 who was writing a novel. Rich Lovejoy14 was writing
a novel—you know, just as people are today—but we never discussed literature
too much.

M.H.C.: When a novel like *Cup of Gold* or *To a God Unknown* was
published—would he talk about it then?

MR. STREET: No.
M.H.C.: Would he give you copies?

MR. STREET: Well, he usually gave me a copy, yes. He didn’t want to
discuss anything after it was finished. His idea was—he had paid meticulous
attention to detail and he didn’t want to go over it anymore.

M.H.C.: How great an influence do you think Ricketts was on Steinbeck?

MR. STREET: Well, I don’t know. Ed was a biologist, of course, and there
may be something in the thesis of scholars that he gave John a feeling of
group psychology, but I think he always had it. I mean, long before he knew
Ed, he was writing things that showed his humanity and social consciousness
and things like that. I don’t think Ed ever did anything to that extent. I
suppose John liked to imagine himself as a biologist, but I don’t think he ever
contributed anything to the field of biology.

M.H.C.: You know there are critics who say that most of the ideas for *Sea
of Cortez*—and many of Steinbeck's other ideas—were really Ricketts’?

MR. STREET: Well, I imagine a lot of that—I mean his observations on
marine life, of course, had to come from Ricketts. John didn’t have any,
but . . .

M.H.C.: He did become a passable biologist, you said?

MR. STREET: No, I don’t think so. He might have because he was
interested to the point of equipping the vessel when they started down to
Baja California, but Ed ordered all those things. John didn’t know what to
get. He paid for them, but he didn’t know what he was doing.

M.H.C.: You helped to get the *Western Flyer,*15 or charter it?

MR. STREET: I drew the charter up, or partly I think. I’ve been trying to
find it—I can’t find a copy of it—but it was simple.

M.H.C.: You went with them as far as San Diego?

MR. STREET: I went as far as San Diego; I wanted to go, but I knew if I
got down there in Baja California, I would be forever getting back, because at
that time it would have had to have been by boat. A friend of mine went
down there—Oh, I don’t know when it was—but he had trouble getting back.
He said “Well, when does the boat leave?” And they said, “En vez de
quando"—from time to time. So if that was the way, I didn't want to get that kind of deal.

M.H.C.: How long did it take you to get to San Diego?
MR. STREET: Oh, I think we were, let's see—we left here at night and I think we got there the following—no, we had one part of it daylight and then—I think we got there the morning of the third day.

M.H.C.: They didn't do any collecting while you were there?
MR. STREET: Oh no.

M.H.C.: And, I guess, no keeping of notebooks or anything?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, we kept a log; Tony kept a very careful log.

M.H.C.: Tony kept the log?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, sure. He had to; he was the navigator.

M.H.C.: But neither Ricketts nor Steinbeck was doing any writing until later?
MR. STREET: Oh no, not that I know of I mean. I suppose Ed was always writing something, you know. He kept track of his thoughts like they were somebody else's.

M.H.C.: He did? He wrote down everything he experienced?
MR. STREET: He wrote an awful lot of things.

M.H.C.: You know there's some disagreement as to how many notebooks there were—whether both Ricketts and Steinbeck kept one. You didn't get any idea of that?
MR. STREET: No, because, you see, they did all those other things after I got off the ship at San Diego. I haven't any idea. They probably did. But I kind of doubt whether John kept any notes, because actually this was kind of like an extension of observing tides for Ed, and then they had this other trip all lined up for Canada. You know at the time of Ed's death, he had already purchased the tickets and bought a lot of equipment and would have gone.

M.H.C.: Did people really like Ed as well as Steinbeck makes it appear?
MR. STREET: Well, Ed appealed to a certain type of person. I don't know. He didn't have the universal appeal. John had more universal appeal than Ed did. But Ed was more of an intellectual outwardly than John was.

M.H.C.: You didn't feel that Steinbeck exploited Ed Ricketts?
MR. STREET: No, no. He liked Ed and he was going to help him.

M.H.C.: And your impression of Steinbeck was that he was always fair with everybody?
MR. STREET: Oh, yes; to a gnat's eyebrow.

M.H.C.: Were there problems over the publication of The Sea of Cortez?
MR. STREET: Joel Hedgpeth has a theory and some support for it that most of the log was written by Ed. Had Sea of Cortez been put out by Ricketts it would have gone down the drain and nobody would have heard of it. That was the thing, and it was John who insisted that Ed get on the title page.

M.H.C.: In one of his letters to Covici, Steinbeck said that he talked with you about the republication of the log after Ricketts' death and that
you suggested a certain amount of the royalties be put aside. When it could
be cleared with the estate, it would be paid, of course.

MR. STREET: Well, the only trouble with the whole thing was—I think we
discussed that Ed had a will—and I don't know whether John ever paid much
attention to it or not. But by the time it got to the point, I was no longer
representing the estate because Alice had popped up as Ed's wife, and we
discovered that she wasn't. I couldn't stand to be in the middle of a fight with
a phantom. It was just too much. From the monetary standpoint it meant
nothing, because Ed's estate was minimal.

M.H.C.: Steinbeck had helped to keep the laboratory going?

MR. STREET: Yes, and then of course, there was the fact that Ed's estate
and Ed himself—or the laboratory—didn't have the funds to repay the loan
and it actually had to be sold. That's where the story started of the
exploitation, but that wasn't it at all. In round numbers—I believe $6000—or
whatever it was that John loaned to the lab to keep it from going down the
drain...

M.H.C.: Do you think his friendship with Ed lasted throughout Ed's life,
or did that change?

MR. STREET: Oh no. I think he always maintained his respect and
friendship with Ed. I never saw that fading a bit. Actually, it seems when Ed
was in this accident, Steinbeck immediately wanted to know from Rich
Lovejoy if the money situation was really going to be taken care of.

M.H.C.: He flew out here, didn't he?

MR. STREET: Yes. Later on he sent some money through Rich to use for
Ed, if necessary.

M.H.C.: You know in the whole log, there is no mention whatever of
Carol's being on the Sea of Cortez trip. She did make the whole trip, didn't
she?

MR. STREET: I think so. I think she stayed with him clear throughout the
whole thing.

M.H.C.: That was just about the end of that marriage, wasn't it?

MR. STREET: Yes, when they got back—I don't know when they began
to separate—but I think when they came back—I don't know. But I guess the
little house became a little bit too small and John bought one over on Eardley
Street in Pacific Grove.

M.H.C.: Was Steinbeck ill after he finished The Grapes of Wrath?

MR. STREET: Oh, I don't know. I never noticed that he was ill then. He
maybe was nervous, but I don't think you'd classify it as being ill.

M.H.C.: Somebody said he had sciatica and was exhausted and that's why
he decided to go on the Sea of Cortez trip; but you didn't know? It wasn't
serious enough that you knew anything about it?

MR. STREET: No, I didn't know. Of course, it was an adventure. And as
long as he could afford it, why, I imagine it was a good project for him. But I
didn't know—nobody ever mentioned it to me. He had varicose veins, you
know, and they were painful, I guess.
M.H.C.: Maybe that was part of what was wrong then.

MR. STREET: That might be. I've forgotten when he had those. In 1941, you know, he had the sense of doing his duty. He wanted to get in—as a matter of fact, he was offered a Colonel's commission by somebody back there in Washington—and he just hated Washington. Some of my letters are on the subject, and I did try to get him deferred through the draft board. But he eventually got an assignment with—I never can remember what press or what overseas service it was—but, anyway, he became an overseas correspondent and they didn't bother him in the Eighth Army.

M.H.C.: That's when he wrote the pieces collected in *Once There Was a War?*

MR. STREET: Yes, I think all those things—that collection—a lot of those were written overseas. But I don't know, I never talked to him about those.

M.H.C.: I guess you knew all three wives?

MR. STREET: Oh yes, yes.

M.H.C.: Did you know Carol best?

MR. STREET: I knew Carol first, naturally. I knew them before they were married.

M.H.C.: There've been rumors that Carol helped with some of the early writing.

MR. STREET: Oh, I think she did. She was very brilliant, I think. Of course, she typed the whole thing—every damned thing he wrote till they separated. She typed it all because nobody could read John's writing except someone that was very familiar with it.

M.H.C.: Did they seem happy together?

MR. STREET: No, not even—earlier. They were young—and Carol, of course, had a fixation about being poor . . .

M.H.C.: Did she? She wanted to be?

MR. STREET: No, didn't want to be. During the strike, you know, in San Francisco, when the port was practically closed by the various strikes that were going on, my God—her whole back porch was full of canned goods. She just got the idea that she had to get lots of supplies on hand so she wouldn't be hungry.

M.H.C.: Somebody who knew Steinbeck later told me that Steinbeck said Carol was a very fine wife, so long as they worked together, but she couldn't stand the prosperity that came after *The Grapes of Wrath.* Do you think that's an accurate statement or not?

MR. STREET: I don't know. Maybe it's because John's activities expanded. You know, he was by now getting into the movies, and he was closeted with Milestone and Lorentz and all those guys. You know he was in Hollywood and New York and everything, and I guess he didn't take Carol with him.

M.H.C.: Could you describe Carol?

MR. STREET: Oh, she was a beautiful girl. She was dark. She had kind of a lambent skin—a lot of glow—and she was a wit, very sharp. Oh, I can't
describe her with any accuracy to anybody. But she had a very quick and rather ribald sense of humor.

M.H.C.: And you knew her before you knew Steinbeck?

MR. STREET: No, oh no. I met Carol—her sister lived out on Jackson Street in San Francisco—and sometimes when I would go to the City, John and I would go to the City together. We’d take them out together and that’s how I met Carol.

M.H.C.: You don’t know how he met her?

MR. STREET: I don’t have any idea how he met her. I just have to guess at it. I know that he knew her when he was working for the fish hatchery at Lake Tahoe. He knew her then, but what that date was, I can’t remember. Somebody’s got to tell me because I don’t know what that date was, but I know I went over to see him and she was there visiting. They hadn’t been married yet. I know that. I’ve forgotten when they got married or where.

M.H.C.: Except for the typing, you don’t know how much else she might have contributed? Steinbeck does say the title The Grapes of Wrath was hers.

MR. STREET: Possibly is, yes. Oh, I don’t think Carol had the great sense of the inner meaning—or you might call it the “sadness of humanity”—that John had. She didn’t. I don’t think she did. I’m just guessing, but I don’t think that she had the intuition to guide him. That’s his book.

M.H.C.: Was she sympathetic with his writing?

MR. STREET: Oh yes, and a very good critic. He told me—I never heard from anybody else—that she was a very good critic and usually right, you know, about deletions, never additions, but deletions. He wrote too long.

M.H.C.: And he would listen to her, I understand.

MR. STREET: Oh yes, he told me that she was a very good critic and he paid attention to her. From the standpoint of whether or not it was too sentimental or, you know, as Mirrieles once told us: “sentimentality is a tender burst of emotion out of place.” That’s the kind of thing that John sometimes fell into. Now, I don’t know where he got those little pieces he used, those pieces he put at the end of the chapter. But, I have an idea they came from—probably his mother—or somebody in his family. Because, you know, they were—Oh, I don’t know how many people in his family had been missionaries. But I’m sure several had, and you know he was a missionary.

M.H.C.: In what sense?

MR. STREET: In every sense. He was trying to expose, not from the standpoint of interfering with lives of people, but more from the standpoint of exposition. He was always trying to show you what a time, what a bad time we were having.

M.H.C.: Do you think he had real compassion for the people he . . . ?

MR. STREET: Oh yes, he did, he did.

M.H.C.: How did he react to his literary critics? Did you ever hear him talk of them?

MR. STREET: Well, he thought they were all crazy. But, when Tortilla Flat was put on, you know, in New York, I saw a telegram someone sent to
John. It just says “Tortilla Flat very flat.” And I think Carol still has that in her scrapbook. Too bad she is so unamenable to discussion. She’s sort of made it a creed.

M.H.C.: Were you Steinbeck’s attorney for most of this period?

MR. STREET: Well, mainly only when he was out here. I didn’t handle an awful lot of things for him. When he loaned the laboratory some money, I drew the note, the deed of trust for him. I handled some tax opinions for him; he didn’t know whether to stay in New York or come back to California. When Carol and John got a divorce, they both came to me. I filed the divorce for her, and John wanted to give everything he owned away. I had a helluva time to get him to hold on to anything. He said, “Why should I—I’m just going to keep writing and as long as I keep writing—I’m going to make money.”

M.H.C.: He’d made quite a bit then out of The Grapes of Wrath?

MR. STREET: I don’t know whether he had or not; I never discussed his financial situation, not at all.

M.H.C.: So you handled the case for her?

MR. STREET: Well, I handled it for both of them. I said, “Look, if you guys get into a fight, I’m just going to back out of it. As long as you’re willing to settle the property—as to the other part—that’s up to you. If you want to contest this thing, I’m going to be out of it.” And they wanted me to handle it because it was just a question of getting a receipt from Carol—you know, for whatever John was going to give her and that was it. He was going to give her everything.

M.H.C.: Was she very bitter about the divorce?

MR. STREET: Yes, yes, oh sure, because actually by this time John and Gwyn21 had gone to New York together.

M.H.C.: You didn’t handle his divorce from Gwyn?

MR. STREET: No, that all happened back there in New York. I only had a couple of letters from John about it.

M.H.C.: He came back here for a while afterwards, didn’t he? His letters to Gwyn concerning the divorce were written in Monterey.22

MR. STREET: Yes, he bought this Eardley house and he also bought this one up here on Pierce Street; it’s an old adobe where Dr. Lusignan has his offices now.

M.H.C.: I’d like to go see them and take pictures of the houses . . .

MR. STREET: The one on Eardley Street is still there. It isn’t prepossessing. It’s just a wooden house, but it had a lot of funny things in it. It had a false wall for seances. Some person that owned it before had used it as a “Knock, knock, knock; is that you, Joe?” You know how they used to rig up houses to make false walls?

M.H.C.: Gwyn told me that one of the houses they lived in had a well under it and that it was so damp they had colds all winter. Did you know about that? It was some house here in Monterey.

MR. STREET: It could have been either one of these houses. I don’t
know, I think that the only one that Gwyn lived in with John here is that one
up on Pierce Street and the one on Eardley.

M.H.C.: Gwyn also told me that John himself was quite a mystic.

MR. STREET: A what?

M.H.C.: A mystic.

MR. STREET: Oh, of course—a romantic mystic—that’s what he was. I
don’t know how you define “mysticism,” but usually you define it by saying:
“He doesn’t know what the hell he wants to say, so he says something to
make him feel like what he wants to say.”

M.H.C.: Did you know Steinbeck’s parents?

MR. STREET: I knew them both. I knew the father better because he was
County Treasurer for Monterey County, so anything you had to pay, taxes or
anything, you had to see him.

M.H.C.: From what Steinbeck says, he was a quiet man.

MR. STREET: Very quiet; yes, yes.

M.H.C.: Did you know the mother? He wrote an hilarious story of her
going on an airplane ride near Salinas. That really happened?

MR. STREET: I don’t know whether that happened or not.

M.H.C.: He said it did.

MR. STREET: Yes, he said it. It might have.

M.H.C.: Was Steinbeck a big practical joker?

MR. STREET: No.

M.H.C.: Was Steinbeck a shy, a private man?

MR. STREET: No.

M.H.C.: Very friendly?

MR. STREET: I wouldn’t say he was gregarious, but he wanted people
around him of his own choice.

M.H.C.: Did you ever go to parties in the laboratory?

MR. STREET: Oh, of course, I have, yes, sure.

M.H.C.: Tell me about some of the parties. What were they like?

MR. STREET: Well, there wasn’t much to it. The whole room wasn’t as
big as this one, and most of it was taken up by the bed. The bed wasn’t very
big—and it didn’t even have any springs. The bottom part was made of ropes
knotted together—you know, a kind of a net. It wasn’t very comfortable and
then it was even more uncomfortable because it had no edge. The boards that
held it together came up, so when you sat down, the boards around it just cut
you across the bottom, you know, where you sat down. So you had to sit
way over or not sit down at all.

M.H.C.: Were there many people there, usually?

MR. STREET: Well, maybe say, seven or eight or nine maybe. There’d be
Toni maybe and Bruce Ariss and maybe Rich Lovejoy and Natalia and
different . . . .

M.H.C.: Who is Toni?

MR. STREET: That is Toni Ricketts—that’s the girl Ed lived with.

M.H.C.: Oh, I see, yes. You don’t know of a party given by all the people
on Cannery Row for Doc’s birthday? The kind he writes about? You think that was imaginary?

MR. STREET: Yes, I assume, yes. I’m pretty sure it is. Those people had no great veneration for Ed. They killed cats and brought them to him, and frogs, and if they found something strange on the beach they’d bring it in, even birds.

M.H.C.: You knew Doc very well?
MR. STREET: I never knew him by that name.
M.H.C.: What did you know him by?
MR. STREET: Just “Ed.” I never called him—till the book came out I never heard him called that.

M.H.C.: Who owns the lab now?
MR. STREET: Well, it’s been bought up by an association of business men. They use it for an employment office.

M.H.C.: They are going to keep it then? They know that they bought something valuable and aren’t going to tear it down?
MR. STREET: Oh, it’s a good place to play poker!

M.H.C.: What about the grocery across the street and Lee Chong, the Chinese grocer—both really existed?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, we couldn’t get along without that Chinese store down there, because, you know, on Sunday there was no place else to go. It was always open.

M.H.C.: What about the madam and the house of prostitution? Did that exist?
MR. STREET: Oh, yes, I don’t know when they closed that down. Flora Wood just closed it up of her own volition. I guess she had enough money that she didn’t worry. There was another one, and that’s where the Bear Flag Restaurant is.

M.H.C.: Was Flora really the good citizen he portrays—one who helped with the ill and was respected?
MR. STREET: Oh yes, she was a graduate of the Bayview, or the Bay little schoolhouse; the little red one down here, which they are trying to save now. I don’t know if they can save it or not. She and Carmel Martin were in the same graduating class from the eighth grade.

M.H.C.: Who is Carmel Martin?
MR. STREET: Oh, he was the father of the Martins in this law firm. He was a member of this firm until he died.

M.H.C.: Gwyn told me that Steinbeck used to go to Holman’s Department Store frequently.
MR. STREET: He loved to go to Holman’s. Oh, when he was here just before Mary Dekker died—it was Thanksgiving, you know—he said, “Toby, let’s go to Holman’s.” It was kind of like “Let’s go to the follies.” He was fascinated with small tools and he’d go over and he’d always see something he wanted and he’d buy it. And the next thing he wanted was some seeds, you know, if it was the right time of year. When we went there that time he was
out here for Mary’s—Mary died soon after that—he bought every herb they
had, you know: sweet basil, marjoram, thyme, everything.
M.H.C.: Could he cook?
MR. STREET: No.
M.H.C.: The food he describes makes you so hungry when you read his
work that I wondered if he cooked himself.
MR. STREET: No, I never saw him cook anything.
M.H.C.: The parties, then, were not the great brawls he writes about?
MR. STREET: Well, once in a while, you know, when Burgess Meredith
would come down and what’s her name—Chaplin’s wife—
M.H.C.: Oona O’Neill?
MR. STREET: No. Claudette Colbert. Well, there wasn’t room in that
place to have a party. They’d have to come down and take something over.
Like one night we went downtown and took over a place called “The
Palm—something—“The Palms”—maybe. It was just a little nightclub, but it
had a piano, and it was a dull night, so they shooed everybody out and we
took the place over.
M.H.C.: Back to Holman’s: Was there really a skater up on a flag pole
platform for days and nights for the whole town to watch?
MR. STREET: I don’t know about that. It could possibly be, though,
because they had these advertising schemes. It was everywhere, I think, about
that time.
M.H.C.: Did you recognize many of the people in Cannery Row?
MR. STREET: Oh sure.
M.H.C.: You really think they were prototypes?
MR. STREET: Oh yes. They were down in the Justice Court every
Monday morning.
M.H.C.: Could you pin down actual characters that were represented?
MR. STREET: Well, not the way John named them, no. But I know that
they were all true-to-life and we had them here.
M.H.C.: We’ve heard that someone told him most of the stories he used in
Cannery Row, Tortilla Flat, and Pastures of Heaven. Do you know who that was?
MR. STREET: Yes, Beth claims it was Sue Gregory who told him
some of the stories, not in—maybe not in—I don’t know whether it’s confined
to Tortilla Flat or Pastures of Heaven or what it is. But, it is kind of hard to
say, because John would take almost any kind of an idea and make a story
out of it, you know. I mean, that’s just the way he wrote. He’d start to
embellish it and pick out the “when” and “why” and write the story until
it—you know, kind of an O. Henry type, but with a soft pedal.
M.H.C.: Where do you think Tortilla Flat is? Was it any special spot?
MR. STREET: Oh, I think it was right up on Jefferson Street where the
American Legion Hall is. I think that’s where it was.
M.H.C.: We’ve heard two different stories: some thought it was up there,
and some, another section.
MR. STREET: Well, sometimes they call that Walker Tract up there
"Tortilla Flat," but I don't know.

M.H.C.: I read that you were in the laboratory at the time the event occurred that became "The Snake." What was the girl like?

MR. STREET: Well, it was just a girl that was on the circuit here and she took a fancy to Ed. We went down to the Blue Bell Cafe and . . . .

M.H.C.: What was "the circuit"?

MR. STREET: They used to have, you know, the piano player and a couple of girls and they'd entertain and they'd go around. And this girl happened to be there and took a fancy to Ed, and Ed invited her to the lab. And she was a kind of a sexy-looking dame and so while she was there, he said that he had to feed the snake. He had a big cage, quite a big cage full of white rats—and he went in there and selected one and put it in with the rattlesnake. The mouse ran all around, and this girl was just fascinated by the damned thing. And then, pretty soon, the little mouse stopped and the rattlesnake struck. Its fang caught in the mouse. And when he pulled, he brought the mouse back with it, and of course the mouse didn't pay any attention, just ran around until the toxic effects began to take hold. His back got all rigid, and he stood up on his back feet and when he fell down, he put his paws right on his nose, like that. This girl, by this time, was right up there looking down at that. And the rattlesnake went over, and you know the way they do—they go up and down the body, noticing how long it is and whether it is still alive. Their auditory nerve is on their tongue. It then finally discovered that the mouse was in fit shape to eat. He went over and went through all this business and got his jaws on the edge and took this little mouse in his mouth. And she watched, oh, I think perhaps half an hour, until there wasn't anything left but the tail of this mouse hanging out of the snake. John made a story out of it and gave it a lot of implications that probably were there.

M.H.C.: Then you think—you saw them too?

MR. STREET: Yes.

M.H.C.: I think "The Snake" is one of his better stories.

MR. STREET: I think "Johnny Bear" is a good story.

M.H.C.: Do you have other favorites?

MR. STREET: Well, I tell you, I think Of Mice and Men is the best story I ever read. I think "The Chrysanthemums" is a good story too. I like it very much. I think that's my favorite short story.

M.H.C.: Do you think that "Johnny Bear" described a true incident?

MR. STREET: Oh yes, I think that was a true incident. I'm pretty sure it was because there was a bar over there in Castroville where this bartender talked to a deafmute, and it was all in sign language. So it is quite possible that he went through all of the episode that he is telling the bartender in pantomime. It's quite possible.

M.H.C.: About "The Chrysanthemums"—I guess there really were tinsmiths coming through the country?

MR. STREET: Yes, sure, there used to be. I remember when John was up
there at Fallen Leaf that summer, one came through. And you know, he had a combination—he was not only a tinker, but he was also a cobbler—so he had two vocations, and all he had was a pushcart. And John said, “That’s an awful good-looking outfit you’ve got.” “Yep”, he said, “I guess that’s about the best this side of Placerville.”

M.H.C.: So perhaps he became the character in “The Chrysanthemums”?  
MR. STREET: Yes.

M.H.C.: Was the term “paisano” used here much?
MR. STREET: Oh, yes, we always called them paisanos. “Pais” means a country—countryman—yes, anybody.

M.H.C.: They are not then, just the Mexican or Indian or Spanish?
MR. STREET: Paisanos were “companeros”—they’re the ones that you know, they’re your own, they live here, people who live here—the indigenous people.

M.H.C.: Some people have objected to Steinbeck’s picture of Mexican-Americans; and I think they believe they were the “paisanos.” But he doesn’t make them particularly Mexican-American?
MR. STREET: I don’t think so. They object to it. They compare it with “Uncle Tomism” and condescension. I think he wrote about them because they had such a beautiful attitude about property and conduct in general.

M.H.C.: Was Steinbeck a prejudiced man?
MR. STREET: Oh, he was biased on some things; but I don’t think you could call it real prejudice.

M.H.C.: Why do you think he was biased?
MR. STREET: Well, I think he hated dishonesty of any kind, you know—hypocrisy, particularly things like advertising and campaigning and that kind of thing. He was, you know, vehement about it.

M.H.C.: Did he change much as he grew older and wealthier?
MR. STREET: Yes, he changed quite a bit, of course. I think it showed in his writing more than it did in his behavior because—he had always lived on a low key. If he had his way about it, he would never get too dressed up, never get too well groomed, never get to the point you know, of being immaculate, of being the glass of fashion by any means.

M.H.C.: Was he usually placid? Someone told me he could be a very gruff man.
MR. STREET: Well, he had moods, of course, but it is hard to tell anything about that unless you know what caused it.

M.H.C.: But you didn’t think of him as gruff?
MR. STREET: No, I never did, but usually if I went over there and found him writing, I’d just go away and he wouldn’t even know I was there. He had that little tiny shack in back of the house there on 11th Street. And when I went to see him at Sag Harbor, he had used some little houses out there in the garden overlooking the bay—and one of them that he used for a studio was so small that he had to put the table on pulleys and he’d get in the room and then lower the damned table. He loved to work in cramped quarters,
presumably.

M.H.C.: What, generally, was the reaction among local people to Steinbeck's early work?

MR. STREET: I don't think there was any.

M.H.C.: They just ignored it?

MR. STREET: Well, *A Cup of Gold*—a guy down there had about 200 copies remaining there, and that's how it was—right in his own home town.

M.H.C.: When did he first become known here then—with *Cannery Row* or *Tortilla Flat*?

MR. STREET: I think *Sweet Thursday* was the one people recognized as being typical Monterey.

M.H.C.: Did *The Grapes of Wrath* make much of a stir here?

MR. STREET: Not that I recall; certainly not locally. *The Grapes of Wrath* was something that would have no significance down here. We didn't have the "Joads" here. We didn't have the sandstorms and the deprivation that led to this migration. All we knew was "here come a lot more orange pickers" and cheap at that. That's what Californians as a rule thought about it.

M.H.C.: Did you have many migratory workers around here?

MR. STREET: Not around here, no. We had Mexicans mostly. Yes, the Wetbacks were always here. Of course they'd always be rounded up by the labor contractors; they'd try to hold out for as much fee as they could get out of them. It was a very bad situation here; still is, I think. You read *Starvation Under the Orange Trees*, didn't you? You should read that.

M.H.C.: No. Who wrote it?

MR. STREET: John.

M.H.C.: Is it an article or . . . ?

MR. STREET: Yes, it was a piece in the local Monterey paper.

M.H.C.: Well, did people here ever take Steinbeck seriously as an author?

MR. STREET: Oh yes, in the academic world and in what I would call "reading circles."

M.H.C.: But generally . . . ?

MR. STREET: Generally, I don't think that his work—I don't think *The Grapes of Wrath* was recognized. At least, people around here and people I knew didn't think very much of it.

M.H.C.: Did they resent it here as some people in Salinas did?

MR. STREET: They didn't resent it, I don't think; but in Salinas they may have. I don't know. You know, the Chamber of Commerce over there—when they wanted to name the library over there—you know they voted it down? They wouldn't let them.

M.H.C.: Steinbeck wrote Covici after he left New York and came back here, in the late forties. I think that you came to see him and talked all afternoon about his work. He said you told him what he should write. Do you remember anything about that afternoon?

MR. STREET: Something he should write?

M.H.C.: Yes, you talked about what he should be writing.
MR. STREET: Well, I told him, I wrote to him, and always talked to him about coming back here to write about the things he knew. He’d never pick up a beautiful story in the 21 Club or the Stork Club, because that kind of people don’t make stories of the kind that he writes. So I said, “Why don’t you come back here?” “Well,” he said—and he wrote to me once and told me—that he couldn’t come back because the Monterey he knew was gone.

M.H.C.: He said that, of course, in Travels with Charley. And I read in Astro’s book that you went back with him and Charley from Monterey to Flagstaff on that trip, though Steinbeck doesn’t say so in the book. Was he much different then?

MR. STREET: John? No, he was not different; he was busy. He had—it wasn’t a very good experience because this trailer—he had one of those things you set on a truck, you know. It made so much noise. It rumbled so as we went along, and of course, the first day, we started out and we got as far as Tulare. Oh, we stopped over at Cademartori’s in San Juan Bautista and ate them almost out of house and home. And then we went on to various places, but I was only with him four days. He was going to go to Texas to be with Elaine’s family. But I couldn’t spare the time, so I got a plane and came back. I went from Flagstaff to Tucson and then home.

M.H.C.: Was that one of the last times you saw him for any length of time?

MR. STREET: Oh no. Well, I saw him in New York in about 1967; and I saw him at the hospital—I was the first one I think, other than Elaine—to see him in the hospital. And then, of course, in ’68, I was there ten days with him. Mostly John was interested at that time in New York politics. He hated New York and Elaine loved New York—I think the only thing of dissension they had between them—because Elaine was a real New Yorker.

M.H.C.: He was already politically oriented when he wrote Travels with Charley, wasn’t he?

MR. STREET: Yes, he was very politically oriented and I said, “Look, John, don’t make these people look so romantic. You know you drive up and stay on a job, and then you can always move away. You know, actually what those people are doing, is getting a free ride on the public parks, the public libraries, all the public services, everything; they don’t pay a cent in taxes. Don’t aggrandize them; don’t make romantics out of them because they’re dead beats, you know.” And I said, “Besides that, I think every county, in California at least, used to have something on the agenda about making these people pay through an extra toll when they come into a place.”

M.H.C.: Did you ever hear Steinbeck talk much about the Viet Nam war?

MR. STREET: No. He talked only about the stress of it, but not his own stress, just in general. He said he had never been in an atmosphere like that—and it was hard even to write about it with conviction. Of course, I never was interested in the Viet Nam situation too much, except that I thought it was a pity. I think he actually had to consciously rid his mind of the implications of that war over there. I think that’s why he came back
before he had to.

M.H.C.: When you were with him, like on this four-day trip, did he talk very much?

MR. STREET: We talked as much as we could. We talked about everything, about the political situation, about food. We’d talk about dogs and everything except literature.

M.H.C.: Not even his own literature? You never talked about what he was writing?

MR. STREET: Very seldom did he write to me about—or say what he—but he’d write to me as though we had just had breakfast together—he would just make it a continuing conversation. It baffled me sometimes.

M.H.C.: Would he ever take time to make notes or write while you were with him on a trip like this?

MR. STREET: No, no. I think he was out to get the impressions. I think he was giving it on a regional basis, more or less, not in the context of contacts with individuals. I don’t think he was. It didn’t seem so to me.

M.H.C.: He always loved dogs, didn’t he? They were necessary to him.

MR. STREET: Yes, yes. They had a funny dog. He had one of those little dogs that don’t have any eyebrows—those pink eyes, and one of the funniest looking dogs. They just called him “Good Dog.” That was his name.

M.H.C.: Can you think of anything else that you’d like to say about Steinbeck?

MR. STREET: Oh no. I like to just talk about him; I’m no authority on John.

M.H.C.: Well, you really are. You knew him better than most people I’ve met and through a much longer period of time.

MR. STREET: Oh yes, a long period of time. But a lot of the things I read in these critiques and one thing and another—they really make me shudder. How in the world can anyone dream up so many different facets? If you put them all together, he would be one of—or THE—most ambivalent character in the whole world. One critic sees it this way and the other one that way—particularly, of course, when they are trying to relate what he was writing with what he was doing. They have absolutely nothing to do with each other. He’d remove himself from whatever he was doing when he was writing. I don’t think it had any influence on him at all.

M.H.C.: When he wrote, he wrote steadily, didn’t he?

MR. STREET: Oh yes. You know, God, why would he write such big long letters to me? He just had to write to somebody, that’s all. You know, I’d get these long letters. They’re on legal stock, sometimes written on both sides.

M.H.C.: Just one more question: What about the Webster F. Street Lay-Away Plan?

MR. STREET: John called me up long distance from New York and said, “Can I . . . I’ve got a line in here . . . W.F. Street Lay-Away Plan.” I said, “yes, you can use it if you give the right recipe and not make one up.” He said, “No, I just want the name and I’ll make up the recipe.” And I said,
“Okay, go ahead, but do me credit.”

M.H.C.: He did. What is the right recipe?

MR. STREET: Well, it’s just a very strong punch. You take any kind of fruit that’s in season, like peaches or strawberries, and just pour brandy over them and let them settle. The brandy sort of burns the fruit a little bit and gives it sort of a tang. About a day and a half is enough. Then you strain it and you have that base for a punch. I usually just make it and I put it in a big punch bowl and put some of that in, and then pour in Chablis wine to give it some body. And then when you serve it, you have a bottle of champagne, you know, and you just squirt that in just before you serve it and you can get a pretty good drink.

M.H.C.: It’s good?

MR. STREET: Oh, yes, sure—that fruit, and then we chopped up or sliced some oranges—it never was the same.

M.H.C.: I think that’s about all I have to ask, unless you have something you’d like to add.

MR. STREET: Oh, I never volunteer anything! Sometimes, you know—after you’ve left I’ll remember something I should have said, but right now . . . .

Notes

1 Steinbeck’s first wife, Carol Henning Steinbeck.
2 Steinbeck’s third wife and widow, Elaine Scott Steinbeck.
3 Miss Edith Ronald Mirrilees, with whom Steinbeck studied the writing of the short story at Stanford University. Later, Steinbeck wrote the Introduction for a volume of short stories by Miss Mirrilees which was published by Viking.
4 Member of the English Department at Stanford.
5 English Professor at Stanford.
6 English Professor at Stanford.
7 Henry David Gray, English Professor at Stanford.
8 Friend of the Street family who owned a summer home at Lake Tahoe.
10 Movie Director. President of the class of 1926 at Stanford.
11 Protagonist in To a God Unknown.
12 Dr. Lewis Madison Terman (1877–1956), who chaired the Psychology Department at Stanford University from 1922–42. The author of numerous books including The Measurement of Intelligence, Dr. Terman conducted research on gifted children and revised army tests and methods.
13 Special Student at Stanford.
14 Monterey Herald News Reporter.
15 The boat Steinbeck and Ricketts rented to make the trip to Baja California, chronicled in Sea of Cortez.
16 Anthony Berry, owner of the Western Flyer.
18 Pat Covici, to whom Steinbeck dedicated The Moon is Down with this inscription: "To Pat Covici: A Great Editor and a Great Friend." The Covici-Steinbeck correspondence is in the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.

19 Lewis Milestone, veteran director whose work includes the film of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men (1939).

20 Pare Lorenz, American documentarist, whose work includes The Plow That Broke the Plains and The River.

21 Steinbeck's second wife and the mother of his two sons, Gwyndolyn Conger Steinbeck.

22 Steinbeck's letters to Gwyn are in the Bancroft Library at the University of California.

23 A Monterey artist.

24 Richie Lovejoy's wife.

25 Steinbeck's younger sister, Mary Steinbeck Dekker.

26 Burgess Meredith, the actor, who played George in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, and was his friend thereafter.

27 An advertising promotion described in chapter XIX of Cannery Row.

28 Beth Ingels, who worked on the Monterey Herald, and was a long time friend of Carol and John Steinbeck. Beth and Carol ran a free-lance advertising agency for a brief period.

29 Susan M. Gregory, who taught English, Latin, and Spanish at Monterey High School.

30 Location of Mrs. Ebright's summer home at Lake Tahoe.

31 The Steinbeck Cottage at 147 11th Street in Pacific Grove.

32 Site of the Steinbeck summer home in New York.

33 In chapter 23 of Sweet Thursday, Sonny Boy serves Doc two doubles of "The Webster F. Street Lay-Away Plan—a Martini made with chartreuse instead of vermouth." Sonny Boy says it is "very good." Doc remembers it as "very effective."
"Western Biological sells bugs and snails and spiders, and rattlesnakes, and rats, and honey bees and gila monsters."

*Cannery Row*
A noted book collector, Adrian H. Goldstone is the co-author, with John R. Payne, of *John Steinbeck: A Bibliographical Catalogue of the Adrian H. Goldstone Collection*, published in 1974 by the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, where much of his collection is now housed. In the preface to this volume he recalls his friendship with Ben Abramson, the Chicago bookseller who introduced him to Steinbeck’s works. But he was already intimately familiar with the central California landscape and people that Steinbeck wrote about. A native Californian, Mr. Goldstone was nine years old at the time of the San Francisco earthquake and was trapped with his father by the raging fire when they went to examine the damage to his father’s wholesale business near Market Street and were forced to camp with other victims before being able to return home. As a young man, selling work clothes, he knew, as he says, “every rut and chuckhole” in Steinbeck country; for his sales route to workingman’s stores, general stores, and small department stores included travel by train,
horse-drawn stage, buggy, spring wagon, river steamer, and Model T. It was during this time that he came to know many ranchers, farmers, and their employees, including laborers from India, the Philippines, the Orient, and later, from Mexico. The following informal remarks, which extend Mr. Goldstone's recollections and his comments on Steinbeck, were taped by Dr. Martha Heasley Cox on February 3, 1975. Mr. Goldstone began by telling how his interest in book collecting started as an outgrowth of his habit of reading to occupy his idle hours while traveling on the road.

Robert H. Woodward

When I had time in various cities on Saturdays and Sundays, when many of the antiquarian bookstores are open, I used to go through the shops. I spent many, many days on Sixth Street in Los Angeles, . . . and of course in Chicago and New York . . . .

One of the various interesting characters that I met in Chicago was Ben Abramson. The Ben Abramson bookstore was called the Argus Book Shop, and it was a meeting place for literary people of Chicago—reporters, writers. The most intriguing man that I met there was the very well known—among book people, anyway—Vincent Starrett. Among the others was Christopher Morley. You could hardly go in there and spend a few hours there without being introduced to somebody that was in the field of letters . . . .

The story is told that when John Steinbeck was in Chicago he gravitated, as was quite natural, toward the Argus bookstore and that Ben Abramson helped to feed him. I haven't been able to authenticate that story . . . . But knowing Ben it could have easily have been true. However, it is undoubtedly true that it was Ben Abramson who introduced Steinbeck to Pascal Covici, and this started the friendship that endured as long as Mr. Covici was alive.

It was Ben who first told me about John Steinbeck. He always touted every author he had on the shelf. He couldn't possibly have a book that wasn't written by a genius; so it wasn't particularly impressive when he said, "Here's a young author out of the West who's going to make a name for himself, who's going to be great," because he said that about everybody. He had a very favorite author by the name of Claude Houghton who wrote a book called I Am Jonathan Scrivener, and he probably thought that was a better book than anything John Steinbeck wrote; but he never could convince me to buy a copy of anything by Houghton and I was probably very wise in my refusals . . . .

I believe that book collecting, like most everything else in this world, is successful simply because of hard work. I haven't found a tremendous success in buying books by going into stores haphazardly and finding things on their shelf . . . . The calls, however, on booksellers are very valuable. If a book dealer will know you as a person, rather than as a name, he will remember
you, and when something comes into his stock in which you are particularly interested, he will offer it to someone that he knows as a flesh-and-blood person rather than just someone with whom he has corresponded. In order to cultivate booksellers it's very often necessary to buy a book or so from a catalogue even if there is really nothing you want. I've amassed quite a collection of books about books simply because that was the only safe thing to buy and I wanted to keep the catalogues coming.

Among the folklore of the book collecting and bookselling business is the story of going into a second-hand bookstore and picking up a book for twenty-five cents or fifty cents or a dollar that's worth hundreds or thousands of dollars. And that's just what it is: folklore. It practically never happens. The average dealer knows much more about books than any collector; in fact, dealers have wonderful minds. A book collector often only collects in one field. He may be a doctor collecting books on medicine, a lawyer collecting books on law, an architect collecting books on buildings, but book dealers know something about books in nearly every field and it always amazes me how much they really do know. This doesn't mean that book collecting cannot be rewarding in the sense of owning something that becomes scarce and owning something that becomes valuable. I think the most important thing is for a collector to collect what he likes. If his judgment is good, he will be repaid. But simply to collect what is in vogue and what is in fashion among book collectors, or among stores, I don't think will turn out well. I believe that even today there are authors who are starting out, who are writing one, two or three books, sometimes even books of poetry, which some day will be known and recognized. Not all of them, of course. But if a person is interested in building a collection and he will shop the stores, if he will shop the catalogues and he'll buy what he likes, I think he'll get a great deal of pleasure out of it.

As far as Steinbeck's rarities are concerned, it's quite interesting that most of the real rarities that I have I got without paying for them, which doesn't mean that I purloined them. *Viva Zapata!* was given to me by a librarian friend in Ohio. The introduction to the Ricketts book which was done by John Steinbeck was made up in a very limited edition by Nathan Van Patten. The Harvard Library says there were only eleven copies of that introduction, but I think there were more. Probably twenty-five is a good guess. And then Nathan Van Patten gave them away to his friends, which I was fortunate enough to be numbered among.

Margie Cohn of the House of Books produced, I believe, forty or fifty copies of *The First Watch.* This was written by Steinbeck, signed by him. They paid him very little for it, and of course they gave it away to their best customers. There is a small book containing a Steinbeck letter. They wrote John Steinbeck a letter and asked him if he would do something for the, I believe it's *The Thinking Dog's Man,* and he declined, and he wrote a letter in which he begged off of the assignment. So they, quite improperly I would say, put his name on the cover of the book and printed this letter. As a
brochure to sell the book they put out an unknown number of copies of just that letter in a little pamphlet. I was able to secure one. There was another one offered in a bookseller’s catalogue out of New York, but I was too late to get that one. I wouldn’t be surprised if there are quite a few more around and that they will turn up some day if people are watchful. There are surely not too many of them.

You asked me a little before what I thought his best books were, and I have a vision of the future in which a man is leaving on a business trip from San Jose (which by this time is a large city stretching from the tip of the San Francisco Peninsula and taking in King City on the south), and he’s leaving by the approved route, which is a little bit of a knapsack packed on his back which takes him out through the atmosphere any place he wants to go. And on this trip he’s going to lunch in London. He has his long-range and short-range radio going, and he’s picking up signals from some of his friends, and there’s another one who’s also leaving San Jose going to lunch, but he’s going in a slightly southern direction, because he’s going down to Addis Ababa for an afternoon tea. And they ask him, “Did you ever hear of an author . . . who a couple of hundred years ago wrote by the name of John Steinbeck?” And the other man says, “Yes, I did. He’s the man that wrote Of Mice and Men.”

I think that that story or play, whichever you want to call it, has a lasting quality that will persevere after his other works are dated. I doubt very much if a hundred years from now that anyone will know what a harvest worker is. It will all be done mechanically. There won’t be anybody working in the fields at all, except a man pressing some buttons on top of a great big machine. The problems of the itinerant worker won’t be before the public because there won’t be itinerant workers.

Cannery Row won’t exist anymore except as an anachronism or a tourist attraction of something that happened in the long-gone-by days, such as the Pyramids, or the Sphinx, or Stonehenge, or something like that, so that these stories of Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat and The Grapes of Wrath won’t be topical anymore, because they won’t relate to anything that exists in the people’s lives. But the strengths and weaknesses that are shown in the short character sketches in Of Mice and Men have, in my opinion, an enduring quality. There are some people that write long, long novels and are not able to create characters. Dickens, of course, is a man who could people his books with characters that are easily remembered. But he wrote long novels in order to do that. In Of Mice and Men, with a paucity of words, Steinbeck was able to create people that it’s convenient to know and remember . . .

The problem with Steinbeck’s books is that his books when they reach the second-hand shelf sell very rapidly, and the rarities are so well known that a bookseller has no problem in disposing of them.

I believe now that there will be a little new rush of Steinbeck collecting. This always happens when a new bibliography is published. The book collector gets the book, gets out his own collection, and wants to find out
whether he has the first issue or not. And in many of the Steinbeck books up
to the time of the publication of our bibliography there was no way to
authentically distinguish between the first, second, third, and sometimes
fourth states of some of his books. So I think this will cause a kind of a rush
of new interest in Steinbeck first editions.

*The Moon Is Down* creates a bibliographical puzzle in which we have made
some arbitrary decisions. Undoubtedly the publishers gave it to three printers
to produce—one unnamed, the other the Haddon Craftsmen, the other the
Kingsport Press. We have decided—possibly correctly, possibly
incorrectly—that the unnamed publisher put out the first books, because
there are seven hundred copies bound in wrappers for distribution to
booksellers. And we presume that in most cases these promotional copies are
sent out before the publication of the hard-cover books—first, to get them
out quickly; second, to save the cost of the binding. But the purpose of it is
to encourage the sale of the book. They are not sent out for reviewers.
Reviewers insist, as the prerogative of their exalted profession, to have a
hard-cover copy which they can sell later and thus add to their income. So we
think that the unnamed publisher who published the seven hundred copies in
wrappers—and this is the one with the error on page 112—was the first
printer.9

But we would have to be there and have somebody watching on the street
at each of these presses, wherever they happened to be, with a time clock and
see which one took up the first book off the press first. It’s pretty difficult to
do that at this late date . . . .

It might be interesting to note that Steinbeck started writing his first book
in almost the first hours of the Depression. It was in October of 1929 in which
*Variety*—the magazine of the stage—came out with its famous headline saying
“Wall Street Lays an Egg.” . . . This was the year that John Steinbeck decided
to put out his first book—and a very bad book at that—called *Cup of Gold*. It
was published by Robert M. McBride of New York that promptly went
broke, as did many of the business people of the entire United States . . . . His
second book10 was published in 1932, by Brewer, Warren and Putnam, and
they promptly went broke also. And they sold their remaining books to a
Robert O. Ballou,11 who also went broke. And they sold their rights to
Covici-Friede,12 who followed these four publishers that I’ve named into the
bankruptcy court or into the Board of Trade and all went out of business.
John Steinbeck didn’t, and his relationship with Pascal Covici lasted for a
long time and supported both Mr. Steinbeck and Mr. Covici as long as they
lived . . . .

The merchants that I met during the days of the so-called Okie invasion
were horrified at the class of people that they encountered who had to come
to California in search of work. An interesting point that I’ve never resolved
in my own mind is whether or not the assertions are true that these people
were invited to come out here to apply for work and then found substandard
wages when they got here. I’ve never been able to substantiate that or to get
anything on the subject. There has been, of course, continual advertising by . . . chambers of commerce and organizations . . . who advertise in the periodicals and invite people to come to California as tourists and to spend their money. But I've never seen an advertisement that came out of California or any place else that solicited people here to come to work and to get jobs. Most of the advertising I've heard along those lines has been just the contrary. As at the present time, there's considerable advertising telling people not to go to Alaska to work on the pipeline because they've got plenty of people up there.

My experience with what merchants told me, in Fresno and in the "valley," 13 was that these were people they had not encountered before. They said they were used to difficult people. They had refugees from Greece and Turkey and the Balkan states, and Japanese and Chinese and Filipinos and Hindus, and they thought that they had met everybody. But they found that these once-farmers from the central part of the country were a different class of people that they had yet to encounter.

They would tell the story—one story of a man who came in accompanied by three or four of his—probably—relatives, and he wanted to buy a shirt. These blue chambray shirts—usually they come "pinned-up." They're folded, and people usually buy them that way and take them home. But this man wanted the shirt unpinned. He wanted to open it up. He asked all kinds of questions—whether it would wear well, whether it would wash well, what it would do, and whether it would be satisfactory; and he was assured, of course, by the storekeeper, that it would suit his purpose and was a very good value. After that was finally concluded—and the shirt was very plainly marked with the price of ninety-five cents—he said, "Well, I'll give you twenty-five cents for it."

It seemed that their method of buying—and I haven't been able to find much proof of this elsewhere—was that they wanted to bargain for everything. Now I know if you go to Turkey today you are told that you will never get the right price right offhand, that they love to bargain, and you have to start in by making them a low offer and hope that you do well with it, but I doubt very much if you do. I like the American system better where you can see the price, and you can decide whether to take it or leave it. Now I've given you one particular story where—I asked the man what he did. Well, he said, when he recovered his sanity and his face turned from red back to its natural color, he was able to order them out of the store . . . .

Notes

1 Abramson (1898–1955) is known to Steinbeck scholars as an astute and discriminating book dealer who early recognized Steinbeck's ability. It was Abramson, according to Peter Lisca, who introduced Pascal Covici (see note 4, below) to Steinbeck's first two novels and thereby changed the young novelist's career. Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958), pp. 74–75.
2 Starrett (1886–1974) was a Chicago journalist and noted bookman, an expert on Sherlock Holmes. With Christopher Morley he founded the Baker Street Irregulars. He was a close friend of Abramson, who wrote the entry about Starrett in Twentieth Century Authors, by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), pp. 1328–29.

3 Morley (1890–1957) was a popular novelist, essayist, and dramatist and was a contributing editor to the Saturday Review of Literature from 1924 to 1940.

4 Covici (1888–1964), Steinbeck’s close friend and editor, was associated with Donald Friede in the publishing firm of Covici-Friede, New York, when he became familiar with Steinbeck and published Tortilla Flat (1935). When Covici-Friede was taken over by creditors in 1938, Covici became executive editor for Viking Press and served until his death with that firm, which published Steinbeck’s major works beginning with The Long Valley (1938). In 1943 Covici selected the contents for The Portable Steinbeck (Viking Press) and was the recipient of the letters Steinbeck wrote during the composition of East of Eden (1952). Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters was published by Viking in 1969.

5 “Claude Houghton” was the pseudonym of the prolific English novelist Claude Houghton Oldfield (1889–1961). I Am Jonathan Scrivener was published in London in 1930 and in New York in 1935. Houghton had, according to Francis McDermott, “a poetic, original, and deeply intellectual mind, a vivid and virile personality intensely absorbed in the spiritual qualities of life.” Quoted in Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1046.


7 Printed in an edition of sixty copies by the Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles, for presentation by Marguerite and Louis Henry Cohn.

8 A Letter from John Steinbeck Explaining Why He Could Not Write an Introduction for This Book was published in 1964 as an eight-page pamphlet and was also included in The Thinking Dog’s Man, by Ted Patrick (New York: Random House, 1964).

9 Goldstone and Payne note that “On page 112, line 11, there is a period larger than the other periods in this book between the words ‘talk’ and ‘this.’” John Steinbeck: A Bibliographical Catalogue of the Adrian H. Goldstone Collection (Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 1974), p. 54.


11 Ballou published the third issue of the first edition of The Pastures of Heaven in 1932 as well as To a God Unknown in 1933.

12 According to Goldstone and Payne, Covici-Friede published, in addition to Tortilla Flat (1935), the fourth issue of the first edition of The Pastures of Heaven and the second issue of the first edition of To a God Unknown in the same year, as well as In Dubious Battle in 1936 and Of Mice and Men and The Red Pony in 1937.

13 The “valley,” according to Mr. Goldstone, is “the great Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys from Redding at the north to Bakersfield at the south.” Goldstone and Payne, p. 10.

One of the conspicuous remaining gaps in Steinbeck scholarship is a reliable biography. Richard Astro has made a brilliant and informative beginning in his treatment of Steinbeck and Edward Ricketts because he uncovered the significant biographical, intellectual, and critical relationships between those two men that had long been acknowledged but never completely investigated. Yet a full scale critical biography of Steinbeck’s life and works is still needed. Unfortunately Nelson Valjean’s book on Steinbeck, subtitled “An intimate biography of his California years,” does not meet this necessity. A native Californian and former newspaperman, Valjean has been a lifelong admirer of Steinbeck. His personal glimpse of the novelist is the result of forty years of interest, dating from 1930. The major portion of the book covers Steinbeck’s movements in the 1920s and 1930s, with excursions into his family’s history, John’s youth and early manhood, and, very briefly, his post-1940 career.

Valjean’s information is supplied in large part from personal interviews provided by a number of people who knew Steinbeck, principally Carlton “Dook” Sheffield, Steinbeck’s room-mate at Stanford University and friend since 1920. Sheffield read much of Steinbeck’s early work in manuscript form, and he often edited Steinbeck’s early fictional attempts and suggested changes (p. 117). He opened his large private collection of Steinbeck manuscripts and letters without restriction. Indeed, Sheffield is the source for a large portion of Valjean’s biography, as are George Mors, Lloyd Shebley, Frank Fenton and others, though the precise degree to which Steinbeck and Valjean were friendly is never clearly revealed. The dust jacket blurb claims: “In Salinas, Valjean became acquainted with the Steinbeck family and Steinbeck’s boyhood friends. In 1939, he and Steinbeck became still closer friends.”
Checking the accuracy of Valjean’s reportage is a difficult task until a thorough biography becomes available. Some of Valjean’s accounts—for instance, the incident in 1935 at Ed Ricketts’ lab on Cannery Row where a woman observed a rattlesnake killing and eating a mouse (later, with sexual overtones, this event was the basis for Steinbeck’s story “The Snake”)—can be corroborated by similar reports in Astro’s John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist (1973) and Webster Street’s “John Steinbeck: A Reminiscence” (in Astro and Hayashi, eds., Steinbeck: The Man and His Work, 1971). That Street was the source of information in all three instances eliminates factual error. Other facts, however, are flimsily presented because Valjean’s concern with Steinbeck’s intellectual and creative life is merely superficial.

One of the most important formative experiences of Steinbeck’s early years was his attendance at the Hopkins Marine Station during the summer of 1923. Valjean passes over that experience in two scant pages, reducing it to an account of a frog hunting expedition (which was later transmogrified for inclusion in Cannery Row), and an account of the eating habits of John, his sister Mary, and Sheffield during that summer. The enormous influence of W.E. Ritter’s organismal theories on Steinbeck is never mentioned. Joel Hedgpeth, in his essay “Philosophy on Cannery Row” (in Steinbeck: The Man and His Work), has already established that C.V. Taylor was Steinbeck’s zoology class instructor that summer, a small fact Valjean does not acknowledge but which is, nevertheless, important. In the matter of Edith Mirrielees, Steinbeck’s short story teacher at Stanford and a woman whom Steinbeck considered to be one of his three best teachers (see California Teachers Association Journal, 1945; the other two were Emma Hawkins, a high school science and math teacher, and his close friend Ed Ricketts), Valjean writes that “Steinbeck failed to leave a written appraisal of [her] . . . . One memorable Stanford teacher in five years—just one! By Steinbeck’s clear implication, that single imaginative and creative instructor had made his entire university career worthwhile” (p. 95). Valjean is apparently unaware of it, but Steinbeck wrote a preface to the Compass edition of Mirrielees’ Story Writing (Viking Press, 1962) in which he publically acknowledged his indebtedness to her.

Although the dust jacket informs us that Valjean “is one of the few writers able to compile a definitive Steinbeck biography,” John Steinbeck: The Errant Knight is little more than personal gossip and literary anecdote, much of it related in one way or another to Steinbeck’s predilections for sexual and alcoholic adventures. Some episodes are slightly amusing, as this one in 1923:

There was also the evening of John’s amorous tryst with a Palo Alto girl on a hillside behind the campus. Their couche d’amour was gently sloping. Locked in each other’s arms and oblivious to the effects of gravity, they rolled from the top of the hill to the bottom, engaging in their intimacies all the way. It was no mean feat. During a subsequent
literary discussion with Steinbeck and several others, the well-read young lady casually referred to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* as a real triumph. Only John knew what she really meant. (p. 73)

Other adventures are merely pathetic, as when Lloyd Shebley found Steinbeck, in drunken anger, “leaning from the window, both arms outside and extending downward . . . holding [a] girl by her ankles, upside-down, her dress, down around her head” (p. 112), threatening to drop her unless she became “more friendly.” Sometimes Steinbeck’s experiences and acquaintances were used in his fiction. Flora Wood, “a madam whose girls were as beautiful and well behaved as any in the trade” (p. 149), emerged as Dora Williams in *Tortilla Flat* and Dora Flood in *Cannery Row*.

Obviously Valjean’s focus is on certain dimensions of Steinbeck’s personality, with occasional references to his fictive world and glimpses into formative influences where they fit the framework of Valjean’s conception of Steinbeck. The portrait of Steinbeck that emerges is that of a tough, physical, sometimes eccentric person, whose single-mindedness and iconoclastic attitudes often brought him into conflict with others. He was a “loner” (p. 49) and a “maverick” (p. 53). By 1923 “John knew that only one thing in the world mattered to him—a literary career. He would be a writer or nothing! An author or a bum! To hell with Stanford’s basic requirements that would get him a degree!” (p. 64). In place of a satisfying and deep investigation into the springs and motives of Steinbeck’s creative preoccupations, Valjean offers exclamatory statements and the hackneyed theory that rebelliousness and mischievousness (p. 19) are acceptable character traits for an artist and can adequately explain creativity. This sentimental and superficial image of Steinbeck as an errant California knight eternally drinking liquor, pursuing women, and scribbling notes for stories (p. 113) is given currency throughout the book. When it comes time to account for the end of that image, Valjean’s language evokes a nostalgic sense of loss for his version of John Steinbeck who must now be given up (in 1950) to his third wife, Elaine Scott, and a promising but unpredictable future in New York—all of which Valjean is unprepared to treat in his book:

On that complete and unexpected turnaround, Steinbeck’s California life came to a close—and a full life it had been. Yet wasn’t it only yesterday that he was a boy in a small town telling ghost stories on the front porch? And yesterday, when nine, that he fell under the spell of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*? And yesterday, too, that he entered Stanford to become a writer? And now Elaine . . . . (p. 181)

Valjean must be credited, however, with two virtues. First, his book develops the idea of Steinbeck’s commitment to becoming a writer. He marshalls substantial proof of Steinbeck’s early writing career and the extent to which he seriously practiced his craft despite years of accumulated
rejection slips (p. 88). Through the generosity of Sheffield, Valjean quotes from a ledger which Steinbeck kept while he was working on drafts of *Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*. The ledger reveals "Steinbeck starting a practice he would follow through life, his indulgence in 'warmup exercises' by writing footnotes to a friend . . . ." (pp. 119–120). The section of the ledger devoted to "New Novel" (later *To a God Unknown*) is valuable for the light it sheds on Steinbeck's intention: "The story is a parable, Duke. The story of a race, growth and death. Each figure is a population, and the stones, the trees, the muscled mountains are the world—but not the world apart from man—the world and man—the one inseparable unit plus his environment" (p. 123).

Secondly, the book contains two sections of previously unpublished photographs of Steinbeck, his friends, and places he lived and worked. The photographs and the ledger excerpts are hardly worth the price of the book, but they do add documented muscle to this skeletal frame of Steinbeck's life and work.

Robert Demott


"Steinbeck is a flawed artist"; this "is the consensus among critics," according to Howard Levant in *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study* (p. 1). He finds the flaw in Steinbeck's "continuing difficulty in fusing a structure and specific materials into a harmonious unity" (p. 2). So Levant takes up each novel in turn from 1929 to 1961, examining the fitting of materials to structure in each. This procedure leads to some good observations, but also to a rather dry treatment of the novels. It is the kind of criticism which studies a literary work as an autonomous structure. There is nothing about background, influences, substructures, underlying content. Levant tends toward abstraction: we get the skeleton of novels with some review of the content.

Levant starts out with remarks on Steinbeck's non-teleology or "is"-thinking. Yet he doesn't seem to understand it. He points to realistic descriptions as examples of "is"—thinking. And he interprets every novel, early and late, in terms of good and evil in opposition. For example, he distinguishes the good and evil characters in *Of Mice and Men*, or divides a character into good and evil aspects: "Lennie is good in his intentions, but evil in fact" (p. 139). But this was not Steinbeck's meaning, as he made clear in his remarks about the book. These people did what they did; they were not to be judged good or bad; this was something that happened. It is only when
Steinbeck came to *East of Eden* that he deliberately abandoned non-teleology and set himself to organize a novel around the theme of good and evil. Yet Levant finds “is”-thinking in the last four novels.

In discussing structure and materials Levant never looks beyond or beneath the manifest content of a novel. Yet do not an author’s prototypes and sources determine his structure to some extent? For example, Cabell’s influence is perceptible in *Cup of Gold*; what effect has *Jurgen* (e.g.) upon the structure? What effect has Jeffers’ *Women of Point Sur* had upon the structure of *To a God Unknown*? Levant almost entirely ignores the mythical dimension of Steinbeck’s novels. Yet Steinbeck consciously drew on one or more myths in composing each novel.

In fact, Levant seems anti-mythical. He undervalues Steinbeck’s debt to the Arthur legend in *Tortilla Flat*. He finds labored and strained my demonstration that Steinbeck closely followed Malory’s structure and materials. And he adds that my “method will serve any cause” (p. 54, note 6). Such remarks are easily tossed off by someone who hasn’t done the spadework. If one reads *Tortilla Flat* and Malory side by side, the parallel asserts itself; there is no need of force or strain. After all this, Levant himself insists on the parallel (Steinbeck himself said that he followed Malory’s structure); only in his view, this was the wrong structure for Steinbeck: he forced his materials into it.

Levant completely ignores *Paradise Lost* and Satan’s rebellion in *In Dubious Battle* in spite of the title. He barely mentions the Exodus legend for *The Grapes of Wrath* and does nothing with it as a structural factor. He cannot ignore Cain and Abel in *East of Eden*, but somehow he fumbles the myth. He calls Cain a hunter, although he is expressly said to be a farmer in Genesis 4. Levant misses the theme of herdsman-farmer conflict entirely.

Likewise, the concept of group organism is slighted as a structural constituent and as material for novels from 1935 to 1947. Levant misunderstands the concept, distinguishing the group from group-man (p. 98), one good, the other evil. From *In Dubious Battle* he concludes “that group-man is a creature of violence.” But group-man is man as a cell in the group-organism. Groups vary in character: mobs are violent; families and workers’ unions may be cooperative. Strange is Levant’s statement that the town “is an artificial formation of group-man” (p. 190). He misinterprets Steinbeck’s sentence in *The Pearl*, “A town is a thing like a colonial animal,” putting a wrong emphasis on “thing” and interpreting “colonial animal” strangely as “an illusion of organic life.” Levant has not read *Sea of Cortez* carefully. There Steinbeck points out exactly what he means by a colonial animal, such phenomena as the tunicate colony. Are tunicate colonies artificial? Levant’s distinction of town as artificial group from family or village as “organic” is invalid, likewise the antithesis between village and town which he reads into *The Pearl*: the brush huts are not a separate village but the outskirts of the town.
There are several misstatements of detail. For example, Shark Wicks did not find "financial value" in Alice's virginity, as Levant asserts (Pastures of Heaven); this is a misreading of Shark's feelings about Alice. Helen Van Deventer did not kill her daughter when she found Bert Munroe talking to her, but hours later (p. 43). Pat Humbert did not move into the barn after his parents' deaths (p. 45); he confined himself to the kitchen, closing off the other rooms, and moved into the barn at the end of the story. Junius Maltby was certainly not loved by everyone (p. 46); we are told that his neighbors disliked him for his laziness and neglect. In The Wayward Bus the river has not yet washed out a bridge (p. 221); the point is that if the bus crosses the bridge it may get caught within the river's loop. In Sweet Thursday Old Jay is not described as an old man; he is not a youth, but surely not past middle age: his hair is yellow.

There is much else that I could say, but space forbids. On the whole Levant's book seems to me a flawed performance. And I don't think that he has put his finger on Steinbeck's flaw.

Joseph Fontenrose
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*San Jose Studies* is published three times per year in February, May and November. Subscription prices are:

- $8.00 per year for individuals ($10.00 for foreign subscriptions)
- $15.00 per year for institutions
- $3.50 for single copies

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