



STEINBECK AND THE SEA

Proceedings of a Conference
held at the Marine Science
Center Auditorium, Newport,
Oregon

May 4, 1974

Richard Astro,
Joel W. Hedgpeth, editors

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OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM

Publication no. ORESU-W-74-004

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introduction

Richard Astro

When John Steinbeck died in 1968, most members of the "literary establishment" had already concluded that he was not a major modern author. Despite the fact that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize, they insisted that even Steinbeck's best novels do not carry complete conviction because his philosophy of life is inadequate for a serious novelist. During those difficult years in the middle 60's when most critics were viewing the human condition with an acute pessimism, Steinbeck's professed commitment to "declare and celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit," his belief in the perfectibility of mankind and his contempt for "the tin-horn medicants of low-calorie despair" seemed to many a naive optimism left over from a simpler age. Even more troubling was Steinbeck's advocacy of the American presence in Viet Nam (a position which he later rejected) which infuriated the critical Left who became convinced that Steinbeck had abandoned the depression-style militancy which, they felt, is the strength of his most important novels.

The state of Steinbeck criticism in 1968 reflects the novelist's general decline in popularity. Even after he won the Nobel Prize, no one made a serious effort to issue a standard edition of his writings. In fact, all of his books were not even in print. There was not a single full-length biography about him, and there were but a handful of critical studies of his works. Even the best of these do not deal with the full range of his writings but concentrate almost wholly on his fiction. Not more than a few pages had been written on such works as *Sea of Cortez*, *The Forgotten Village*, *A Russian Journal*, *Viva Zapata!* and *Travels with Charley*. There were almost as few important shorter articles about Steinbeck. The bibliographies published in *American Literature* between 1950-1955 mention only three Steinbeck items (two of which are long book reviews), and this during the years when Steinbeck finished his biggest and perhaps most misunderstood novel, *East of Eden*.

In short, in 1968, there were only a few serious scholars who did not share the feeling of Harry T. Moore (author of the first book-length study of Steinbeck's novels) that Steinbeck used "a wooden prose to project a mawkish content." Indeed, the best Moore can say about Steinbeck in--of all things--a memorial statement written just after the novelist's death, is that Steinbeck remained "a man of

good will. In the best sense he meant well. Even though the future may determine that his literary status is that of a Louis Bromfield or a Bess Streeter Aldrich, the fact remains that he was a very fine and generous human being."

Well, this is 1974 and the picture has changed. On one hand, the publication of *Journal of a Novel* (the *East of Eden* letters) which provides the most revealing autobiographical portrait of the artist yet published, and public statements by some of Steinbeck's long-time friends and acquaintances confirm Moore's belief that Steinbeck was "a man of good will," a "fine and generous human being." But important new books, journal articles, and conference papers about his works conclusively affirm that his talent is not that of a Louis Bromfield or a Bess Streeter Aldrich, but rather that he is a major American writer who in his own tempo and with his own voice defined and gave meaning to the complicated nature of the human experience.

There have been those who have diagnosed as unimportant and irrelevant all attacks on Steinbeck on ideological grounds and have asserted instead that there is an experience in reading his works that is purely existential and beyond cavil. One author points to Steinbeck's sketch of an early morning encounter with some farm laborers on a dusty road and notes that this is a scene of intrinsic purity; that it contains a fresh, non-conceptual awareness which is not vulnerable to the attacks by those who would assess a writer's achievement by the tenacity with which he supports a given political dogma. Others have acknowledged what they regard as the shortcomings in Steinbeck's philosophy of life but have maintained that his important novels, like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* will endure for their narrative power; for their accurate observation; and above all, for their human sympathy. These critics affirm that Steinbeck was an original stylist who expressed his ideas in language that is still alive and vital because it was entirely his own.

Still others have reexamined Steinbeck's philosophy of life and have tried (with varying success) to systematize his beliefs into a credible world-view which serves as an interpretive base for his fiction and non-fiction. Along the way, they have concluded that many of the flawed assessments of Steinbeck's canon resulted from the limited horizons of the critics themselves who almost always carry out their investigations of a writer's work within the constricted framework of literary forms and traditions. A couple of examples may be helpful.

At a recent meeting of the Steinbeck Society in New York, Peter Lisca (whose *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* is the most comprehensive study of the novelist) reported on a teaching experience he had at the University of Florida. "In successive academic terms," Lisca notes, "I held . . . a Steinbeck seminar with graduate students and then with undergraduate honor students."

From the first, I learned very little; from my undergraduates very much. My graduate students were already in a professional rut, reading literature exclusively in literary terms. But my undergraduates were still taking courses in psychology, anthropology, sociology, religion, philosophy, etc. From these areas of study they brought to the novels and short stories a live knowledge and interest which resulted in some very original and publishable papers.

About the same time, I had an analogous teaching experience at Oregon State University. In my undergraduate seminar on Steinbeck, one of my students--a psychology major--brought to the class insights from Jungian psychology which provided startling new insights to two of Steinbeck's short stories. An anthropology major wrote an outstanding essay on *Sea of Cortez* which included anthropological insights about man's sea-memory. Two oceanography students contributed something I had learned a year or so earlier: that anyone really interested in Steinbeck must have at least a general knowledge of the discipline of marine biology and an understanding of the life and work of Steinbeck's closest friend and intellectual companion, marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts.

In short, Lisca and I learned that Steinbeck's orientation was less toward the strictly literary world than it was to the world of great ideas, of great books. [His area of interest was greater than that of most novelists, and so, therefore, must be that of his critics.] Finally, Lisca notes, and I agree, that while these new studies of Steinbeck have provided some fresh and valid understandings, "Steinbeck's road to Xanadu lies yet before us."

Joel Hedgpeth and I proposed a conference on "Steinbeck and the Sea" to Bill Wick, Director of the Oregon State University Sea Grant College Program, because we believed that such a meeting would open new vistas to students of Steinbeck. Bill concurred (which means Sea Grant agreed to support the conference), and Joel and I set ourselves to the task of planning a program of speakers who, among other things, would assess responsibly Steinbeck's interest in and knowledge of marine biology which, we

agreed, is largely responsible for his enduring contribution to American letters.

We invited three kinds of speakers. First, we invited Tetsumaro Hayashi of Ball State University, who is the Editor of the *Steinbeck Quarterly* and the author of the finest Steinbeck bibliography. We invited Jackson J. Benson of San Diego State University who is completing work on the definitive biography of the novelist. And we invited Peter Copek of our own English department who has assessed Steinbeck's contribution to American literature from perspectives in current fiction.

Second, we invited those scientists who, free from the academic biases of even the best literary critics, could examine the range and magnitude of Steinbeck's knowledge of marine science. We asked Fred Tarp, an ichthyologist from Contra Costa College in California, who, like Steinbeck, studied marine biology at the Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove, California. We asked Arthur W. Martin of the Department of Zoology at the University of Washington to talk about the kinds of scientific matters that interested Steinbeck. We asked Willard Bascom, former Director of Project Mohole, to talk about Steinbeck's role on that famous expedition.

... anyone really interested in Steinbeck must have at least a general knowledge of the discipline of marine biology ...

Because we realized that Steinbeck was above all a man of his time, deeply moved by the social, economic and political developments in the world around him, we felt it necessary to invite an historian who would evaluate Steinbeck's achievement from the perspective of the age in which he wrote. And so we asked William Appleman Williams, the internationally known historian, to speak on the subject of Steinbeck and the spirit of the 1930's. Finally, to provide balance, and additional interest, we asked film maker Donald Wrye to show the U.S.I.A. film of Steinbeck which he wrote, produced, and directed, and to comment on his view that Steinbeck's metaphor of life was not a fountain but a tidepool.

Besides telling our speakers the general theme of our conference, we did nothing to dictate the contents of their talks except to urge that they not address themselves to pedantic questions about Steinbeck with even more pedantic answers. We believed

then--we believe now--that creative, responsible scholarship should stimulate, not undermine discussion. We wanted our speakers to send out exploring waves of thought; we wanted to stimulate our audience to read more of Steinbeck's work so that *they*, like the good biologists Steinbeck describes in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, might take the time "to think and to look and to consider" and make certain that "nothing is wasted, no star is lost."

The papers in this volume are the record of that conference, held May 4, 1974, at the Oregon State University Marine Science Center in Newport, Oregon. Originally, we made no provision to publish the conference proceedings so that the talks by Willard Bascom (who called Steinbeck "a good amateur biologist looking over the shoulder of a professional") and Don Wrye (who talked about the political climate which surrounded the making of his U.S.I.A. film), which were not written addresses, could not be reproduced for inclusion in this volume.

The remainder of the talks are printed here with few editorial changes, except for those minor alterations which seemed necessary in order to convert them into essays for a reading audience. The first section, "Steinbeck as Man and Artist," contains Joel Hedgpeth's conference introduction and his tribute to Steinbeck as a kind of naturalist who studies the world about him because of his love for it and faith in it as that through which his own life has meaning. Tetsumaro Hayashi then conducts a survey of the range of Steinbeck's artistic achievement, from his poetic prose and genial sense of humor to his diverse activities as a novelist, journalist, dramatist, essayist and diarist.

Section two, "The Novelist as Scientist," opens with Jackson Benson's essay about the conflict in Steinbeck's fiction between "the wondrous" and "the objective." Benson asks the important question whether a novelist can be a true scientist at all and still attain measurable success as a writer of fiction. Fred Tarp then assesses Steinbeck's early interest in and knowledge of the seashore and makes some personal observations about what he calls the symbiotic relationship between Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts. And Arthur Martin's discussion of the sex life of *Octopus dofleini martini* is, he suggests, an example of the kind of esoteric knowledge Steinbeck and Ricketts shared in their many discussions.

The final section, "Steinbeck in Perspective," contains William Appleman Williams' compelling appraisal of Steinbeck as an "innocent" full of feeling and emotion who might have used his innocence as a springboard to wisdom, but instead became

the symbolic spokesman of a reformism that fails. "Steinbeck," Williams insists, "was an anguished cry at the end of our twilight. He is not a beacon to guide us at our midnight." The last selection is Peter Copek's comparative study of "Steinbeck among the Moderns." Copek comments that much modern fiction exists in a technological heaven of its own. He notes that whereas Steinbeck's works celebrate human feeling and sensibility so that for him "the Word was made man," many modern writers do not feel compelled to represent human life at all, so that for a writer like Anthony Burgess, "the Word is all the flesh I need."

Reading over the selections in this volume, I am struck even more by their diversity, by their varying subject matter and by the different approaches taken by each author. And that's as it should be. Not every reader of this volume will find every article valuable. And few, if any, readers will find any final answers to the major issues in Steinbeck scholarship. And that's also as it should be. Yet, each author--in his own voice--makes the vital inquiries.

Perhaps one of these days we'll get to Xanadu, or at least to that junction in the road when it is time to slow down.

When books beget books and articles beget articles to the extent that Steinbeck enthusiasts stop evaluating Steinbeck and start evaluating each other, we'll call a moratorium. But not quite yet, for the important questions need to be asked before

they can be answered. And that is the reason for a meeting on "Steinbeck and the Sea" and for the publication of the essays in this volume.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to William Q. Wick, Director of the Sea Grant College Program at Oregon State University, for his belief in and continuing support of an idea. Bill Wick demonstrated the oft-neglected principle that it is possible to accomplish something new and innovative if your energies are directed toward problem solving and not toward complaining. My thanks go also to Daniel Panshin, Jim Folts, Jan Johnson, Ronda Reagan and Steve Covey of Sea Grant, to Dean John Byrne and Professor James McCauley of the School of Oceanography, and to Sheryl Ace of the Oregon State Research Office who helped take the pain out of planning a conference. My thanks go also to Robert MacVicar, President of Oregon State University, who recognized the importance of the artist's relation to the sea and supported the conference enthusiastically. And I want to thank Robert Frank and Tim Perkins of the Department of English at Oregon State University and Don Giles and Marlene Lund of the O.S.U. Marine Science Center for their help with a million details. My deepest thanks go to my wife, Betty, who helped more than she'll ever know from the day when Joel Hedgpeth and I conceived the idea for the Newport conference through to the publication of this volume of proceedings.

steinbeck as man and artist

ESCAPE FROM SALINAS

Joel W. Hedgpeth

In the days of John Steinbeck's boyhood, Salinas was a farmers' town like dozens of others in California: the same Main Street, with the usual dry goods emporium, drug store, hardware and farm instrument store, pool-hall, saloon, newspaper and job printing; and, on the unpaved side streets, the blacksmith shop, already on its way to becoming a garage, the lumber yard and feed and grain stores near the railroad station. In the summer, such towns were hot, dry and somnolent. Salinas, however, was only a few miles from the sea, open to the cooling summer fogs with their smell of the sea. There were, of course, many hot and dusty days nevertheless, as it may have been when John rode his pony down the unpaved street near his home, but there was the family cottage at Pacific Grove about twenty miles away. Like many other families in the middle of things, the Steinbecks escaped the summer doldrums of their own community by going to the seashore.

The cottage at Pacific Grove was only a few blocks from the sea, and in those days there was even less to interest a boy in that town than in Salinas; inevitably he walked along that shore, one of the world's most beautiful seacoasts. Many years later he wrote to Joseph Henry Jackson, literary critic of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, "nothing gives me more pleasure than the little bugs on the rocks."

By that time, however, John Steinbeck had taken a course in zoology at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station, about half a mile from the family cottage on 11th Street, had become a friend of Edward F. Ricketts and with him had written *Sea of Cortez*. He often stopped by Hopkins Marine Station to chat with the professors there, especially the late Rolf Bolin, the well-known ichthyologist. He loved the ideas of biology and had a keen eye for interesting creatures on the rocks at low tide. Most of all, he admired biologists, "the tenors of society," and now and then wished he might have become one. He learned much from his friend Ed Ricketts, who thought John had the keenest eyes for collecting interesting specimens of anyone he had ever known. Steinbeck's interest in the sea and its scientific aspects continued until his final years; in 1962 he eagerly accepted the invitation of his friend Willard Bascom to witness and write about the first attempt to drill a hole into the bottom of the ocean.

The participants invited to represent Steinbeck's interest in the sea have had the common experience of residing at Pacific Grove; two of them, Arthur W. Martin and Fred H. Tarp, were students at Hopkins Marine Station in their graduate years, and Willard Bascom was an engineering student of beach processes from the University of California. Dr. Martin did his graduate time at Hopkins before Steinbeck or Ricketts became famous and did not know them, but his research interest in the sex life of the octopus would have delighted and fascinated Ed and John. Dr. Tarp, a student of Rolf Bolin, was in residence at Hopkins during those last hectic years when Ed had become famous as the Doc of *Cannery Row*. Willard Bascom, as the friend most closely associated with Steinbeck's interest in the sea in later years, brought to the symposium a fresh view of the eminent man of letters involved at the beginning of one of the significant scientific and engineering projects of our time.

The Mohole Project was one of the activities that aroused the public interest, especially in Congress, that led to the establishment of the national Sea Grant Program. Through his article about the project for *Life* magazine, John Steinbeck contributed in a significant way to this public interest. He certainly would have approved of the Sea Grant idea, and we hope, of this symposium in spite of his antipathy to the literary critics. From Ed Ricketts he learned to appreciate sound research, and he shared with Ed a disdain for the sterile, dehydrated approach of the cabinet naturalist who has no interesting ideas.

This symposium is a reminder that the Sea Grant Program has wider scope and purpose than teaching fishermen how to catch more fish or improve canning methods; for the implicit understanding of its broader purposes there could be no better spokesman than John Steinbeck, who saw the rise and fall of Cannery Row, learned the ways of seashore animals and participated in significant studies of the sea.

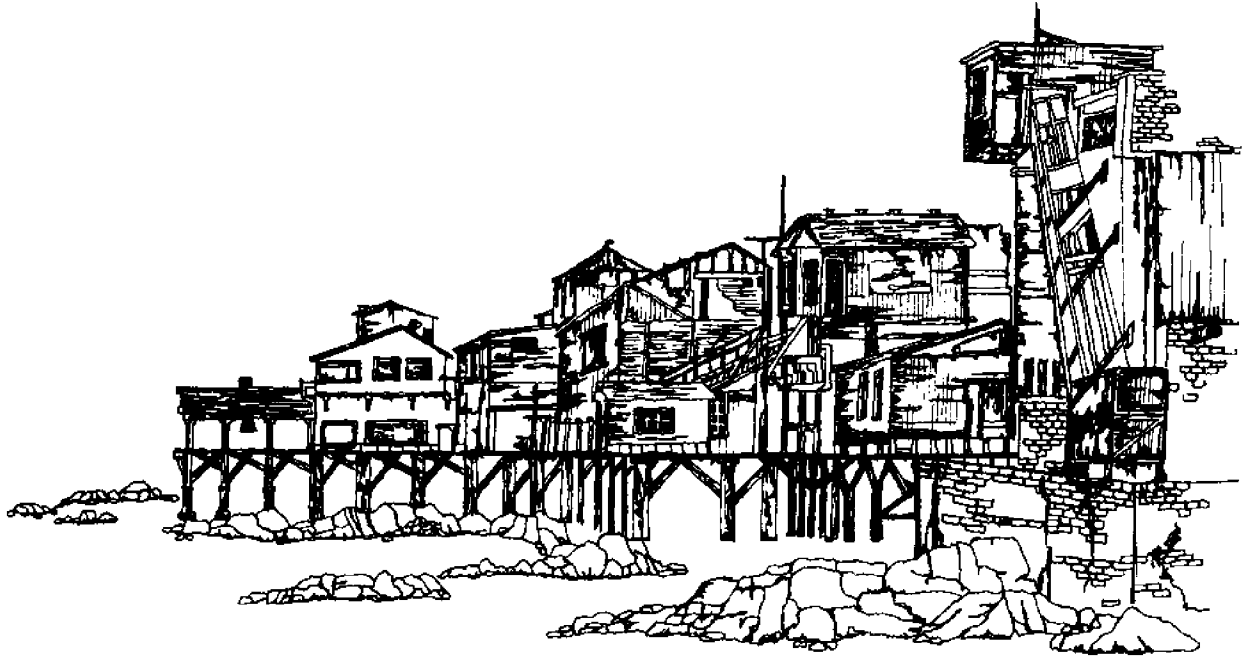


RECENT STEINBECK STUDIES
IN THE UNITED STATES

Tetsumaro Hayashi

John Steinbeck, whose roots reached deep into his native California, is proof that the Nobel Prize is no shield against the criticism--largely based on ignorance, jealousy, or misinterpretation--of intellectual snipers, who reproduce in the dark by some obscene ritual, far from the center of creative activity and criticism. They have dared, in a representative example of bad judgment, to compare Steinbeck with Mickey Spillane and to attack this author of diversified accomplishments so bitterly; and, in an unpardonable and singular lapse of good taste, to compare him with Mickey Mouse. The former critic is himself shielded by obscurity, and the latter hopefully, is in charge of a concession stand in Disneyland. Indeed, Steinbeck's reputation has risen steadily since 1968. What accounts for this drastic and dramatic change in the critical climate? Why is Steinbeck so appealing to heterogeneous groups of readers here and abroad? Why is he so widely read today, especially by young people and without compulsion? To my knowledge few have provided satisfactory answers for these difficult questions. I should like to address those questions, however presumptuous the attempt, and however tentative, debatable, and dogmatic the conclusions.

As I reexamine why Steinbeck has continued to fascinate me since my first "encounter" with his literature in 1956, I must mention the following reasons, all interrelated: (1) Steinbeck's "poetic" prose, which appeals to our esthetic sense; (2) his heart-warming and delightful sense of humor, which is unique but still transcends the barriers of language and customs, and which, in particular, is manifest in *Cannery Row*, *of Mice and Men*, and *Sweet Thursday*; (3) his masterful psychological grasp of man's pride, dignity, fear, hypocrisy, aspirations, dreams, agonies and ecstasies, all captured in *Burning Bright*, *Cup of Gold*, *East of Eden*, and *The Winter of Our Discontent*; (4) his diversified activities as novelist as in *The Grapes of Wrath*, as a dramatist as in *Of Mice and Men*, as a novelist/dramatist as in *Burning Bright*, as a journalist in *A Russian Journal*, as a diarist as in *Journal of a Novel*, and, if this were not enough, as an essayist in *America and Americans*. Other factors include: (5) his approach as a detached artist but an involved journalist as in *The Forgotten Village* and *The Grapes of Wrath*; his views



as an artist/moralist, particularly in *East of Eden*, *The Pearl*, and *The Wayward Bus*, and his impressive philosophy as a non-teleologist/teleologist as in *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*; (6) his use of rich literary sources, both American and European, Western and Eastern, Medieval and Renaissance, classical and modern, and both Judeo-Christian and pagan; (7) his unique holistic view and group-man concept, and his biologist-philosopher as hero, who emerges from his serious interest in marine biology; (8) his concept of the Emersonian "Oversoul" which is particularly appealing to the Oriental mind, having been molded by similar philosophical forces; (9) his magical use of the vernacular in the tradition of Mark Twain, the Father of Modern Fiction; (10) his technique of vivid narration and picturesque description from the perspective of the literary "Cameraman"; (11) his extensive use of philosophy, theology, and mythology in his literature; (12) his obsession with such allegorical themes as good vs. evil and fate vs. man's free will as in *East of Eden*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Winter of Our Discontent*; (13) his fearless experimentation in all genres, varied styles, subjects, sources, and themes; and, most importantly (14) his faith in man's perfectibility, man's spiritual strength, and man's passionate search for truth.

In 1966, Preston Beyer and I founded the John Steinbeck Society, which today has over 350 members in 17 nations. In 1968 a modest, even humble journal was begun under my editorship at Kent State University with

the support of a few friends who believed in the value of what I was trying to do: promoting Steinbeck studies through such a modest means. That humble, mimeographed journal, which was issued five times in 1968, has been commercially published under the sponsorship of Ball State University since 1969. Both the *Steinbeck Quarterly* and the *Steinbeck Monograph Series*, which I founded in 1970, are publishing some of the finest and latest research on John Steinbeck, his work, and his friends. As editor/project director of these publications, I have been in a position to observe at least some of the highlights of Steinbeck criticism in the United States in recent years.

The year 1973, for example, was one of the most productive in the history of Steinbeck criticism. We witnessed then the publications of the following books on Steinbeck:

1. Richard Astro, *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist* (University of Minnesota Press).
 2. Steve Crouch, *Steinbeck Country* (American West Publishing Co.).
 3. Warren French, *Filmguide to "The Grapes of Wrath"* (Indiana University Press).
 4. Tetsumaro Hayashi, *A New Steinbeck Bibliography (1929-1971)* (Scarecrow Press).
 5. Tetsumaro Hayashi, ed., *Steinbeck's Literary Dimension: A Guide to Comparative Studies* (Scarecrow Press).
- Furthermore, the *University of Windsor*

Review published a special Steinbeck issue under the editorship of John Ditsky (Spring 1973); this issue includes articles by Peter Lisca, Leo Gurko, Richard Astro, and Robert DeMott, who originally read their respective papers at the Steinbeck Society Meeting during the MLA Convention in New York City, in December 1972. The *Steinbeck Quarterly* also issued two special numbers devoted to criticism of Steinbeck's *The Long Valley* (Summer-Fall combined issue, 1972 and Winter issue, 1973). In addition, Lawrence W. Jones's posthumous work, *John Steinbeck as Fabulist*, which was edited by Marston LaFrance, a Canadian scholar of American literature, was published by the Steinbeck Society in 1973. This will be followed by *Steinbeck Criticism: A Review of Book-Length Studies (1939-1973)* (1974) and *Steinbeck and the Arthurian Theme* (1975), both of which I shall have the privilege of editing.

Further, Warren French, President of the John Steinbeck Society since 1969, is revising his famous book, *John Steinbeck* (Twayne, 1961); the revision is scheduled for publication in 1974 or early 1975.

Howard Levant is reported to be publishing his book on Steinbeck at the University of Missouri Press in 1975. And the *Steinbeck Quarterly* will be publishing at least two special numbers in 1975: "Steinbeck's Travel Literature" and "Steinbeck's Women." I am publishing two more books: *Study Guide to Steinbeck: A Handbook to Steinbeck's Major Works* (1974) and *A Dictionary of Steinbeck's Fictional Characters* (1975-76) as editor/project director.

Admittedly, these are merely some of the highlights of Steinbeck criticism, but they seem to symbolize the notorious energy of American scholars and their ever-growing serious interest in the once-neglected Nobel Prize winner. The productivity alone does not always insure its quality, it is true. However, I tend to believe that among these books, monographs, articles, essays, conferences, and lectures, some are bound to be original, revealing, and provocative and that the finest of these publications, such as Richard Astro's excellent book, will promote Steinbeck studies vigorously.

novelist as scientist

JOHN STEINBECK: NOVELIST AS SCIENTIST

Jackson J. Benson

The fiction of John Steinbeck has had a special appeal to the scientist, for of all the major American writers of fiction in this century, Steinbeck alone has had an abiding interest in natural science and brought that interest to his writing. The marine scientist, in particular, has claimed Steinbeck for his own because of the writer's life-long attachment to the sea-shore and its animals. Steinbeck was, according to several professionals who knew him, "a very good amateur biologist." Furthermore, if Steinbeck does have a claim on the attention of future generations of readers, much of that claim will be based on Steinbeck's concern with science, for he alone, among the many accomplished novelists of his time, saw man as part of an ecological whole.

At the same time, however, Steinbeck's scientific outlook created many problems for him as an artist and contributed significantly to a generally negative response to much of his work by literary critics. For one thing, as I shall try to explain hereafter, his use of ideas associated with science brought him into conflict with the novel form and its tradition, leading him into difficulties with characterization, plot, and point of view which he was only partially able to overcome. For another thing, his use of science put him in a position of isolation--often the critics didn't understand what he was doing. While the modern novel as a whole has tended to drift back toward the poetic and mythic, Steinbeck's fiction, particularly during those years when he was most heavily influenced by his marine biologist friend, Edward F. Ricketts, was often infused with large doses of naturalistic philosophy. Thus, Steinbeck's "case" not only provides some interest as an exception to the general flow of modern American fiction, it throws into sharp relief the central scientific-poetic duality of the novel form itself.

In order to bring Steinbeck's case into proper perspective, I am going to review for a moment certain fundamental aspects of the novel and its development. I ask the indulgence of those readers who already have the novel tradition clearly in mind and hope that, while I can offer nothing absolutely new to them, they might bear with me as I set up the terms of the dualism in which Steinbeck became enmeshed.

The novel is not only our youngest

major literary form, it is a bastard form, neither one thing nor another, and has been for the most of its young life, terribly philosophically confused. The English novel was born out of the Reformation, the middle-class version of the Medieval romance. Instead of knights and fair maidens and dragons, it dealt with shipwrecked "merchants," ambitious waiting maids, and lascivious young gentlemen. Although the subject matter was largely new, the formula was an old one: mix the wondrous with the commonplace and the wondrous can be believed. Belief was essential, for the novels were written by those who earned their living by writing them, and they instinctively found that enjoyment of their fiction was linked in large measure to their ability to create a world in which the reader could believe and therefore participate.

With the rise of science, what was "commonplace" gradually became "that which was objectively observed" from the full range of human experience, and that which was "wondrous" became the poetic, the religious, and the mythic that we could no longer quite believe in, but often wished we could. Largely by an accident of inheritance and by an evolutionary adaptation, the novel, among all the literary species, assumed those characteristics which best fitted it to carry the burden of the major philosophical conflict

John Steinbeck was born and raised a romantic, and maintained certain poetic-religious-mythic schemes of thought and feeling throughout his lifetime.

of the post-Renaissance Western world: science versus religion, or the new faith versus the old. Neither poetry nor drama could adequately carry the burden because each was already committed by origin and development to the old. It became the task of an essentially new form, the novel, to explore the nature of reality, an ancient question brought into the center of modern consciousness by the power of science at last to command a degree of belief which roughly matched the power of religion.

I do not believe that this task has been as consciously pursued by novelists as it has been thrust upon them by the nature of their form. There is every indication that novelists, for the most part, have never really been quite sure what the

novel is. Nor have they, generally, been aware--until the self-consciousness brought on by the advent of literary realism and the debate it generated--that their medium was by its very nature rent assunder by a profound philosophical dualism. Literary anthropologists, such as Northrop Frye, have traced the structural evolution of the novel, however, and confirm that its present philosophical duality has been the product of a mixed ancestry of narrative technique.

Among the various strains identified in the background of what we presently call the novel, two narrative families have been dominant. On the one hand, there is, as we might recall, that narrative family given the title of "romance" which has descended from narrative poetry, particularly the epic, and from the Medieval romance. This narrative family, the critics tell us, tends toward content which is fantastic or marvelous and often employs mythic or allegorical forms of expression in pursuing the adventures of extraordinary humans or gods and god-like figures. This narrative strain as it appears in modern fiction suggests the poetic-religious heritage of the past and an intuitive approach to knowledge. On the other hand, there is that narrative family rather confusingly referred to as the "novel proper" (as a result of the fact that what we call the "novel" today was at its birth in the eighteenth century more closely attached to this narrative strain). The "novel proper" descends from the real-life prose account--the letter, the journal, the diary, the biography, the traveler's log, and the first-person history. This family tends toward content which is natural, often focusing on the social environment, and employs a more or less realistic mode of expression to describe ordinary relationships and events which lie within the range of possible view, if not participation, of its reading audience.

As many of us already know, the modern version of the long fictional narrative begins with the "novel proper," the early writers often choosing such nonfiction forms as the letter, the diary, and the journal to lend credibility to their fictions. The very fact, of course, that writers such as Defoe and Richardson used these disguises so effectively (it didn't matter that the audience might suspect a disguise--the impact of the form itself was enough to encourage belief) is testimony to a changing climate of belief. The seeds of a philosophical dualism had been planted from the very beginning, however, for the published "journal" of Robinson

Crusoe traces the fantastic adventures of an extraordinary man made ordinary through the description of the daily routine of a shipwrecked sailor with a shopkeeper's mentality. And so although some critics have used, with some justification, the titles of "romance" and the "novel proper" as categories for classifying long fiction, we begin to realize that as we review the characteristics of these narratives since the mid-nineteenth century, we are not just dealing with competing forms, but conflicting ingredients. Furthermore, we find that the closer we approach the novel in the twentieth century, the more often we are likely to find those ingredients assigned to the romance and the novel bound together, not only in a mixture of technique and subject matter, but in that philosophical dualism which we have already identified--a suspended conflict between old and new, between knowledge gained by inspiration and knowledge gained by observation.

Of Steinbeck's predecessors in the American novel caught up in this dualism, Herman Melville presents, perhaps, the most dramatic example. His awareness of the split is manifested most directly in the masterpiece of his mid-career, *Moby Dick*. For in this novel, much to the consternation of its early readers, is presented side by side two versions of reality: a scientific catalogue of ordinary whales and a religious allegory of an extraordinary whale. Prior to *Moby Dick*, Melville wrote fiction essentially drawn from the close observation of personal experience with sailing ships and the sea; following *Moby Dick*, Melville's work became increasingly allegorical and in some instances obscure. In this context, it is important for us to note here that Melville viewed his early work with some contempt as superficial, and that his ultimate concern became a search for a satisfactory metaphysic.

We might pause to mention that Steinbeck's mid-career masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*, was similarly dualistic: on the one side, there is the attempt to view the migration of people to California in the detached terms of a scientist observing group animal behavior; on the other, there is the history of one special family, a history clothed in religious allegory. Also in parallel to Melville, Steinbeck after *The Grapes of Wrath* turned more and more toward metaphysical and moral abstraction in such works as *The Moon Is Down*, *Burning Bright*, *The Wayward Bus*, and *East of Eden*. Except for the last of these, general reader as well as critic was offended by Steinbeck's failure to in-

clude believable human characters--at this point, Steinbeck was apparently more interested in problems than in people.

Melville's choice would seem to be typical of the serious novelist: involved, perhaps inadvertently, in a dualism of tradition, form, and thought, the American writer of fiction seems to drift nearly always toward the magnetism of the



poetic-religious. The pattern--for with all the exceptions one could name, I still think it is a pattern--appears to match man's stubborn adherence to the unknown and probably unknowable as depicted in Robert Frost's poem "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep." In the poem people on the sand of a beach all turn and look toward the ocean--

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch keep?

This preference for trying to "look in deep" may arise from the fact that so many novelists are, to use the phrase William Faulkner applied to himself, "failed poets." More precisely, the biographies of modern American novelists suggest that children do not grow up to be writers of fiction because they are interested in science, but rather, of course, because they are readers entranced with the world of adventure and romance that books offer to them. They become conditioned toward speculation rather than investigation, and they become fascinated by the unknown rather than by the knowable.

Jack London, who was an immediate predecessor in many ways to John Steinbeck and whose work Steinbeck read in his teens, serves as an example of the writer drawn into writing by his love of adventure, whose early life was devoted to a search for adventure (as in the case of so many writers of a later generation who enlisted in World War I to be where the action was), and whose experiences brought to him a sharp apprehension of reality in opposition to his romantic dreams. As were those other writers of the so-called "Realistic-Naturalistic" period, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, London has been labeled both a "realist" and a "romancer." That is to say, both strains appear, sometimes at the

same time, in the work of these writers.

In his well-known story "To Build a Fire," the two directions so typical of the modern American writer are brought together. The story suggests that the man who does not understand his place in nature and who has been betrayed by the rosy, comforting illusions of a civilization which has insulated him from the facts of the natural world, will die when he confronts the full power of nature indifferent to his needs. The story becomes an ecological parable, mixing, as John Steinbeck would in much of his fiction, dispassionate observation, human illusion, allegory, and a mystical personification of the forces of nature. The central impact of the story is to show man, self-deluded, at the mercy of a natural world he hardly understands--ironically the man's dog lives and adapts, while his master perishes.

The biographies of such twentieth century writers as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck suggest that it is in the process of growing up, as the romantic expectations of adventure and poetic justice as endorsed by our culture are contradicted by experience, that the writer becomes, often reluctantly, a realist, more concerned with observing the nature of things as they actually are, than with trying to make his experience conform to his hopes and dreams. As further evidence of this process, we might note once again how many modern novels are concerned with this very process of growing up--often autobiographically tracing the pathology of disillusionment. In such novels or interconnected series of short stories as *Look Homeward, Angel*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *The Nick Adams Stories*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Red Pony*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Goodbye, Columbus*--just to name a few--the sensitive youth, attached in one way or another to the poetic and visionary, either has his whole view of life radically altered, or is destroyed or nearly destroyed in his encounter with the real world.

The trauma of realization which comes from exposure to life as it actually is, is given graphic expression in another work of fiction from the period of American Realism, Stephen Crane's story, "The Open Boat." After severe exposure to the ravages of the sea in an open life boat, taking turns at the oars day and night, with little water and no food, the correspondent (the central character) comes to a realization of the irony and injustice of his situation. That his situation is unjust can only be maintained within the egocentric picture of the universe sustained by the Judaic-Christian

tradition. The correspondence first asks, "Why?":

If I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned, why in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?

He thinks of his suffering as a personal punishment, searches for cause and effect, and determines that his punishment has been wrongly administered, when, in fact, he has been betrayed by an inaccurate, poetic-religious map of reality:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Later in the story the correspondent becomes aware that his situation cannot be approached from the question "Why?"--it is irrelevant. The only thing relevant is that which "is," and the only relevant questions are "What is the situation?" and "How can I deal with it?" As the correspondent looks at the shoreline that has since come into view and at the windmill tower among a group of deserted cottages, he wonders

if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if they never looked seaward. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent.

This realization might be called, using terminology from the Ed Ricketts-John Steinbeck vocabulary, the moment of "non-teleological breakthrough." It is the trauma of rejecting the religious world-view and adopting a scientific world-view.

While much modern American fiction following Crane has maintained a pattern of disillusionment with an egocentric view of the universe, it has also tended to view the universe as chaotic and without any understandable interrelationships at all. Without religion or romantic expectation, man, in this literature, is thrust back upon himself into a stoic

existentialism--he endures as he can apart from belief. Poetry, myth, and romance return to the novel, but usually not as elements of belief; instead, they appear as relics, as vehicles of irony whereby the present chaos is underscored. At the same time, there is little in modern literature as a whole to suggest that man's effort to endure has physical as well as moral dimensions and that the



two go hand in hand. Insofar as John Steinbeck not only has taken a nonteleological view of reality, but has gone beyond that breakthrough to see a different kind of order, a physical order with certain moral and social imperatives, to that extent he was a writer who was unique.

If we are to examine John Steinbeck's role as scientist, or any twentieth-century American novelist's relationship to science, for that matter, we must do so, I would suggest, within the context of the traditions and patterns we have just reviewed: the dualism at the heart of prose fiction (extending from the novel to all fiction, long or short); and the duality of the writer's own experience as a result of having encountered reality in a culture which has endorsed an essentially poetic-religious view of life. John Steinbeck was born and raised a romantic, wrote his first novels as a romantic, and maintained certain poetic-religious-mythic schemes of thought and

feeling throughout his lifetime. At the same time, he adopted certain attitudes and approaches, as expressed in his fiction, which brought him closer to a scientific perspective than any other modern American writer of similar stature. The conflict between the romance of his early conditioning and an interest in science acquired as an adult produced a particularly intense conflict within the schemes of tradition and theme which we have just summarized.

When I say he was born a romantic, I mean that his roots were in the adventure of the journey West to California taken by both his paternal and maternal grandparents. When he was young, a sister read the Greek myths to him, and from uncles, aunts, and parents he heard the Bible, Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. There was a split in the foundations of his imagination as produced by his early experiences with literature: on the one hand, there was a deep attachment to what we have called here "romance"--to the fantastic, the magical, and the adventurous; on the other hand, there was a deeply ingrained feeling for the harsh judgments and dark imagery of fundamental religion. All in all, Steinbeck had been carefully nourished in a climate which was thoroughly unscientific in its approach to life. His mother, as Steinbeck once remarked, possessed a theology which "was a curious mixture of Irish fairies and an Old Testament Jehovah whom in her later life she confused with her father."

The early development of Steinbeck's talent reflected the climate within which it had been nourished. As a young teenager he wrote poems and gave them as presents to relatives, and by the time he was a junior in high school, he had decided to become a writer--a writer of the kind of tales of adventure which had excited him as a reader: Alexandre Dumas, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Jack London. At the age of seventeen, he went to Stanford, not that he thought that going to a university would help him toward his goal of becoming a writer, but to please his parents. But in his sophomore year, he became so restless that he decided, in Jack London fashion, to run off to sea. He left a note for a startled roommate that he was on his way to China. He was never able to get a ship, however, and stayed in San Francisco for a time, attempting to live the Bohemian life he thought a struggling young writer should, and then returned to Stanford.

Brief stays at college alternated with various jobs. Then he finally did sail aboard a freighter, but for New York, rather than China. He tried to further his apprenticeship by becoming a cub reporter in the big city. But he failed as a newspaperman (one story is that he could not report what he observed--he had to embellish everything he wrote with poetic flourishes), and returned to California and spent most of the next three and a half years in the Lake Tahoe area. During his twenties, Steinbeck's reading ranged widely from the Greek and Roman classics, to Dostoevski and Zane Grey; but the writers that seem to have made the greatest impression on him were the romancers, popular at that time, James Branch Cabell and Donn Burne. While at Tahoe, Steinbeck spent most of his time, winter and summer, working on a series of novel manuscripts. Two of these, both romances, were published--*The Cup of Gold* and *To a God Unknown*. Both were mythic and allegorical, as well as extremely poetic in execution.

Needless to say, there is very little in all this to suggest that Steinbeck had much interest in science. He did have a job as a bench chemist at the Spreckles Sugar factory near Salinas performing a perfunctory test on the distillate. He also worked on several occasions as a helper at trout hatcheries on Lake Tahoe. He did take a course in general zoology at Hopkins Marine Station one summer while going to Stanford. But none of this small connection with science had any relationship with his writing, writing which was generated essentially out of his reading and his imagination. Then two things happened at nearly the same time, and I think they are, in terms of Steinbeck's work during the nineteen thirties, of nearly equal importance. He married Carol Henning and he met marine biologist Ed Ricketts. Each drew Steinbeck out of his penchant for romance toward a more realistic fiction based on experience.

During the first two or three years of his marriage, while at the same time his friendship for Ricketts grew, Steinbeck appears to have experienced several "breakthroughs" in thought, and his direction as a writer changed markedly. One such breakthrough was his conversion to a social-political consciousness that he was willing to bring into his fiction. He had already experienced the disillusionment with the middle-class, Victorian view of life which has so often led modern American writers into realism. But it took the visible suffering produced by the

depression, as well as the political consciousness of his wife and a new set of friends in the Monterey-Pacific Grove area, to displace his attraction for romance with a concern for observing life as it actually was. In *Dubious Battle*, published in 1936, shows the combined influences of Ricketts' holistic, nonteleological philosophy--"observing things as they are to try to get an understanding of the whole"--and of Carol Steinbeck's social consciousness and preference for tough, realistic prose.

A second breakthrough came in terms of a new sense of his art as dependent on direct experience--not necessarily his own, but experience nevertheless. In this I think Steinbeck's wife was perhaps the most important influence. She was his severest critic and was intolerant of the lyrical prose style and the mystical-allegorical themes that her husband had labored to cultivate during the years prior to their marriage. She was a very talented and perceptive person and seemed to have a far better critical sense than her husband, realizing that if he continued to emulate Burne, his writing would continue to be second-rate. Going to his own experience, Steinbeck wrote several short stories, *The Red Pony*, and *Of Mice and Men* during the early and mid-thirties. This fiction, along with *In Dubious Battle* (the material for which he got as second-hand experience from a strike organizer), is among Steinbeck's best and is far different in tone, style, and underlying philosophy from his early *Cup of Gold* and *To a God Unknown*.

A third change came during the early thirties in terms of what I have already described in discussing Stephan Crane's short story "The Open Boat" as a "nonteleological breakthrough," and it is here in the adoption of this mode of thought that Ed Ricketts no doubt played the most persuasive part. The foundations of Steinbeck's nonteleological thinking have been described rather fully elsewhere. (I refer the reader to the recent book by Richard Astro, *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist* and to Joel W. Hedgpeth's article, "Philosophy on Cannery Row," in Richard Astro and Tetsumaro Hayashi's *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work*.) I have only space to point, first of all, to Ed Ricketts himself, whose thinking along these lines was initiated by his professor of marine biology at the University of Chicago, W. C. Allee; and, second, to the U.C.L.A. professor John Eloy Boodin, whose organismic philosophy was brought to Steinbeck by Richard Abee,

a long-time friend who joined the Steinbeck-Ricketts circle in the mid-thirties.

The resulting picture of the universe as derived from these sources and others, modified by much discussion and debate and by the personalities and backgrounds of Steinbeck and Ricketts is too complex for me to describe in any detail here. Let me simplify the picture for the purposes of this discussion by reminding the reader of two oft-quoted passages from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*:

Nonteleological ideas derive through "is" thinking, associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it. They imply depth, fundamentalism, and clarity--seeing beyond traditional or personal projections. They consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than results; conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all-important prerequisite. Nonteleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what

Seeing and not-seeing, reality and self-delusion, these are the materials that Steinbeck plays with, sometimes seriously, sometimes humorously.

should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually "is"--attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what or how*, instead of *why*.

and

Our own interest lay in relationships of animal to animal. If one observes in this relation sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational....It is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcries which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality.

The passages above are really "Ricketts as interpreted by Steinbeck," since Ricketts' notes and essays were out on the table in front of Steinbeck as he composed *The Log*. Nevertheless, Steinbeck came to agree with the sentiments

expressed in them long before *The Log* was written. The first significant expression of nonteleological and holistic thought is in *In Dubious Battle*. Doc Burton does not act, in this novel, so much as he looks to understand; what he wants to observe is men, who, coming together as a group, assume the characteristics of an entirely different "individual." The expression of this thought continues in almost all of Steinbeck's fiction up through *East of Eden*. The *Red Pony* (parts of which were published before and after *In Dubious Battle*) uses Jody as an unwilling student of nature--his dreams of romance are reinforced with the optimism, the "personal projections" of Billy Buck. Buck is the false tutor--it is Jody's father, who is pictured so harshly, who really understands that nature's will must be done regardless of our feelings. What Jody must learn to accept is that the vultures are as much a part of nature as the pony.

The Darwinism of *The Red Pony* is brought from the conflict of animals to the conflict between men in *Of Mice and Men*. Originally titled "Something That Happened," we find again that the dreams of man, his personal projections, contradict the nature of reality. As engaging to our own sense of romance and sentiment as Lennie's and George's dream of a small ranch may be, the facts are that they do not have the power within the scheme of things as they are to make that dream come true. Lennie kills without malice--animals and people die simply because of his strength. Lennie himself must die simply because within the society of man he is an anomaly and weak. The point of *The Red Pony* is not that Jody has an unfeeling father, neither is the point of *Of Mice and Men* that society is unfeeling and should provide land for people like Lennie and George. The point in each case is that what happens, happens: things work themselves out as they must according to their nature.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* both personal projections (that little white house surrounded by orange trees in California) and traditional projections (religion, family, poetic justice) run afoul of the nature of human society as it actually is. Like Doc Burton in *In Dubious Battle*, Jim Casy can become an observer of things as they are only after he rejects his own personal projections and those of society's traditions as well. In a parody of Christ's religious purgation of the self, Casy goes into the wilderness to emerge with a scientific, nonteleological vision: "There ain't no sin and there ain't no

virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing." Along somewhat the same lines, the various subcultures depicted in the comic novels--*Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *Sweet Thursday*--are able to achieve happiness insofar as they are able to deal with life on an "is" basis, rejecting both the personal and traditional projections typical of the larger society. Disaster strikes whenever individuals in the subculture are tempted to depart from their natural environment, their interdependent "tidepool" communities, to take up duties within the middle-class sea of values.

While Steinbeck's obvious sympathy for the subcultures in his comedies irritated critics, his lack of sympathy and his stereotyping of characters in the microcosm of *The Wayward Bus* bothered them even more. The approach used in the comedies and in *The Wayward Bus* is roughly similar, but the observer in the comedies is on a "field trip," while the observer in *The Wayward Bus* has deliberately collected certain representative specimens in the field and put them together in a laboratory tank to observe their interreactions. Nevertheless, the topic of major concern in this novel is accepting what "is," just as it is also the topic of major concern in *East of Eden*. Although the Biblical materials may be more confusing than useful, if we can look beyond them (or see that Steinbeck is using religious materials to make a non-religious, philosophical point), we can perceive that the primary movement of the novel is toward freedom--freedom from destructive illusion and self-delusion. At the end of the novel, as Adam Trask is dying, he is being reborn to a new perspective. Earlier, he could not see his wife for what she was because of his romantic projections, and then he could not see his sons because of a religious reaction which replaced his romanticism. Now, at last, he gains an opportunity to see things as they are when he realizes that man is not bound by the scheme of sin and virtue, that man is free to be, and in being, he is what he is. By freeing himself, Trask is able to bless and free his son.

These patterns which express a nonteleological point of view, in one way or another, can be seen as having some similarities to the Realistic-Naturalistic fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, there is at least one important difference. In Realism-Naturalism, one sees and therefore rejects traditional or personal projections. One would like to believe, but

in light of the evidence, one cannot. The resulting disillusionment, as in the case of Stephen Crane's correspondent in "The Open Boat," often leads the individual to the anger of someone who has been swindled. By contrast, if the individual fully assumes a nonteleological point of view, he rejects traditional and personal projections so that he *can* see. The fiction of such writers as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser often suggests that the dream is better than the reality, but that the dream is impossible to hold onto. This pattern does appear to some degree in Steinbeck's fiction when the nonteleological perspective is applied outside the novel or story by the author (in assumed conjunction with the reader). Both *Of Mice and Men* and *The Red Pony* are examples of this perspective--they are novels of disillusionment. But when a nonteleological point of view is established within the work of fiction itself, as it is in such works as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, the resulting emotional tone is far different. As nonteleological observers within their respective novels, Doc Burton and Jim Casy are islands of calm within the strife and bitterness which surround them. It is significant that several of these characters are called "Doc" (and patterned in some degree after Steinbeck's real-life scientist friend, Ed Ricketts) in that their main characteristic is a scientific detachment. This is even true of Jim Casy whose "other-worldliness" is ironically more like the dispassionate, determined scientist than the Jesus Christ figure he has so often been compared to.

The contrast between the nonteleological observer and the characters around him who are caught up in illusion, wandering as if lost on a darkling plain, brings a somewhat new dimension to the basic realistic-romantic dualism of the novel of which we have spoken. The actions of the strikers in *In Dubious Battle*, of the bulk of the migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath*, of Mack and the Boys in *Cannery Row*, and of the Trask family (including Cathy) in *East of Eden* are as futile and unseeing as rats trapped in a maze. From a tragic point of view, this is mankind hopelessly captured by the myths of the past and personal predilections which make it impossible for man to rise above the maze to see it as a whole and therefore escape. From a comic point of view, it is the Keystone Cops all running into each other and falling over themselves while Doc goes quietly about his business and, resigned to the foolishness of men,

tries to pick up the pieces.

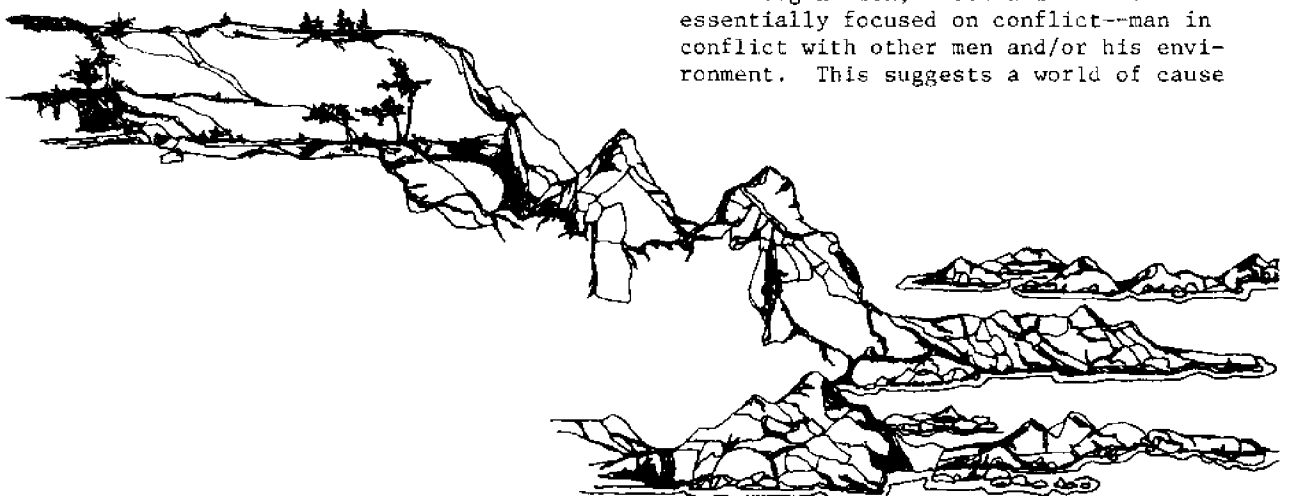
The dualism in the comedies *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*--leads to humor in that the contrast is weakened and the illusions are foolish rather than serious. The contrast is weakened in that Mack and the Boys are in themselves somewhat more nonteleologically directed than society as a whole. As bums, or rather as successful bums (who know how to manage other people's illusions to their own benefit), they have already been disillusioned by society's myths, and being outside society, they too are usually observers. Thus, they are not so very different from Doc, the prime observer. The trouble starts when they depart from their disillusionment and their roles as observers. But the trouble is comic--minor and short lived. It is all, including Doc's romantic departure into the sunset, riding his "bucking" car with the reformed saloon girl, palpable nonsense, a parody of sentimentality. Note, by the way, that the first book of the series, *Cannery Row*, begins with a look at life through a peephole and that the parting gift of Mack and the Boys to Doc at the end of *Sweet Thursday* is a telescope.

Seeing and not-seeing, reality and self-delusion, these are the materials that Steinbeck plays with, sometimes seriously, sometimes humorously. To some degree it is the same game that novelists, from Sterne to Nabokov, have always played with the reader. But for many novelists, the discovery of reality has been a matter of regret, a sad necessity. For Steinbeck the emphasis is reversed. At that point when nonteleological thinking enters Steinbeck's work, man is seen as part of the natural world--what is sad is that man refuses to recognize that he is a part of nature. The novel tradition still

clings to the belief that although man's dreams, his myths and his poetry, may lead him astray, they also separate him from and raise him above nature. While Steinbeck recognizes that man is different, he proposes that his uniqueness--namely, his ability to see beyond his own immediate needs and to understand his place in the picture of nature as a whole--should make him a better member of the natural community. At the core of disillusionment, as we find it in such naturalistic novels as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Norris's *The Octopus*, London's *Martin Eden*, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, or Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, there is an inescapable melancholy and nostalgia. At the core of Steinbeck's best work, there is anti-sentimentality that is almost unbearable--the blind futility of strikers and employers in *In Dubious Battle*, the cold inevitability of the vulture in *The Red Pony*, the hunt for Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, and anti-poetry of the starving old man at Rose of Sharon's breast in the ending of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Although I think charges of sentimentality against Steinbeck's fiction have often been glibly applied and usually overstated (there is much in the surface manner which is sentimental, and much more which appears to be, but which is not), that is not to say that his fiction does not have serious weaknesses and inconsistencies. Many of his difficulties can be traced directly to his efforts to employ a nonteleological vision as a basis for his form and technique. The source of these difficulties becomes clear when we realize that the nonteleological position expressed in the passages from *The Log*, as quoted above, contradicts rather sharply many of the basic attitudes expressed in and through the traditional forms of fictional narrative.

To begin with, fictional narrative is essentially focused on conflict--man in conflict with other men and/or his environment. This suggests a world of cause



and effect (contrary to the nonteleological view), of difficulty and remedy--and it implies, further, a separation of man from man and from his environment (contrary to the proposition that man is part of the "whole picture"). It is true that the scientist sees the natural world in continuous conflict. But if he is a pure scientist (not looking for ways to kill mosquitoes), he does not take sides. Fiction, on the other hand, almost always involves "side-taking." For conflict, as the essence of plot, attaches values to one side or the other as a matter of course.

Furthermore, the very way a story is told--the technical point of view--attaches, in itself, a set of values to the story content. Whereas the concept of plot suggests the overlaying of a set of values (from religion, cultural myth or attitude, or whatever) onto a series of events, point of view usually suggests that reality is indeed essentially a matter of personal projection. Whereas plot imposes ethnocentricity, point of view imposes egocentricity.

And, again, characterization runs into similar difficulties when it encounters the nonteleological formulation. As just noted in regard to point of view, the more personalized the narration, the more egocentric the focus, so that the narrator, as a character in fiction, imposes a teleology on events. As expressions of conflict, the protagonist and antagonist characters project a traditional value system (particularly if they can be seen as hero and villain). Indeed, in the very act of making a character "sympathetic" or "human," an author imposes a value system on his material.

Thus, the essential ingredients of fiction all come into conflict, to some degree, with the nonteleological position. The question at this point, therefore, is, Can a novelist hold a nonteleological position in regard to the nature of reality and still function as a novelist? The answer for Steinbeck must be, I should think, yes he can function, but he will be rather constantly forced into a position of contradiction and compromise. Furthermore, he will inevitably come into conflict with his form, altering it or perverting it, depending on the perspective with which his changes are viewed, and he must offend, to some extent, the preconceptions, or "standards" if you will, of his readers.

If we were to look at the way in which Steinbeck handles the aspects of fictional form--point of view, plot, and character--we could see how, in each case, he has

reached a compromise, letting the novel work as a novel, while at the same time expressing some measure of nonteleological thinking. By way of illustration, I have only the space here to point to some of these compromises and some of the difficulties with the novel form which have resulted from them.

The nonteleological position tends to restrict Steinbeck's use of various storytelling devices. To be consistent with

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his philosophy, he must, as a general rule, tell his story in as an impersonal way as possible. Since the first-person point of view is clearly the most egocentric, Steinbeck, during his "nonteleological period," does not use it. (His only major use of the first-person is in his final novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*.) Instead, Steinbeck uses the third-person omniscient point of view and, in the novels written as plays, the dramatic third-person. The third-person omniscient point of view is the technique which, above all other possible ways of telling a story, best presents an overview of the interaction between characters. Steinbeck favors what might be called a "community overview" wherein he stands above a group of people, and using this picture of the whole as a reference point, he focuses on one character or incident after another, returning usually to place the individual scene within the larger context.

One of the marks of Steinbeck's work is this sequential focus on a variety of characters and scenes; we find it in his novels from the early *The Pastures of Heaven* to the late *East of Eden*. And because of this serial focus, what might normally be called minor characters and events receive, generally, more attention than they do in the work of other writers who use a more personalized point of view, organizing their fiction around the evolving purposes and thoughts of a single character. But because Steinbeck's view is often so diffuse, his work is usually in danger of losing unity, power, and direction. Furthermore, there can be, as in *The Wayward Bus*, an impersonality which, although appropriate to the nonteleological position, may alienate the reader's affections.

Plot can also be weakened by the impersonal, sequential focus. Suspense, or that need on the reader's part to find out what happens, is dissipated by the lack of personal involvement in the motivation and fate of a single character. The fate of the central character in a number of Steinbeck's novels evolves so impersonally and is so tied to the general situation, that we don't really care very much about what happens to him. This is our reaction, I suspect, in regard to such characters as Mac in *In Dubious Battle*, to Danny in *Tortilla Flat*, or to Juan Chicoy in *The Wayward Bus*--if, indeed, we can even refer to these characters as "central" in the usual literary sense of the term. Actually, not only does Steinbeck's use of the impersonal point of view with a sequential focus tend to act against the development of a strong central character, but the nonteleological position itself stands in opposition to giving heavy emphasis to any single character other than as a reference point (Tom Joad), a sample of a characteristic part of the whole (Mac in *In Dubious Battle*), or an unusual specimen or mutation (Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*). That is, the choice of a particular character for extended observation is guided by what could be called "scientific interest," rather than by traditional literary criteria as dictated by a mythic-romantic view of man. Thus, the protagonist-hero is out of bounds for Steinbeck, not only because of the mythic-romantic value system such a character presupposes, but because such a character can only function within a teleological framework of individual triumph or disaster. In *In Dubious Battle*, by contrast, Doc Burton observes that the strike leader, Mac, may be as much the product of the group functioning as a group as a leader functioning as a cause behind group activity.

Contrary to the typical "side-taking" which focuses the author's favor on a single individual, the implied author's approval or disapproval in the Steinbeck novel is likely to be applied to the entire group or "colony" more or less evenly. Thus, we are led to like nearly everyone in *Cannery Row*, we tend to be indifferent to nearly all the characters in *In Dubious Battle*, and we find none of the characters in *The Wayward Bus* to be particularly likable. Since there is seldom anyone in his novels who can be labeled as "hero" or "villain," Steinbeck has been accused of failing to make moral discriminations. Actually, since in Jim Casy's words "there ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue," Steinbeck tends to follow in Mark Twain's

footsteps in condemning most not those who "sin," but those who make such moral judgments.

In an age in which our culture, and hence very often the novel, is concerned with the internal workings of man's mind, Steinbeck's fiction is notably exterior in its point of view. Of course, it must be if he is going to focus on what "is" as matter of what is observed, eschewing as much as possible special pleading. Occasionally, through the omniscient narrator we do enter the mind of a character, but extended use of some kind of interior monologue is rare, and it is always filtered through the sensibility of the narrator. Strangely enough, the power of Steinbeck's fiction often comes from the fact that we don't have direct knowledge of his characters' thoughts. Instead, we often hear his characters struggling to express their thoughts and feelings aloud, and in that struggle what they think and feel gains an authenticity and power that might be lost in a more direct presentation.

Another technique, in addition to dialogue, by which Steinbeck presents states of mind consists in using an exterior landscape to represent the inner landscape. This technique is tied to Steinbeck's heavy dependence on scene to perform functions in his work which are more typically assigned to other fictional techniques--a matter we will discuss in more detail in a moment--and it is an appropriate technique in light of the fact that Steinbeck's characters are so often closely connected, in temperament and state of being, to their surroundings.

What goes on inside Elisa Allen, in "The Chrysanthemums," is more perfectly represented in her flowers and her care for them than could be stated in her mind or by the narrator reading her mind. Most important, from a nonteleological standpoint, the way that men tend their gardens--as they often do literally in Steinbeck's fiction--is observable, whereas the inner workings of their minds is not. This is one area--depth of characterization--in which I do not think Steinbeck is as weak as many critics have claimed, for there is a paradox involved here. Sometimes the outside is more truly indicative of inner condition than the inside, itself, laid bare. I, for one, feel I know Elisa Allen almost as well as I know Mrs. Dalloway, even though Virginia Woolf has two hundred seventy-three more pages, most of which is Mrs. Dalloway's stream-of-consciousness, to reveal her to us.

Scene, therefore, or the character's environment, is very often instrumental in carrying out in Steinbeck's third-person

narration that which in other fiction might be performed by a more personal point of view. Scene carries a further burden as well, in that it is often in Steinbeck's work the basic medium for plot development. With a few exceptions, plot in the usual sense of the term is not very important in his fiction. As we have already noted, normally developed, plot is essentially a teleological formulation--it traces causes and effects, dwells on motivation, and inevitably involves "side-taking" in respect to an evolving conflict. To avoid being enmeshed in traditional plot, Steinbeck seldom examines or emphasizes motive--the effect he strives for is the presentation of events as they evolve out of conditions, as things that "simply happen," while trying at the same time to remain neutral to his characters, or at least trying to treat most of them pretty much the same.

Instead of characters carrying us through a series of actions in particular locales, it is, frequently in Steinbeck's fiction, the locales which shift or move, carrying the characters, in a sense, along with the change in scene. The drama here is the drama of circumstances, rather than the drama of evolving character cognition. Purposeful action by characters is not abandoned entirely, of course, but it is usually made secondary to a narrative flow animated by the larger purpose of observation and examination. Revealing of this method of plot development are Steinbeck's notes for *The Grapes of Wrath* wherein he talks of taking his characters across the mountains, having them travel to the town

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of Brawley, and bringing them into the government camp. Clearly, Steinbeck is interested in what happens to people *within* a particular social-physical environment. Note also, by the way, that *The Grapes of Wrath* ends not with an event, a "plot development" or twist, but with a *scene*.

In Steinbeck's most nonteleologically directed fiction, scene dominates all other elements of technique. The rationale behind this, whether conscious or unconscious, would seem to lie in the fact that scene most clearly and directly expresses the condition of what "is." Thus, plot moves from condition to condition, and the struc-

ture of Steinbeck's novels usually involves contrast and parallel of condition, almost musical in its contrapuntal precision. Man is perceived as an intimate part of his environment; indeed, character can be often perceived in Steinbeck's work as a function, so to speak, of scene. (The failure of two of Steinbeck's play-novels written in the dramatic third-person might be traced to the failure, in *Burning Bright* and *The Moon is Down*, to provide a convincing environment, let alone a convincing connection between character and environment. In *Of Mice and Men*--the only success by Steinbeck in this genre--such an environment and such a connection between character and scene does exist.)

Conflict in the Steinbeck novel usually arises out of the inability of man to function in harmony with his environment, social or physical (and the two are seen in Steinbeck's work usually as interdependent). Such a conflict brings us back once again to Steinbeck's peculiar use of the basic dualism of the novel form, as illusion blinds man to what he should see in order to act in harmony with others. The conflict can be resolved once man takes off the blinders of social myth (often in Steinbeck "respectability") and romantic self-delusion (often manifested as some form of egotism, greed, or self-indulgence). The final scene of *The Grapes of Wrath* defines such a resolution rather precisely. An old man at a young girl's breast is totally unacceptable to middle-class respectability, as a surface objection--it is "nasty." On a deeper level of objection, the scene violates our romantic-erotic imagery, a culturally imposed illusion, as well as our traditional religious imagery. On the other hand, within the physical-social landscape as it actually exists at the end of the novel, the scene is totally natural and harmonious. That we have objected to the scene so violently proves Steinbeck's point exactly.

Furthermore, that the scene pinpoints a moment of natural joy amidst the pathos of the natural disaster of the flood defines the difference between Steinbeck's nonteleological Naturalism and that employed by the Realists-Naturalists at the turn of the century. In "The Open Boat" there is, as I have said, a nonteleological breakthrough, but it leads to a sense of emptiness and unfairness. Here in the final scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*, there is a sense that man can survive *in* nature if he is, in turn, himself natural. Beyond the breakthrough to awareness as described in the Stephen Crane story is a further awareness as described by Steinbeck:

nature is not good or bad, fair or unfair; nature simply is. Man is unfair as he tries to deprive other men of the benefits of nature or as he leads other men into danger or deprivation by foisting upon them the illusion that nature functions as a part of man's myths or desires.

One final point about the last scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Note that the scene is not a resolution of the conflict for the Joads. We know that they will be further hurt by their own and other men's illusions. The scene is rather a resolution for the reader, who has been taken in tow by the narrator to witness one set of conditions after another. It is almost as if we as readers had been shown a series of slides recording "that which happens" in this environment and that. The resolution, significantly, is one for the observer, rather than for the observed. No novel, it seems to me, could operate more in the spirit of science than this.

Critics have of course sensed the importance of scene in Steinbeck's work, and the subordination of almost everything else in that work to scene has tended to either puzzle them or irritate them (speaking now of the non-specialist). It has also allowed them to classify Steinbeck rather easily as a "Naturalist", while feeling that since he does not always come to the same pessimistic conclusions that the traditional Naturalists-Realists usually come to, he must be sentimental--the ultimate epithet in our critical lexicon. The irony here is that although there is a certain amount of surface sentimentality in Steinbeck's work, his ultimate position is far less sentimental than those who have condemned him. For while the generalist critics are almost totally united in their anthropocentrism, Steinbeck cannot see man as anything more than as a part of a very large whole.

To diminish man in such a way is bad enough, but to do it without mourning, with sympathy and good humor, is to add insult to injury. The most common complaint has been that Steinbeck deals with (or plays with) his characters as if they were puppets or that he creates characters who appear to function more as if they were animals instead of men. To a certain extent, for the reasons we have noted above, this assessment is true: he does see man as an animal, albeit a rather gifted animal. The real question, however, is whether such a view of man is, as implied, necessarily an artistic fault. Perhaps Steinbeck has been a less accomplished novelist as a result of his adherence to certain views which might be called "scientific", or it may simply be that there is a fundamental

difference in philosophy between the critics and the author.

Much of the negative reaction to Steinbeck's characterization arises, I suspect, from the nonteleological prohibition of the heroic protagonist, a prohibition which runs counter to our cultural taste even in an age of literary anti-heroes. And Steinbeck's central characters are not quite anti-heroes, either. If they fail, their failure is not usually a failure to act, but a failure to see. In many of Steinbeck's novels a philosophical character with whom the author's essential sympathy lies is paired with a man of ac-

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tion. (Sometimes, as in the pairing of Jim Casy with Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Lee and Adam Trask in *East of Eden*, there is a tutor-tyro relationship similar to the one described by Earl Rovit in regard to Hemingway's fiction.) The philosophical character seldom acts, while the man of action does not usually act effectively or well. Mac in *In Dubious Battle*, Billy Buck in *The Red Pony*, Danny in *Tortilla Flat*, Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Mac in *Cannery Row*, Juan Chicoy in *The Wayward Bus*, George in *Of Mice and Men*, and Adam Trask in *East of Eden*--each is the man of action who one way or another, one time or another, messes things up and who is a parody of the traditional protagonist who overcomes obstacles to achieve a satisfactory resolution of problems. Steinbeck's point is, of course, that you don't act to gain results--a teleological formulation--you *look* in order to *understand*.

The final scene in *East of Eden* exemplifies as metaphor the triumph of perception as versus heroic action. Adam Trask, the central character, is throughout the novel the "man of action" who messes things up. He is not an anti-hero, nor is he the usual victim of circumstances one finds in Naturalistic-Realistic fiction. If he is victimized at all, it is a result of his own stubborn lack of perception. (The irony implicit in his stubbornness is somewhat parallel to the irony which comes of Oedipus's stubborn blindness, inappropriate action, and final perception while literally blind.) Almost everything Trask does, almost every significant action he

takes, whether in his personal life or in business, leads to disaster. At the end of the novel, however, he is paralyzed--that is, he can no longer act. And it is at this moment that he is finally able to understand. In setting up the antithesis between action and perception, Steinbeck, it seems to me, has managed to bring the basic romantic-realistic duality of fiction into a new stage of evolution.

Unfortunately for Steinbeck, however, there is nothing very dynamic, in the traditional sense of what fiction does, in the processes of looking and understanding. The resulting penalty that Steinbeck must pay is the danger of stagnation in his work: except for *The Grapes of Wrath*, where the changing scene and the journey motif provide a kind of dynamism, Steinbeck's long novels--*East of Eden* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*--are often boring. Steinbeck's worst fault as a novelist is not weak characterization (a silly charge--he has created some of the most interesting and memorable characters in modern fiction) or sentimentality, but stagnation. That he is so often static in his fiction *without* being dull is a tribute to a very skillful prose style and an ability to see things from a very different perspective than they are usually seen. A book like *Cannery Row* is a masterpiece of a kind--witty, original, and amusing, it carries the reader along by sheer force of the narrator's personality and unique way of looking at things. At the same time, almost nothing of any consequence at all happens in the novel. Steinbeck's greatest successes--*In Dubious Battle*, *Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Cannery Row*--are

all triumphs of perception, so that his adoption of the nonteleological approach must be said to have had its advantages as well as its disadvantages. It provided that edge of differentness that every writer must have if his work is to make its mark and be remembered.

John Steinbeck's exact place in the history of the American novel and his contribution of the evolution of the novel form are yet to be determined. Too much prejudice is still attached to his life and too much confusion still surrounds his goals and methods for any kind of fair assessment to be made at this time. Nevertheless, when that assessment is made, I think those who make it will be bound to consider Steinbeck's frequent use of scientific attitudes and methods in his fiction, a use that took him beyond the tradition of Naturalism-Realism into an achievement purely his own. Perhaps no such thing as a novelist who is also a scientist is possible--a writer who consistently brings a thorough-going scientific philosophy and methodology to the writing of fiction. But John Steinbeck went further in this direction than any other writer of distinction has, and as far, perhaps, as any writer can. His attempts led to some failures and some rather extraordinary successes, and his work, in its own way, was often as experimental and daring as that of any number of other modern writers whom we honor for having extended the presumed limits of artistic expression. Much of the fiction of John Steinbeck was profoundly different in kind, and we are obliged to give him the credit, as well as the blame.

JOHN STEINBECK: SOME REFLECTIONS

Fred Tarp

During the years 1946 to 1950 I attended Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove, California. I had gone there as a graduate student to study marine biology. My decision was made in 1931, when I was eleven years old I had spent a month in Pacific Grove, exploring its beaches and tidepools and, after presenting myself at the doors of Hopkins, had been given a tour of the Agassiz laboratory by a friendly graduate student. I picked Stanford University's marine facility because it was there that I could study with Dr. Rolf Bolin, a well-known and outstanding ichthyologist. Some of you, who do not know him as a scientist, may still be familiar with his name. He is the individual in *Sea of Cortez* who identified the sea monster as a basking shark, thereby shattering the hopes of Monterey that a genuine sea monster had emerged from the depths of the bay.

The marine station was an interesting place during those post-war years. There were graduate students and post-doctoral fellows who had recently been released from the Armed Forces, as well as others from overseas who, now that the war was over, had come to America to continue their studies. Scientific celebrities, foreign and domestic, popped in and out of the laboratory enlivening its intellectual atmosphere. *Cannery Row* had just been published and the pilgrims were beginning to invade even the bastions of the marine station. New friendships were made. It was during this time, for example, that I first met our panel moderator, Joel Hedgpeth. It was also during this time that I became an acquaintance of John Steinbeck and developed a friendship with Ed Ricketts.

I had first met Ricketts in 1941 when, as an undergraduate, I had been sent to Monterey to study the sardines for the California Department of Fish and Game's Bureau of Marine Fisheries. A chance meeting at Hopkins made little impression on him. It did, however, impress me enough to purchase immediately a copy of his *Between Pacific Tides* which had been published in 1939. I was delighted when the Bureau decided to send me to Monterey because of the opportunity to investigate the intertidal, now that I was somewhat better prepared than I was when I was eleven. I had brought with me, in order to identify the invertebrates, a copy of

a 1927 text entitled *Seashore Animals of the Pacific Coast* by Myrtle Johnson and Harry Snook. This was an excellent text, and the only one readily available to the general public at that time. It contained short analyses of the principle species of marine invertebrates one would expect to find along the seashore from Baja California to Alaska. The organisms were arranged in phyletic order, the style of the day, which made it difficult to use by amateurs and inexperienced biologists (incidentally, this fine text, although now hopelessly out of date, was reprinted as a paperback in its entirety a few years ago by those saviors of remaindered texts, the Dover Press).

In 1941 I was a rank beginner. I quickly learned from the new text by Ricketts and Calvin the ease with which a beginner could identify the common intertidal organisms using the methods they outlined. Briefly, identification began with the observation of a few environmental variables readily discernible to anyone. The first variable was the degree of exposure of the organism to wave shock. The second variable was the degree of exposure of the organism to dessication as indicated by its distribution relative to the tidal level; and the third was the nature of the environmental substratum, whether rock, sand, or mud. Combinations of these variables delimit the habitat and greatly restrict the numbers of species one is forced to differentiate. These organisms are then ranked according to their relative commonness in such environments. It can be seen that the latter, although verbal, approaches a quantitative numerical statement. The text considered 500 of the most common organisms encountered in the intertidal of the Pacific Coast.

Today such an organism-habitat inter-relationship is basic to an understanding of marine biology, even at the level of high school biology students. I would also submit that restricting the numbers of species one must identify by easily discerned environmental means, requiring no special vocabulary or knowledge is more logical and easier for the beginner than the traditional method which often requires a knowledge of fairly complex anatomical structures whose observations often require specialized training and skill. In those days, such an approach was a radical departure from the traditional and contrary to that practiced by the reigning priesthood of biology to such an extent, that the 1939 edition of *Tides* was almost dismissed arbitrarily because of the hostility shown to it by just one traditionally-minded pre-publication reviewer.

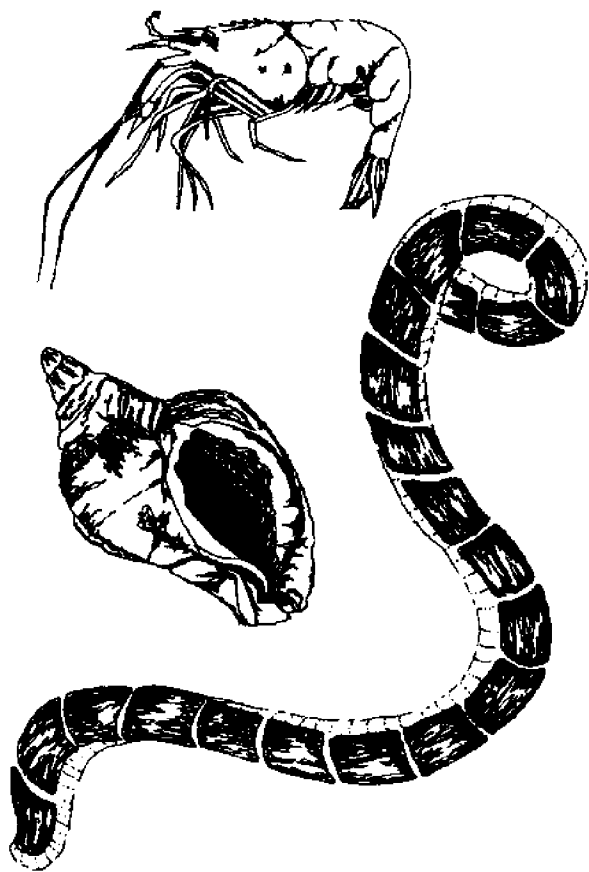
During my first few months in Pacific Grove in 1946, I purchased a copy of *Sea of Cortez* co-authored by Steinbeck and Ricketts. I wasn't aware that John Steinbeck had authored a book in 1941, let alone one co-authored with Ricketts. What drew me to the volume, however, was the title page which proclaimed that it contained "a scientific appendix comprising materials for a sourcebook on the marine animals of the Panamic Faunal Province." The 1951 publication called *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* is an abridged text omitting the appendix and having little scientific interest. Incidentally, the gilt letters on the brown cover of my copy of *The Log* spell out only the name *John Steinbeck*. Today's more honest generation would probably call the deception practiced by the Viking Press in 1951 a "ripoff." A more honest title would have been "About Ed Ricketts" by John Steinbeck. My respect for Steinbeck, the man, slipped a little when I realized what he had allowed his publishers to do to the memory of his good friend. If Ed had lived, he probably would have ignored the whole thing.

The friendship between the two men was an interesting one. As a biologist, I occasionally express my thoughts in biological terms. In describing my restricted view of their relationship I am sorely tempted to term it a symbiotic one. However, the problem with using such an analogy, is that one is confronted with the problem of assessing whether the type of symbiotic relationship was mutualistic, commensal or parasitic.

One facet of their relationship, their original basis for friendship, seems fairly obvious to me. I fully concur with Dr. Hedgpeth who suggests that the two men were probably drawn together by a mutual interest in biology. Steinbeck's father, the Treasurer of Monterey County, owned a home on 11th Avenue in Pacific Grove. It is but a short walk to where 11th Avenue joins Ocean View Boulevard which runs along the shoreline of Monterey Bay. Below the boulevard there are many excellent tidepools that the curious explorer can investigate. Steinbeck writes in *Travels with Charley* that "The Pacific is my home ocean; I knew it first, grew up on its shore, collected marine animals along the coast." It was probably along this stretch of coast, between Lover's Point and Hopkins Marine Station, that the youthful Steinbeck first developed his interest in marine organisms. I also recall Rolf Bolin telling me one day that John had attended summer classes at the Marine Station during the Twenties, prior to his own arrival at the station (which was in 1928) and, of

course prior to Steinbeck's first meeting with Ricketts in 1930. Steinbeck's interest in marine biology was undoubtedly, I feel, an original sin.

Having once met, their friendship flourished and grew, only to end with Ricketts' accidental death in 1948. A revealing insight into the depth of this friendship, and a certain dependency upon it, is revealed in Steinbeck's *America and Americans* published in 1966. In the text of this book, Steinbeck still quotes his friend's words, although Ed had been dead for eighteen years.



Many critics have attempted to analyze the effects of this friendship on Steinbeck's writings. I do not feel qualified to play the role of analyst. However, there are many of us "constant readers" who feel that Steinbeck's finest and most inspired writing took place when he was in closest contact with his friend, Ed Ricketts.

I do feel I should comment on what I consider to be the permanent contributions Steinbeck's interest in the sea has made to the field of marine biology. The first of these contributions resulted from the publication of *Sea of Cortez*. Its title page states that it is "a

leisurely journal of travel and research." Prior to its publication there were, of course, many narratives and accounts of expeditions and scientific researches.

A pretty good example of one of these is Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*. However, in the 30's most budding marine biologists were relegated to reading the accounts of William Beebe in the *National Geographic* magazine or in book form. These narratives, in the main, described his deep sea researches which took place in a restricted area of the ocean near Bermuda, and carried out under the aegis of the New York Zoological Society. These accounts stirred our young hearts, but by no stretch of the imagination could the lead character be described as "swashbuckling." The term "swashbuckling" however could, I think, be applied to the image conveyed by Steinbeck and his companions in *Sea of Cortez*. In this volume the biologist, and in particular, the marine biologist, is removed from the dry dust of academia and an image is created of a laughing, lusty, down-to-earth type, who is endowed with compassion for his fellow man. Steinbeck writes, "We sat on a crate of oranges and thought what good men most biologists are, the tenors of the scientific world--temperamental, moody, lecherous, loud-laughing and healthy." Not many professions can get such rave notices! Further, he emerges as an individual who can speak in more than a series of grunts when discussing fields other than his own and delving into philosophy, art, music and literature. In short, the image presented is that of a totally humanized and well-rounded individual.

It is difficult to know what effect this book had on the recruitment of future marine biologists. Somehow, to me, to enter the field because of a desire to become a marine biologist of the type portrayed in *Sea of Cortez* is far more intellectually satisfying than becoming attracted to the field because you're into skin diving and like to limit out on "ABS" (this view has been expressed by certain students I have counseled). For many years I have questioned students who professed a desire to become marine science majors, if they had read *The Sea of Cortez*. Their affirmative answers ran amazingly high.

The second contribution of Steinbeck to the field of marine biology occurred through the publication of *Cannery Row*. Whereas the image of the scientist was humanized in *Sea of Cortez*, the novel *Cannery Row* added a totally new dimension. It was the first book in which a marine biologist appeared as a hero. Not only

were marine biologists the tenors of the biological world, they now assumed the dimensions of a hero. During those post-war years, I feel that every student who registered at Hopkins Marine Station knew and had read *Cannery Row*. In retrospect, I am convinced that some of them probably registered solely because they had gathered the idea that Hopkins was part of and related to the events depicted in Steinbeck's novel. In addition to luring students into the delights of marine biology, the book provided the general reading public with what it thought to be a thumbnail sketch of a marine biologist. The image was somewhat inaccurate and, like most descriptions of heroes, greater than life, but at least it familiarized the reading public with the profession.

We could probably spend some time discussing the effects Steinbeck's biological philosophy had and how its holistic emphasis foreshadowed an entire nation's sudden recognition in the 1970's that an interdependence of life and physical environment existed on this planet. This biological philosophy has been discussed by others and was discussed negatively by certain critics in the 50's. It would be interesting to know if their essays would have the

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same emphasis today.

Steinbeck's contributions to marine science, as far as the reading public was concerned, were probably the straightforward ones we have identified, rather than the philosophic and symbolic ones that critics have found in his writings. These obvious contributions are namely: the identification of the marine biologist in our society and his humanness; and secondly, the recruitment of students to the field of marine biology.

In a secondary vein, one of his more important contributions occurred when he co-authored *Sea of Cortez* with Ed Ricketts and helped provide a medium whereby an annotated bibliography and list of organisms from the Panamic Faunal region became available to the students of this region. It provided data from which comparative zoogeographical studies of the Pacific area could be developed, as well as making certain zoogeographical conclusions of its own. In fact, this faunal survey and bibliography may have been the greatest

value of the book. Considering the comparatively short time the authors spent collecting, over 500 species--an amazing number--were observed and identified.

In one sense Steinbeck's contributions were made via a circuitous route. Webster Street notes that "Ed had formed Pacific Biological Laboratories in 1924. He and a group of young scientists had gotten together and started it. And since I'm on that subject I might say that in 1939 John bought quite a large block of stock in that corporation and also loaned it a substantial sum of money, which it needed very badly." Some years later, in 1947, despite a rejection of a grant application by Ricketts by the Guggenheim Foundation to support a collecting expedition to the Queen Charlotte Islands, Ricketts and Steinbeck planned a trip to the area with Steinbeck apparently intending to underwrite the expenses. Steinbeck provided Ricketts with moral as well as financial support. In a restricted sense then, with money and friendship, he encouraged Ed to concentrate on the work begun with *Between Pacific Tides*. There is a possibility that Steinbeck, himself, might have become more heavily involved in the writing of new editions of the text, if it had not been for Ricketts' death.

It should be pointed out that *Between Pacific Tides* has continued to be available to the public, having been revised several times by Dr. Hedgpeth. Hedgpeth's most recent revision is extensive but retains the flavor and direction of the 1948 version. The effect of *Between Pacific Tides* on generations of workers on the Pacific Coast is difficult to assess. It has probably been the most popular and widely used text in introductory marine biology courses in the Junior Colleges and State University System of California. No serious California student of marine biology is unfamiliar with its contents. Its value to the novice is invaluable. It is the reference text of choice, for example, in Project MER, a marine ecological research participation program involving 3000 high school students yearly in the San Francisco Bay area. Its format has provided these non-professionals with deeper insight into local habitat-organism relationships.

Some researchers have tended to downgrade popularizers of science. The answer to such individuals is given most succinctly in *The Sea of Cortez* in which Steinbeck and Ricketts note that "It is usually found that only the little stuffy men object to what is called 'popularization,' by which they mean writing with a clarity understandable to one not familiar

with the tricks and codes of the cult. We have not known a single great scientist who could not discourse freely and interestingly with a child. Can it be that the haters of clarity have nothing to say, have observed nothing, have no clear picture of even their own fields?" It is now thirty-three years since this observation first appeared in print. It is a shame to say, some of these scientific snobs are still with us. Despite the appearance of competing volumes which have appeared in the intervening years, the success of *Between Pacific Tides* attest to its continuing relevance and significance.

In conclusion: the last time I saw John Steinbeck was shortly after Ricketts' death. A few of us from Hopkins had come, at his invitation, to the small laboratory on Cannery Row to take some of Ed's papers back to the Hopkins library. For a short time that afternoon we drank some beer,

talked, and then we left.

In the years that followed I, of course, followed Steinbeck's career with great interest, the books, the adulation of the public, and the honors which culminated with the Nobel Prize. Despite this successful period of his life it was as if, at least to some of us, that an era had ended when he lost his friend in 1948. In his Forward to the 1948 revision of *Between Pacific Tides*, Steinbeck wrote that "There is in our community an elderly painter of seascapes who knows the sea so well that he no longer goes to look at it while he paints. He dislikes intensely the work of a young painter who sets his easel on the beach and paints things his elder does not remember having seen." To some of us, in the years following Monterey, Ricketts, and the sea, Steinbeck had become that elderly painter.

INTRODUCTION

William Q. Wick

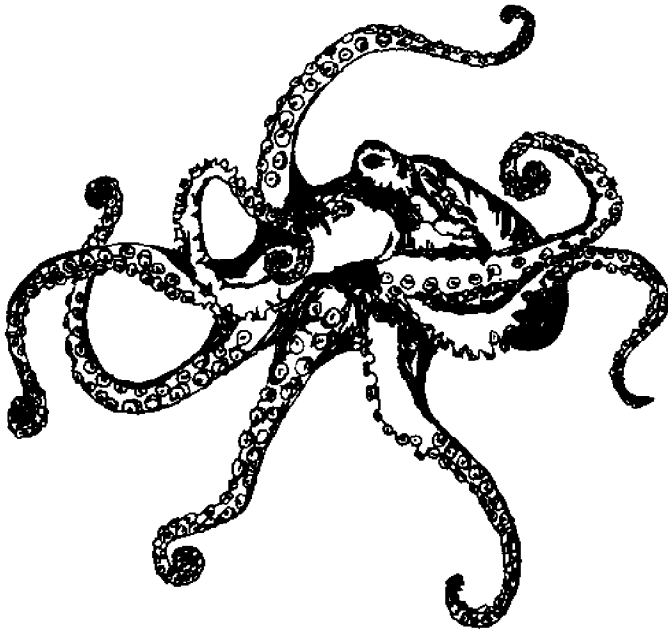
The uninitiated may wonder why Dr. Martin's paper on "Sex Life Among the Octopi" is included in the proceedings of a conference on Steinbeck and the Sea. I refer those who are curious to marine biological projects conducted at Hopkins Marine Station during the 1930's and 1940's and to Doc's preoccupation with octopi in *Sweet Thursday*.

SEX LIFE AMONG THE OCTOPI: AN EXAMPLE OF THE ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE SHARED BY STEINBECK AND RICKETTS

Arthur W. Martin

What lies behind the tales told by Steinbeck? What was the philosophy of this teller of tales? We have heard him characterized as a nonteleological realist. Others have presented the details of the close friendship between Ricketts and Steinbeck, and what it meant to be Steinbeck's friend. Here we wish particularly to examine the relationship of the sea to his philosophy and, as its interpreter, that character Doc Ricketts who had the kind of detailed knowledge described here. Profound acquaintance with natural science has led some men into mysticism, but the more common result is skeptical realism.

The large Pacific Coast octopus, *Octopus dofleini martini*, lives as a solitary animal along the length of the North American coast line from lower California into Alaska. From hatching out of the egg until the completion of its sexual phase it never knows any guidance or instruction. When food is scarce it may be cannibalistic and hence must avoid its larger relatives, and be itself avoided by the weaker. The perpetuation of the species demands that at sexual maturity there must be a profound change in this behavior. In preparation for this phase, about ten percent of the body of the male develops into the gonad and the accessory genital organs. The third arm on the right side elongates its specialized tip, the hectocotyle, which has been present throughout life, into a structure ten to fourteen inches in length. While the animal is young, this tip is only an inch



or two in length but still recognizable because it has no suckers on it, and there is a groove in the tip which continues up the skin of the arm all the way to the body. This is the structure that will guide the seminal fluid into first one oviduct, then the second, of the female.

The seminal fluid cannot make the long traverse down the groove through the activity of the sperm cells. The sperm, and accessory parts, are therefore all beautifully packaged into a series of tubes each about a quarter of an inch in diameter and nearly a yard long, and each containing about one billion sperm cells. The tubes are produced on an assembly line, packed with sperm and stored, usually from six to nine at a time, in a special long chamber ready for use. Some cephalopods, like squids and nautilus discharge the tubes, called spermatophores, near or into a special receptacle or even the oviduct of the female where they are dissolved or explode. Octopuses provide each spermatophore with a complex elongating device, called an ejaculatory apparatus, that looks like a coiled spring but which extends not like a spring at all, but by being turned inside out like an inverted finger of a rubber glove. You can imagine this inverted rubber finger also being coiled to take up less room, and this will give you an idea of the neat packing of the ejaculatory apparatus. The motive force is provided by a secretion of the glands that manufactured the spermatophore. The sperm are surrounded by a solution of a concentrated, high-molecular weight compound which cannot escape through the pores of the spermatophoric membrane.

When the spermatophore is brought out of the reproductive tract and exposed to sea water, this compound draws water into the spermatophore until the pressure rises to about the level of human arterial blood pressure. The high pressure slowly turns the ejaculatory apparatus inside out, extending the length of the spermatophore almost half again, but now down the groove in the arm towards the hectocotyle. As the tube elongates the sperm thread is drawn along keeping pace with the growing tip. This process takes from thirty to ninety minutes, while one watching the mating pair of octopuses might think that nothing whatever was happening.

Now we are prepared to look at the behavior of an animal equipped in this way. At the breeding season, usually January through May, the male seeking or meeting a female, recognizes and approaches her without hostility on either side. Remember that he is a beginner and if she is already fertilized she will try to avoid him, so the female cannot direct the process. He begins by embracing her in several arms, and then begins a thorough exploration of the entire body surface with his hectocotyle. Gradually the search narrows and within fifteen minutes to half an hour he is inserting the hectocotyle into the female's mantle cavity. This is not surprising. All through his three or four years of life he has freely inserted the tip of any of his eight arms into his own mantle cavity to clean the gills or to remove an offending invader. What is surprising is that the hectocotyle recognizes the oviduct of the female, and probably clasps it in the tip of the groove. The preliminary stroking has had an effect on the female, not visible outwardly but presumably very important in the sex act. The oviducts have been quiescent all through life, but now develop peristaltic waves running from the open tip towards the ovary; and these waves may be a part of the recognition process.

With the preliminary orientation accomplished the male ejects a spermatophore from the last one of a series of sacs. This last sac holds but one spermatophore at a time, and is called the penis or copulatory organ, although it does no more than eject the spermatophore forcefully out through the excurrent siphon and into the groove in the third right arm. The sperm end is lodged up in the armpit and the ejaculatory organ is pointed down the arm. The last structure to emerge from the male tract is a long, thin thread attached to the cap of the ejaculatory apparatus. No doubt this thread helps the animal to keep control of the

spermatophore so he does not risk losing it entirely. But once the spermatophore is firmly held by the arm, the siphon tugs at the thread and pulls the cap off the spermatophore. This act expedites the process; internal pressure would ultimately blow the cap off or explode the spermatophore, so pulling the cap allows the whole reaction to start at a lower pressure. As the tip unfolds it creeps down the groove in the arm at a rate of about one inch every five minutes. The final stage has never been witnessed by man *in situ*, but we can reconstruct it accurately. As the last five inches of the ejaculatory duct unfolds, a roughened surface is exposed. We suspect that this roughness is a signal either to the male or female or both. The growing tip enters the orifice at the end of the oviduct. If this orifice had been widely open all of this time, the anti-peristaltic movements would have filled the oviduct with sea water. There is some evidence that a little sea water does get in, but the amount is negligible, and so the tip of the spermatophore is the first structure ever to enter. As the growing tip moves inside the oviduct a new phenomenon, long prepared for, intervenes. The wall of this part of the spermatophore is much weaker than all the rest and so the pressure driving the reaction suddenly dilates this weak wall and most of the contents of the spermatophore are driven with a rush into this three-inch bag inside the oviduct. This amounts to almost an eighth of a pint of seminal plasma, sea water and

sperm cells which is soon free in the oviduct because the continued contractions rupture the weak bag. The tip of the oviduct contracts on the collapsed spermatophore, and the tube projecting from the orifice is a portion of the highly elastic membrane and is rightly closed, so there is essentially no leakage of sperm from the oviduct. But the act is not finished, the female has a second oviduct. While the long process of ejaculation has been going on, the male has reloaded the copulatory organ from the reservoir of spermatophores. He now moves the hectocotyle to the other oviduct and repeats the entire performance. The act may therefore require five hours or more.

The male may now be considered an expert, and goes off in search of other females. The fertilized female soon uses some of the two billion sperm to fertilize from 50,000 to 100,000 eggs, each the size of a small grain of rice. She fastens each egg by a stalk to a rock or to a central strand holding hundreds of eggs, and will now remain in the sheltered area she has selected, blowing water over the egg mass and keeping the area clean with the tips of her arms. She eats nothing during the six months of development and is thought invariably to die at the end of this period. The young begin to hatch, take up an independent life in the plankton until they are too big for this type of life, then settle to the bottom and go about the serious business of growing to maturity, and so the cycle begins again.

steinbeck in perspective

STEINBECK AND THE SPIRIT OF THE THIRTIES

William Appleman Williams

I am delighted to be here at the invitation of Joel Hedgpeth, a dear friend and a distinguished teacher, scientist, and colleague.

I am a bit uneasy, however, about the ghost of Ed Ricketts. I did not know him, but from all I have learned he was not a man to be diddled-with about important matters. So I have goose bumps in my belly which warn me that he would not take kindly to being celebrated in this particular context. By which I mean that May Day to Ed was May Day, not some bourgeois abberation honoring Labor by transforming the holiday into something called Law Day, and then celebrating it according to the Profit Principle.

I am also nervous about talking about Steinbeck and *the* spirit of The Thirties. No one can do that, not even Edmund Wilson, simply because there was no one spirit of the Thirties. If there had been, then it would have revealed itself as an ideology that would have informed us as a people so that we would have changed America in ways far more consequential than the New Deal montage of emergency measures and capitalist reforms. That much maligned man named Herbert Hoover deeply feared that *the* spirit of the Thirties would be fascist. Happily, he was wrong. But he did not feel much relieved when he was rather shortly proved correct in his prediction that the lack of *any* firm spirit would create a monster of collusion between the corporations and the federal bureaucracy.

Hence all I can attempt to do, and of necessity must do cryptically, is to define the several spirits of the Thirties, and suggest Steinbeck's relationship to each of them. I do think, however, that this approach helps to explain Steinbeck's popularity during the Thirties, and may give us a better (and impersonal) understanding of his failure to sustain and enlarge upon his achievements in *Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*.

II

One of the spirits revealed in American fiction of the Thirties is an emphasis on feeling and emotion. This is certainly an accurate evocation of the mood of the country, at least after 1932, and much of the writing is excellent in the sense that it captures and conveys that aspect of life. In this respect,

at any rate, Steinbeck displays the master's touch in several novels. I am primarily concerned, however, with relating the ideas and actions that are revealed by his feeling and emotion to the broader spirits of the Thirties.

Let me begin with the response to the Crash. Having come to premature social consciousness between 1929 (when I was eight) and the devastating recession of 1937 (when I was sixteen), I am perpetually amazed by the way that the vast majority of historians, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists ignore or slight the first phase of the Great Depression. Everyone emphasizes the reformist activism of the New Deal, whereas the first years were characterized by abject passivity. It is traditional to blame the Hoover Administration for failing to act; but if you believe in representative government, then I am afraid you will have to settle for the government reflecting with eerie perfection the mood of the people. For that matter, Hoover did more than the citizenry.

If you cherish the notion that the United States is unique, then there is your basic footnote. No other population of an advanced industrial society ever laid so inert for so long when confronted with such a massive failure of their system. Not even Americans: 1877, for example, was a year of industrial militance and violence; and the wracking depression of the 1890s produced riots and strikes that tipped the status quo to the edge of radical reform or socialism.

Not so between 1929 and 1934. We sat on our bum. And Steinbeck did encapsulate that passivity in his opening evocation of Jim Nolan in *In Dubious Battle*.

"You look half drunk, Jim. What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know. I feel dead. Everything in the past is gone."

So there we are, into the soul of a traumatized society with Steinbeck's perception of one of the spirits of the Thirties. He got it true, as Hemingway would say; but as Hemingway never got it true about the Thirties in America.

Steinbeck veered next toward Marxism; or, more exactly, toward that weird and unsettling distortion of Marxism known as the doctrine of the American Communist Party (and the related convolutions offered by its metropolitan intellectual camp followers). Those brilliant and dedicated people were thinking about America in terms of the Soviet Union. That meant they were thinking about a revolution without a social movement.

Which meant that they were not thinking about America. Once Steinbeck understood that non sequitur he was at one with another spirit of the Thirties--the rejection by the vast majority of an irrelevant analogy.

But Steinbeck was not as close to a related spirit of the era. He did not explore Marxism in a serious way. He evaded the issue in a way that another Western novelist named Robert Cantwell did not: Cantwell grappled with Marx, he dealt with industrialism coming to the West, and he confronted the central Marxian problem of the evolution of social and class consciousness in a way that was thoughtful, realistic, emotional, and sophisticated. Hence in my view Cantwell tells us more about American strikes in the early Thirties than Steinbeck; even though Steinbeck is closer as a novelist to the popular rejection of American communism.

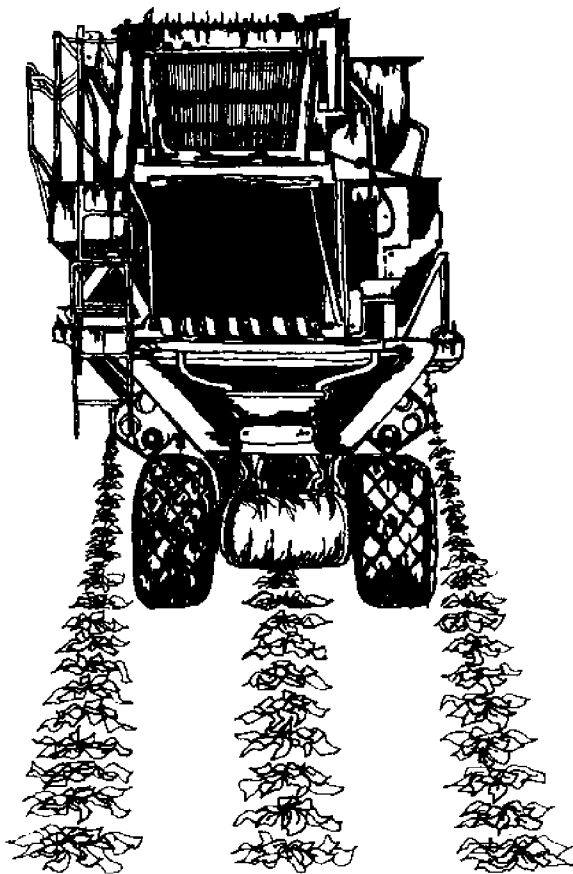
The key here is Steinbeck's very Thirtyish (and contemporary) American fear of the nonfamilial collectivism that is essential to the creation of a social movement and the building of a modern community. Steinbeck is afraid of class solidarity and its determined militance to change the system (as in *In Dubious Battle*); he is at ease only with the courageous family that shys away from sustained confrontation with the system (as in *The Grapes of Wrath*).

Steinbeck thus becomes the symbolic spokesman of a reformism that fails. Cantwell was a revolutionary able ultimately to live at peace because he came to realize that the America of the Thirties was as revolutionary as Joan Crawford and Tom Mix.

Steinbeck was a classic petty bourgeois reformer who believed the Jeffersonian axiom that a *little* property allowed one to be moral and prosperous and truly happy. It is a great American tradition, perhaps even *the* American tradition. It was appropriate to the realities of American experience from about 1640 to the 1880s. But it was irrelevant to the structural and the existential realities of the Thirties. A classic example of cultural lag, and of how people's perception of reality is more consequential than the reality. And therein lies the key to Steinbeck's significance and popularity.

III

To talk about Steinbeck's America is to talk about the New Deal, and to talk about the New Deal is to talk about reform. But the history and nature of American reform is in many important



respects the history and nature of America. Indeed, social commentators of Freudian and non-Freudian predispositions have agreed that *the American* is best described as a compulsive and obsessive reformer. Let us accept the essential proposition without quibbling over the definitive formulation. We are then confronted with one of those truths that self-destruct into an extremely troublesome question: we have to explain why reform is so persistently necessary; or, to phrase it another way, why our reforms never end the need for perpetual reform.

Two unusually intelligent and viscerally honest reformers point us toward the answer. Listen first to Frederick C. Howe, a key progressive of the 19th and 20th centuries, summarizing his *Confessions of a Reformer*. We Americans are dominated by an "evangelical-mindedness that seeks a moralistic explanation of social problems and a religious solution for most of them." That not only covers most of the lay preaching in *The Grapes of Wrath* (and other Steinbeck novels), but it prepares us for the far tougher confrontation with that exceptional 19th century reformer named Orestes Brownson. Brownson was one of

those unnerving people who cut through the bone into the marrow. We Americans seek "to reform without disturbing the social arrangements which render reform necessary.... The only way to get rid of the evils is to change the system, not its managers.... You must abolish the system or accept its consequences. No man can serve both God and Mammon."

To say that Steinbeck did not understand--let alone confront--Brownson's challenge is not to damn him, it is only to say that he was typically American. Steinbeck was a semi-industrialized Jeffersonian of the Thirties: romantic, sentimental, transcendental, evangelical, humanitarian, and escapist. In one important sense, *innocent*. To paraphrase Mark Twain, the innocent at home. That is not a put-down; for so, too, in many respects, was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Which is to say that innocence *can* be the springboard to perception and even into the shallows of that ocean otherwise known as wisdom. The difference between Roosevelt and Steinbeck was Roosevelt's upper class consciousness, his realization that he had to deal with industrialism even though he was an agrarian, and his understanding that *someone* had to play the hand. The central weakness of American reformers--and hence Steinbeck--is that they never want to play the hand. Steinbeck damned his own heritage and hence had no springboard.

To rail at the upper middle class, or to scream at the bankers, is irrelevant Jeffersonianism. To paraphrase Brownson: either use the bankers, or imagine and then build a social movement to create a system without bankers. Either use tractors without investing them with transcendental good or evil, or get on to oxen and horses. It is fascinating to realize that Steinbeck's treatment of tractors is the mirror reversal of Soviet socialist realist fiction: he damns them, they worship them. He cannot see beyond the family farm, they cannot see beyond the industrial machine. The irony is that, in the end, both rape the land.

IV

These manifestations of Steinbeck's oneness with many of the spirits of the Thirties are revealed in classic form in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

First. There is no sustained, thoughtful confrontation with the modern American system of corporate industrial capitalism--yet that was the reality of the era. If one wanted to be cruelly unfair to Steinbeck, then one would

simply say that he copped-out by siding with--and sentimentalizing--the born losers. But William Faulkner, and even Cantwell, make that impossible. Both men offered devastating social and cultural criticisms of industrialism without romanticizing the agrarian idiom.

Steinbeck did not do that: he gave us Pa instead of Popeye, he gave us abstract, evangelical anger about money, and he begged the issue of the plasticity of machines--meaning that *we* make them, and if they then make us *we* have no one to blame but ourselves. Furthermore, Steinbeck failed to face two other central issues. Despite all his rhetoric about the banks, it was in truth the dust that pushed Ma and Pa onto Highway 66. But most American farmers of the Thirties knew they were being done in by the corporations: the mortgage companies, the life insurance companies, and the other companies that sealed the fate of traditional agriculture.

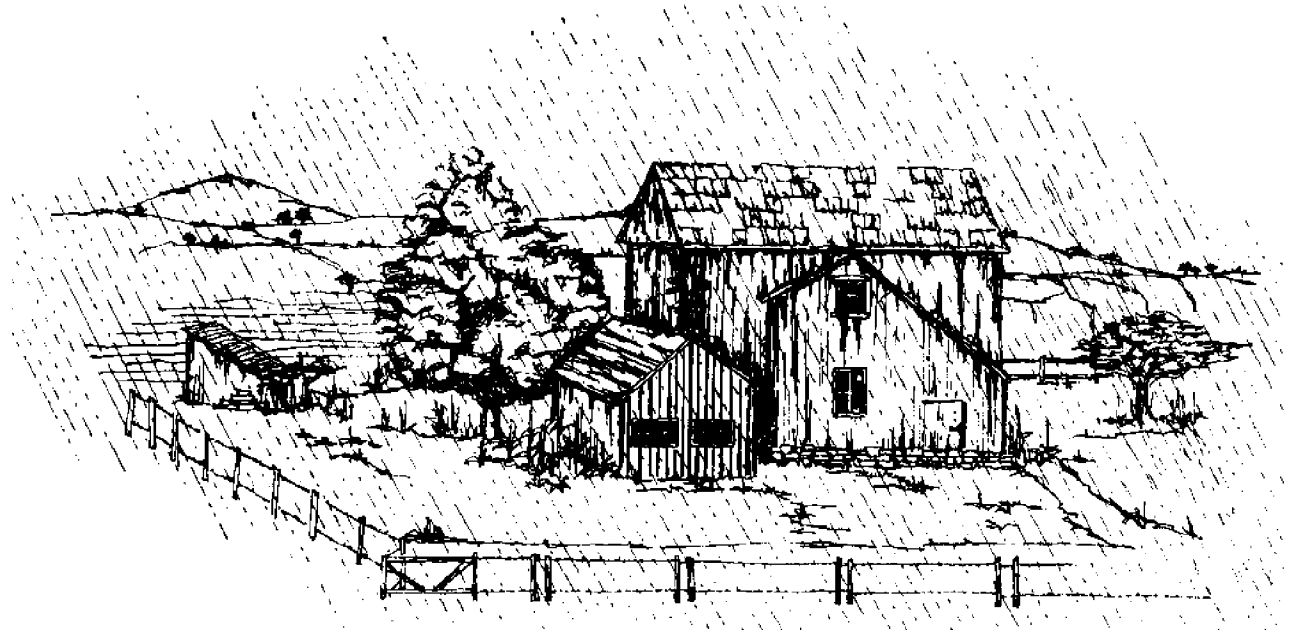
Second. Steinbeck fails totally to confront that Americanism to end all Jeffersonian Americanisms--the frontier thesis. Westward is the way to truth and self-sufficiency and democracy and happiness and everything else that is good and true. Frederick Jackson Turner, the author of the New Testament of the frontier thesis, understood and admitted that the frontier was an escape from the central issues. Steinbeck offers not the slightest recognition of the falseness of the Eldorado of the West. He rushed past irony into a benevolent

thunderhead. Steinbeck has it rain to verify the frontier thesis. Once again he is at one with a major spirit of the Thirties.

Third. Steinbeck fails to confront the non sequitur in his amateur bourgeois philosophizing about success. Success is bad, he tells us, but he and his characters want it anyway. The gospel according to Steinbeck is that property destroys *we*, but I have to have it to be *me*. Now make no mistake, there is a basic issue there: how much of what kind of property do we need to be whole enough to get outside of ourselves and build a community? But Steinbeck writes right by the issue. I know of nothing more classically American.

Fourth. Steinbeck is viscerally disturbed by a social movement that builds a community around new institutions. He is even uneasy about a reformist government camp for people in trouble. Steinbeck is truly frightened by community, by institutions, and by the Brownson challenge. Classic American reformism.

Fifth. There is, finally, at the end of the Thirties, the gnawing truth we all knew. Despite all the reforms, the reality was still very bad. At least ten million unemployed. Nobody knew how many dead from the failure of the system. Even more revealingly, nobody wanted to know. And the President crab-walking off into war, and the corporations creeping into Washington to line their pockets as patriotic citizens. So there we are back with Howe and Brownson. Be evan-



gelical or change the system. Steinbeck had it rain in California. Wholly American.

V

Steinbeck also expressed some less central truths of the Thirties. He did reveal (if in a limited way) the cultural impact of movies, and he was even better on the joyous--and not wholly escapist--sublimation of harsh reality through dancing. He also understood the documentary idiom of the era, and in his impersonal "truth telling" sections of *The Grapes of Wrath* moved beyond the newsreel technique of Dos Passos.

But he missed the spirit of other groups of Americans. Consider, for example, the farmers of the South (to say nothing of the Okies who returned to Oklahoma). For those truths we have to go elsewhere, particularly to James Agee and Walker Evans. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* there is a recognition of the end of the frontier that Steinbeck simply does not perceive. The point is that there does come a time to stay at home and hack it out. Steinbeck did not stay home. He went instead to Hollywood and the Upper East Side.

So we come finally to two subjects about which Steinbeck was a bit *avant garde* and mostly wrong.

The first is Steinbeck's revolt against the bourgeois treatment of sex. He is not James Joyce. He is not D. H. Lawrence. And he is not Henry Miller. Still and all, he talked Anglo-Saxon to the multitudes. There is no need to commit oneself to Freudianism to recognize the paradox in Steinbeck's treatment of sex. On the one hand he was explicit, blunt, and earthy. Fine. On the other hand, he was not explicit, blunt, and earthy in order to reveal a richer version of love and community through sex between a woman and a man.

So how do we get into the heart of that issue? I suggest we go back to Marx. Marx understood and said explicitly that sex as an *end* reduces people to animalism: one participant, male or female, becomes an *object*. Then he said that *human* sex was the irreducible basis of socialism: my satisfaction and fulfillment is dependent upon your satisfaction and fulfillment. The essence of communion and community. Now on that vital point Hemmingway did get to the truth: there *is* sex that moves the earth.

But there is no such sex in Steinbeck. Maybe Ed Ricketts was to blame. John's memoir of Ed in the introduction to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* is in many

respects an embarrassing essay on sexual envy. Ed got the women. But Steinbeck seems wholly unable to realize that Ed got the women as a substitute--largely unsatisfactory--for getting what he wanted but could not get.

And so we arrive at last at Steinbeck's amateur scientism. There is a poetic wholeness in it all--and perhaps Steinbeck was inherently a poet who mistakenly chose to write prose. Be that as it may, Steinbeck was a positivist of the old regime at a time when the emerging truth was the rediscovery of anti-positivism--of holism.

Biology and its philosophical sister called ecology are by nature holistic. Hence Steinbeck's increasingly frenetic concerns to emphasize *what is*, rather than *why* or *what might be*, are wholly misconceived. Ecology is the modern version of Spinoza: everything is related to everything else. Marx understood that, and you cannot understand Marx unless you understand Spinoza and read Marx as the Spinoza of our social ecology.

Ed Ricketts sensed that truth and struggled to rediscover that richer--and revolutionary--comprehension of reality. Steinbeck in my view did not even know the object of his crusade. To the extent that Ricketts educated Steinbeck, that is to say, Ricketts moved Steinbeck out of romanticism into positivism. But Ricketts was on the threshold of a profound anti-positivism. That is what Ricketts meant by his references to "breaking through." All of which is to say that while Steinbeck was being made aware of what is, Ricketts was recognizing that you cannot know what is unless you know the relationships. And you cannot know the relationships until and unless you move beyond the *what* into the *why*.

In one sense, therefore, Steinbeck did not fail because he was a would-be scientist trying to be a novelist. He failed because he was a novelist who mistakenly understood science as being atomistic--positivistic. Science is in truth holistic--anti-positivistic. Thus *The Grapes of Wrath* does not tell us the scientific truth about America in the Thirties. Neither do *The Wayward Bus* or *East of Eden* or *Travels with Charley* tell us the truth about a later America.

The gut truth of it is that modern America has not produced a Doris Lessing and *The Golden Notebook*. Wright Morris came close in his novel about the end of the frontier: *Ceremony at Lone Tree*. And Robert Heinlein tucked right-in-

upon-it in his so-called science fiction story about "The Cool, Green Hills of Earth." Maybe Thomas Pynchon did it in *V*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*. All I can say is that I have read them, and can only say that I don't know. He may simply be too much for me.

VI

So we are back to Steinbeck. Perhaps I do not understand him.

But what I have to say is this:

Salute him: at his best he was a great writer.

Honor him: he told us that our feelings and our emotions are important to our ultimate salvation.

Learn from him: he teaches us through his honest failures that to be a

heart without a head is to be a patsy for the power structure.

So I must also say: do not follow him.

Steinbeck was an anguished cry at the end of our twilight. He is not a beacon to guide us at our midnight.

Most of the lights are out. We are back with Cantwell and Faulkner and Marx.

The time has come, not to go to California or to the Upper East Side, but to talk to each other in the dark. To hold hands without trying to screw each other. To stop being evangelical and instead to change the system.

Steinbeck, Ricketts, and Hedgpeth helped us face that truth. Let us honor them by getting on down the road.

JOHN STEINBECK AND FEELING IN FICTION

Peter Copek

My talk today is about Steinbeck only in a roundabout way. I had set for myself the problem of why Steinbeck has been slow to gain recognition; and I thought I found the answer when I remembered some of the qualities contemporary writers hold sacred in their craft. But this in turn started me thinking that for all the verbal magic in the fiction of the last ten or fifteen years, we may have lost something essential. Caught up in method and technique, feeling may have escaped us. Despite John Barth's phrase for contemporary fiction--the "literature of exhaustion" he calls it--the novel seems to me not so much breaking down as it is surrendering and running all too smoothly in its own very special kind of technological heaven.

The keynote for my sermon comes from what at first might appear to be a most unlikely source. I was struck by it when I was reading *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*. Just before the key passage, Darwin is thinking about how his mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up till age thirty, poetry (Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley) gave him great pleasure; he took intense delight in Shakespeare. Now, an older Darwin finds Shakespeare intolerably dull; he has lost his taste for music and painting. In fact, "Music sets me thinking too energetically on what I have been at work on, instead of giving me pleasure." And then, Darwin's analysis and judgment of the change:

My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.

A man with a mind more highly organized or better constituted than mine, would not I suppose have thus suffered; and if I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied could have thus been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious

to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

Now I know that Darwin is talking about poetry, not prose; poems, not novels. He shared the nineteenth-century prejudice against fiction as an inferior art, John Stuart Mill's distinction that poetry's task was the representation of the human soul, a representation of feeling; the novel's lesser task was merely a true representation of incident, a representation of everyday life in community.

I would say the novelist's task has always been a combination of these two--or to use D. H. Lawrence's words, "The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered." The novel has been an exploration of man in a changing community, in Lawrence's case the community of industrial England, which he found blasted, mechanical, dead. The novel is really a most recent phenomenon. It was born at the start of the Industrial Revolution; it has until now remained the antibody of that Revolution, opposing all the forces of that Revolution that would enfeeble our emotions, deprive our instincts, curb our imagination; it has attempted to maintain the health of the human community.

Civilization is harmony and completeness. Barbarism is being lop-sided. You can be a barbarian of the soul and the feelings as well as of sensuality.

So important was this concept to Lawrence that he interrupts his tale of Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors to remind us of the way the novel could help us:

And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.

The best writers of the last ten years or so have turned away from this conception of fiction (and by "best" I mean best practitioners of their craft, best word-smiths). What contemporary novelists are constantly telling us in their work is: (1) This novel is not about the changing shape of community; this is not intended to represent what life is; this is what art is. (2) The subject of this novel is the novel itself. (3) A novel can be defined as a collection of black marks on a series of white papers, a piece of imaginative prose that must be stitched instead of stapled as Anthony Burgess calls it, and then goes on to

define a "word" as "what comes between two spaces."

Of course, some of the traditional apparatus appears in these fictions: story, plot, characters. But on page after page the contemporary novelist tries to undercut the realism of their presentation, tries to suspend your belief in their reality. And not only contemporary literature pays homage to this notion. Much of the comedy of popular culture is based on this technique: the anachronisms, word plays, camera mugging, parodic humor of *Blazing Saddles*, for example; or even The Count of *Sesame Street* who is called The Count because he loves to count.

Whenever you notice a technique like this, you back off from the work. It distances you, detaches you. You can no longer feel with the characters. And yet we are so conditioned to reading fiction in the traditional way that we soon lose ourselves in the plot again, until the

Since matters of form, style, and language seem to be the concerns of writers and critics these past several years, it's not difficult to see why Steinbeck is only slowly coming into his own.

next time we notice the author playing with his character, and we bounce back again, until we've been burned so many times by getting too close that we finally retain our distance and read the novel the way the novelist intended it to be read.

Since I have mentioned Burgess already, I would like to stay with him now as an example. And certainly *A Clockwork Orange* is a novel (or at least a movie) most of us would be familiar with.

At first glance *A Clockwork Orange* might appear to be a very traditional social novel. The world described is one in which men are on the moon and yet people are fearful of the streets. Newspapers are unread. Few are interested in learning, and the library is nearly empty. The housing is all flat-blocks and the food all packaged or frozen. Street gangs talking "nadsat" and dressed like the Teddy Boys of the fifties terrorize the community. In other words, the world described is not unlike our own. All is fear and timidity except for the novel's hero and leader of the gang, Alex. Alex doesn't like TV, he reads newspapers, visits libraries, detests sloppy grooming and bad manners, loves classical music (especially the Glorious Ninth of his beloved Ludwig Van); but his ruling passion is violence in all its forms. The

moral of the book seems clear and is indeed stated by a prison chaplain: it is better to be free to choose evil than to be conditioned to always choose good.

If indeed we rejoice when Alex shakes Ludovico's conditioning technique and begins again to *tolchock* and *razrez*, and think finely in his ungently glib of the ultra-violence and the old in-out in-out with starry ptitsas, then where have we been led? Our feelings have been engaged to vandalism, assault, rape, murder. And we can't simply repeat the old argument stopper, that the author is merely presenting violence, not provoking it or condoning it.

But there is a way out of this. As in all novels of this kind there are at least two plots going on. You might call the first the Plot, the second the Intrigue. The first is the traditional plot of the characters; the second is the game of the author playing with his characters and his reader. In *A Clockwork Orange* there are indeed three plots, and each is written in its own distinct language:

(1) the puffy polemical English prose of the revolutionary journalist, F. Alexander, (2) the "nadsat" story of Alex "Your Humble Narrator" of which F. Alexander's *A Clockwork Orange* is only a part, (3) the entire novel between the orange boards, *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. Its language is a complex series of clues--sometimes linguistic, sometimes musical clues--leading us out of the other two stories and back to a confrontation with their creator and controller, Burgess himself.

The moral turns out not to be a moral at all. There is no choice, never (unlike the movie). The novel is completely sealed and self-contained. It does not represent an outside world; it only returns us to the image of the author hovering over his creation. The glimpses of the author cause us to pull back, disengage ourselves from the book, to keep from being caught up in the trap of feeling with and for Alex.

Therefore, *A Clockwork Orange* is about looting, vandalism, murder, rape, even theft. Another Burgess novel, *Enderby*, is

a sort of portrait of the artist as a middle-age poet who creates while on the toilet seat. Relics of the bum, as Dryden would call it. Yet for all the violence, *A Clockwork Orange* doesn't hurt us. For all its cloacal stirrings, the Great Bowel Shift inside Mr. Enderby doesn't smell bad. In fact they are delicate books, novels shaped like complex and fragile crystals, as long as the reader stands far enough away to take in all the angles of their fabulous shapes. But of course we can misread them.

I say that the novels of recent years cannot hurt us morally, directly; but they may not be helping us either, if we go to fiction for the purpose Darwin would--and for the purpose Lawrence wrote it, Steinbeck wrote it--as an education into feeling which is bound finally to our moral character.

The words that come to mind to describe contemporary fiction of this kind are words like "witty, intelligent, elegant, playful, skillful, crafted, cunning" (qualities of the intellect, cerebral qualities, not emotional ones). In fact, it can almost be said that here for the first time is literature that can be played, and solved. Where we used to read simply *The End* we now can read QED, if we have the scholarship for it, that is, for one thing these novelists refuse to be is direct and easy. Since matters of form, style, and language seem to be the concerns of writers and critics these past several years, it's not difficult to see why Steinbeck is only slowly coming into his own.

But in retreating from feeling in fiction, one not only gives up its extreme sentimentality--but sentiment and compassion as well. Steinbeck concluded his Nobel Prize acceptance speech by paraphrasing John the Apostle: "In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man, and the word is with Man." Creation in literature--the word made flesh, *verbum caro factum est*--would celebrate man's capacity for greatness and correct his failings. Burgess has given us the more contemporary version of John's gospel:

Verbum caro factum est. Indeed.
The word is all the flesh I need.

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