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Dissonant Symphony: Multilevel Duality in the Fiction of John Steinbeck

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DISSONANT SYMPHONY: MULTILEVEL DUALITY
IN THE FICTION OF JOHN STEINBECK

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today, ten years after he received the Nobel Prize for Literature and four years after his death, the verbal warfare over the quality of John Steinbeck's fiction continues undiminished. In his introduction to Tetsumaro Hayashi's bibliography of Steinbeck's works, Warren French reviews the battlefield as of 1966: "more than a quarter of a century after what seems indisputably the height of Steinbeck's career, he remains the most controversial literary figure of his generation." While the position of Faulkner and Hemingway is secure and "the battle of Scott Fitzgerald seems won, . . . that of James Farrell, for example, seems lost." French notes "a division in the scholarly community between those who consider Steinbeck a mere journalist and those who adjudge him one of the masters of modern prose."¹

Since French's communique, the dispute has not abated. Voices from the opposing camps, as well as from the uncommitted middle ground, have been heard in the intervening years. Agnes McNeill Donohue, for instance, objects to the

"facile" readings of critics who consider Steinbeck to be "simplistic, primitivistic, sentimental, or naturalistic." She places Steinbeck in "the line of the inheritors of Puritanism—a strain that reaches its most magnificent expression in American literature in the works of Hawthorne, James, and Eliot." ² James Gray also advances the cause of Steinbeck the artist, comparing him with Scott Fitzgerald. "He, too, found pity and terror among his fellow human beings but, like Fitzgerald, he also found beauty, charm, and wit." These authors "shared the responsibility of presenting in fiction all the conflicts that have confused our time and yet affirmed its aspirations." ³

John Clark Pratt remains neutral in the battle. Writing about Steinbeck's Christian perspectives, Pratt judges not. "Just as I have intentionally avoided evaluating him as a novelist, so I think I should refrain from judging the merits of his stand." ⁴

Other critics are far from neutral, taking to the field in full combat gear. In an epilogue written in 1966 for

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the second edition of *The Novels of John Steinbeck*, Harry Thornton Moore remains unimpressed with Steinbeck. "He is simply not a major figure." Moore decries those critics who compare Dante and Shakespeare and Swift with Steinbeck, "an author whose peers, as passing time increasingly shows, are the Louis Bromfields and Bess Streeter Aldriches."

Moore's conclusion is a call to arms, a plea that the citadel he defended from the attacking barbarians: "We can perform a service to our culture, to the preservation of its truest values, by not overrating the work of this man of goodwill who is sometimes a competent novelist, though never 'great.'" In an article published in *PMLA* in 1970, Howard Levant begs the question completely in his first sentence: "To understand more fully why one of the most promising of recent American authors did not develop into a major figure, we must examine *Tortilla Flat* closely and in the round, for it is crucially significant in the record of John Steinbeck's artistic development."

I would like to enter into the lists as a champion of Steinbeck. He is a "major figure" and he is, in his better works, "great." I would like to offer evidence of his greatness in one important aspect of his writing, the richness

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6 Howard Levant, "*Tortilla Flat*: The Shape of John Steinbeck's Career," *PMLA*, LXXXV (October, 1970), 1087.
and complexity of his fiction which has been all but neglected to date.

No total accord could be reached by a group of readers as to what definitive qualities are necessary for greatness in a novelist. Each reader's definition would vary in detail. But one may assume that most evaluators would specify that a great novelist should display great talent in organizing diverse material, telling interesting stories, creating believable characters, building efficient structures, and writing effective prose. In his better novels, Steinbeck does all these things. A great novel should have significance beyond its pages. Steinbeck's better novels have this significance. A great novel, I as a reader believe, should have depth as well as breadth, richness as well as clarity. For a novel to be genuinely impressive, the reader must be offered more than a thin, single line of plot development that demands no more than partial response from the auditor. The many facets of the reader's mind must be profitably engaged in appreciating the many things unfolding simultaneously below the surface of the sentences' forward thrust. In the opening chapter of *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding states that the novelist should offer the readers a feast. I believe Steinbeck at his best offers his readers such a feast. The writing of an author like William Faulkner is often so obviously complicated that the reader finds it easier to recognize the complexity of
his fiction than it is for him to analyze similar complexity within the deceptively simple language of Steinbeck.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the substrata of Steinbeck's fiction. The first step must be to find an approach that will aid in organizing the assorted and often nebulous elements that produce the undertones and undercurrents that enhance his fiction. A brief survey of Steinbeck criticism will be of value in this determination of method.

Critics of John Steinbeck's fiction have been diverse both in their methods and their conclusions, ranging in their approaches from the exclusively political or social to the purely symbolic or mythic, ranging in their assessments from the scathingly negative to the blissfully positive. Most of these critics, however, no matter what their means or their ends, have discovered in Steinbeck's fiction some degree of conflict between either opposing material or contradictory viewpoints.

In his pioneer study, Harry Thornton Moore emphasizes "the mystic strain that persists in Steinbeck despite all his realism." In an essay of 1941, "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer," Frederic I. Carpenter explains that Steinbeck's fiction revolves about the interplay between reality and dream, a dichotomy further developed in subsequent criticism.

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7Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck, p. 94.
such as Georges-Albert Astre's *Steinbeck, ou le rêve contesté.* Maxwell Geismar notes that *In Dubious Battle* represents "the victory of Steinbeck's repressed realism over the romantic serenity which he has hitherto assumed as his tone... For this master of illusion has produced here a sort of masterpiece of disillusionment."9

Floyd Stovall focuses primarily upon Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman in *American Idealism*, but in his short survey of twentieth-century authors he finds in *The Grapes of Wrath* not only a strain of true American idealism, but also, to Stovall's regret, a vein of decidedly nontranscendental vulgarity.10 Freeman Champney observes that Steinbeck attempts to bridge the gap between extremes, thoroughly examining "the no-man's-land between intellectual and non-intellectual, rational and supernatural."11 In a chapter entitled "The Fickle Sensibility of John Steinbeck," Edwin Berry Burgum condemns the writer's "fluctuations" in his novels, his "oscillation between the decadence represented


by an amused tolerance of ignorance, poverty and depravity, and a recovery from decadence in the social novels."12

According to Frederick Bracher, "Steinbeck oscillates between two poles: the tide pool and the stars; and of the area between animal and saint, which most novelists have taken for their province, he has relatively little to say."13 Woodburn O. Ross describes Steinbeck as "Naturalism's Priest" because he is "both rational and irrational."14

In American Literary Naturalism, Charles C. Walcutt states that spirit and fact, the two components of American naturalism, serve as the poles of Steinbeck's thought.15 Peter Lisca's comprehensive study, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, is especially strong in the analyses of Steinbeck's style. According to Lisca, "all of his successful fiction contains a "tension between mind and heart, science and poetry."16} Warren French's John Steinbeck concentrates on three fundamental characteristics of Steinbeck's approach,


his use of allegory, his non-teleological philosophy, and his transcendental theology. French develops the conflict between the "capacity of detachment" of the non-teleological viewpoint and the "vigorous compassion" of the transcendental idealism.  

F. W. Watt suggests that it is "arguable" that Steinbeck oscillates "between the poles of scientific or God-like detachment" and "all-too-human involvement; between ruthless vision of things as they are, and sentimental reconstruction of things as they ought to be if a man is to bear them." Steinbeck's "opposing themes of Paradise and Paradise Lost reveal a deep ambivalence," concludes Joseph Fontenrose in his examination of the mythological backgrounds of the novels. "Steinbeck is sympathetic," Fontenrose writes, "to genuine human aspirations, and yet must always show them either defeated or, if attained, disappointing." Objecting to interpretations of The Grapes of Wrath that stress "an easy optimism," Agnes McNell Donohue compares Steinbeck's attitude toward humanity with the "profound ambiguity of Hawthorne concerning man's moral nature." Steinbeck, she continues, "is as interested

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in human depravity as he is in innocence."  

Throughout criticism of Steinbeck's work, in the sampling above and in many other investigations, one finds recurring reference to such concepts as opposition, tension, ambiguity, dichotomy, polarity, oscillation, and vacillation. Critics writing from totally different vantage points still see the same strong pattern of conflict between two opposing forces within the fiction of John Steinbeck. This inherent division resembles the explanation of scientific exploration that Steinbeck outlined in his foreward to Between Pacific Tides: "Periodically in the history of human observation the world of external reality has been rediscovered, reclassified, and redescribed." He explains a possible method of rediscovery: "a young, inquisitive, and original man might one morning find a fissure in the traditional technique of thinking."  

This image of the fissure suggests, in turn, Steinbeck's regular use of the symbolic valley within his novels. The narrator of East of Eden, for example, describes the Salinas Valley, recalling that the Gabilan Mountains to the east were "light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation" and that the Santa Lucias to the west were "dark and

20 Donohue, "'Endless Journey to No End,'" pp. 258, 259.

brooding—unfriendly and dangerous." "I always found in myself a dread of west and love of east," he remembers. "It may be that the birth and death of the day had some part in my feeling about the two ranges of mountains." The Hamilton and Trask families settle literally in the valley between the mountain chains, but they also live figuratively in the fissure between love and dread, birth and death.

To discover the new, the unique world of his novels, Steinbeck gazed through the fissure he found in traditional thinking. On either side of the abyss are the opposites, the extremes, the contraries. Since this was Steinbeck's method of gaining his original perspective, I believe the most appropriate method for a critical examination of his fiction is a view through the fissure of duality.

The purpose, then, of this study is to demonstrate the depth and complexity of Steinbeck's fiction. The unique method of this study is to examine the related ideas being developed simultaneously on the various levels of his fiction. The unique approach to this study is to analyze these developments in terms of multilevel duality.

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CHAPTER II

MULTILEVEL DUALITY

John Steinbeck has in the past frequently been condemned as a simple writer of popular fiction and is still so derided in some quarters. One of the major causes for this unjust but tenacious evaluation lies in simplistic criticism of his fiction that emphasizes a single aspect of his work at the expense of all others. Too many critics have examined but one level of his writing, thematic or philosophic, stylistic or symbolic, with little attempt to combine several approaches to his fiction. While many of these individual studies have been intelligent and illuminating within their restricted areas, they fail to provide the needed connections between theme and philosophy and style and symbolism and other equally important components. Because Steinbeck uses his varied approaches not alternately but simultaneously, a more comprehensive critical method is required for full appreciation of his art. Antonia Seixas, who served as Steinbeck's secretary and who was married to his friend Ed Ricketts, reports that "Steinbeck consciously writes on several levels." Using Of Mice and Men as her example, she identifies a story level, a "social protest"
level, a symbolic level, and a philosophic level. A careful dissection will not only confirm the presence of these four layers in *Of Mice and Men*, as well as in Steinbeck's other novels, but will also reveal additional levels that contribute to the accumulative impact of his writing.

T. S. Eliot offers in "The Metaphysical Poets" his prescription for effective modern poetry, insisting that "poets of our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." Steinbeck makes his novels more and more comprehensive by adding layer upon layer of meaning. Instead of dislocating the language, however, as Eliot advises poets, Steinbeck attempts to achieve equivalent complexity within prose that is deceptively simple and often colloquial. Steinbeck is at no time a primitive artist whose folk art unintentionally contains enriching dimensions of symbol and myth, but is at

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all times a sophisticated craftsman who methodically adds layer upon layer of meaning. He is conscious, first of all, of the realistic surface. He lived with migrant workers, for example, in order to reproduce the conditions of their lives in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He studied the history of the West so that he might present authentic historical perspectives. He was a conscious American symbolist in the tradition of Emerson and Melville. His active scientific investigations, culminating in *Sea of Cortez*, reinforced his literary heritage of biological naturalism. His utilization of myth was never accidental, but was completely conscious, for he was, after all, a writer who began his career near the end of the decade that began with *A Vision* of William Butler Yeats and *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot.

Steinbeck's major works contain so many divergent, tangential, and contradictory elements that they cannot be summarized without destroying their force. Minor characters who appear in but a single episode are often as important to the overall effect as main characters who reappear throughout the story. Short incidents, sketched rather quickly by the author, often etch an impression upon the reader's mind as lasting as that of more fully developed scenes essential to the central plot. Themes are introduced, restated, dismissed, and then revived. In *Cannery Row*, for instance, suicide is mentioned in the opening chapter in the tale of Horace Abbeville who shot himself over a pile of
fishmeal after transferring the title of his storehouse to Lee Chong. Chapter 2 contains the vignette of William, late pimp of the Bear Flag Restaurant, who coolly plunged an ice-pick into his heart. In Chapter 26, the motif is reintroduced when Joey relates how his father died after swallowing rat poison. This undertow of self-destruction helps to create the dissonance that radically alters the tone of this comic novel.

In correspondence with his agents in the early 1930's, Steinbeck mentions the manuscript of a work entitled "Dissonant Symphony" which he thought might be included with the stories later published in The Pastures of Heaven. He subsequently withdrew this manuscript, but the title is memorable and appropriate because, in a sense, all of Steinbeck's novels are dissonant symphonies. He reflects the fascination with music, especially the use of leitmotif in Wagnerian music drama, that had such a profound influence upon masterpieces of twentieth-century literature—James Joyce's Ulysses, Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, and Eliot's The Waste Land.

Harry Thornton Moore reports that before he started to write Steinbeck "often played the music of such composers as Dvorak, Brahms and Handel, drawing his mood from them and sometimes constructing his work from symphonic patterns."

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Moore also gives Steinbeck's explanation that "Cup of Gold was worked out—with the various parts built up of parallel tempos—after the pattern of Dvorak's Symphony from the New World." This preoccupation with musical effects is obvious in the final scene of Cup of Gold when Henry Morgan on his deathbed feels that "a low, sweet tone was flowing into his consciousness; a vibrant, rich organ tone, which filled him, seemed to emanate from his brain, to flood his body, and from it surge out over the world." The faceless children, representing Henry's deeds on earth, appear and question him: "their voices were becoming more and more strident and harsh, so that they overwhelmed the great Tone." At the moment of his death, however, Henry is once more "conscious of the deep, mellow pulsation of the Tone."  

Steinbeck's efforts to obtain musical effects in his fiction continued throughout his career. The endpapers of The Grapes of Wrath are decorated with a facsimile of the words and music of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," source of the book's title. Some of his magnificent evocations of the beauty of nature recall his comment in The Log from the Sea of Cortez about "a stretch of coast country below Monterey which affects all sensitive people profoundly, and if they try to describe their feeling they almost invariably

4Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck, pp. 91-2, 12.
do so in musical terms, in the language of symphonic music."
He also compares with music the discussion of speculative
metaphysics in which he and Ed Ricketts engaged: "It was an
enjoyable exercise on the instruments of our minds, improvi-
sations and variations on a theme, and it gave the same delight
and interest that discovered music does."\(^6\) Kino in *The Pearl*
hears musical statements like the hero of a Wagnerian opera:
"And Kino thrust the pearl back into his clothing, and the
music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears and it was
interwoven with the music of evil."\(^7\) In like manner, Doc in
*Cannery Row* hears the interweaving of themes when he finds the
body of the beautiful girl in the surf: "Music sounded in
Doc's ears, a high thin piercingly sweet flute carrying a
melody he could not remember, and against this, a pounding
surf-like wood-wind section."\(^8\) Doc plays recordings of
symphonies and Gregorian music in his laboratory by the sea,
especially when he is entertaining his girl friends. The
gramophone is as closely associated with his love life as it
is with that of the typist who stoops to folly in "The Fire
Sermon" of *The Waste Land*.

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In Journal of a Novel, the series of letters to Pascal Covici that Steinbeck wrote alongside the first draft of East of Eden, he records his attempts to orchestrate the work in progress. "There needs today to be the end of the kind of music which is Samuel Hamilton. It was to have first a kind of recapitulation with full orchestra, and then I would like a little melody with one flute which starts as a memory and then extends into something quite new and wonderful as though the life which is finishing is going on into some wonderful future." In the section of East of Eden to which he refers, Samuel Hamilton says to the Trask houseboy, "You know, Lee, I think of my life as a kind of music, not always good music but still having form and melody. And my life has not been a full orchestra for a long time now. A single note only—-and that note unchanging sorrow." Steinbeck later continues his discussion of writing in terms of musical composition in Journal of a Novel: "What you had today was the full orchestra I spoke of. Now tomorrow I will take up the little flute melody, the continuing thing that bridges lives and ties the whole thing together, and I will end with a huge chord if I can do it."

10 East of Eden, p. 274.
11 Journal of a Novel, p. 155.
Although Steinbeck is discussing in these journal entries the finale of but one section of *East of Eden*, a similar recapitulation of themes by "full orchestra" with a "huge final chord" is found at the end of every one of his novels from *Cup of Gold* of 1929 to *The Winter of Our Discontent* of 1961. In the last chapter of *East of Eden*, all the various levels of opposition within the book are restated briefly in the careful construction of the final chord. Cal Trask returns to his home at the beginning of Chapter 55 and discovers that his father is dying and that his brother Aron is dead. The cold, scientific efficiency of Adam's nurse is contrasted with Lee's warmth and reverence for all life. Dark and earthy Cal learns of the sacrificial death of his blond, celibate brother, recalling the background story of Cain and Abel which surfaces throughout the novel. Lee angrily calls Cal a "mouse" and a "nasty cur," reintroducing two of Steinbeck's ubiquitous animal symbols: the rodent, eternal victim of aggression, and the contrasting hunting animal. Cal, following Lee's advice, seeks out Abra who takes Cal to the willow tree where in the past she and Aron had parted the hanging branches and entered the cavern within, symbolism combining Steinbeck's omnipresent tree and cave images. But Abra suddenly decides that Cal is not yet ready to enter the cave with her, and she tells him that he must first return to his father's house, thus presenting the opposition between cave and house upon Steinbeck's symbolic landscape. In the
house the dying Adam's blessing of Cal with the word "Timshel" balances the tragic sacrifice of Aron. Adam's kind and noble presence is opposed with references to the boys' evil mother, Kate. Lee's mention of a book of "dirty stories written by a French queen" echoes the menace of sexual depravity in the novel. Allusions to "animals" and "beasts" suggest the circus at Kate's whorehouse where bestiality was a featured attraction. Lee's last emotional speech to Cal epitomizes every man's journey through life in search of perfection which is the core of all of Steinbeck's novels:

"I thought that once an angry and disgusted God poured molten fire from a crucible to destroy or to purify his little handiwork of mud. "I thought I had inherited both the scars of the fire and the impurities which made the fire necessary—all inherited, I thought. All inherited. Do you feel that way?"

"Maybe you'll come to know that every man in every generation is refined. Does a craftsman, even in his old age, lose his hunger to make a perfect cup—thin, strong, translucent?" He held his cup to the light. "All impurities burned out and ready for a glorious flux, and after that—more fire. And then either the slag heap or, perhaps what no one in the world ever quite gives up, perfection." He drained his cup and he said loudly, "Cal, listen to me. Can you think that whatever made us—would stop trying?" 12

Lee's sermon offers the action of the novel in miniature form, a method of condensation Steinbeck uses in other of his works—in the parable of the gopher in Cannery Row, in the short journey from the flooded boxcar to the deserted barn

12 East of Eden, pp. 531-2.
at the close of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Lee, the philosophical servant, could very well be speaking for the author here, for Steinbeck in his earlier novels certainly seems to believe that "an angry and disgusted God poured molten fire from a crucible to destroy or to purify his little handiwork of mud."

The dichotomy of "fire" and "mud," of drought and rain, is crucial to all three of the epics, *To a God Unknown*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *East of Eden* itself. Lee's speech also includes the equally fundamental opposition between "slag heap" and "perfection," which in Steinbeck's novels often takes the form of wasteland versus transcendentalism. The reference to the little translucent porcelain cup that Lee is holding suggests the Grail Quest which is a recurring structuring design in the novels, appearing in a number of interesting variations. In *Cup of Gold*, Henry Morgan finds a real chalice of gold, while the ironic grail in *The Moon Is Down* is Socrates' cup of hemlock and in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rose of Sharon's breast.

"Two stories have haunted us and followed us from our beginning," Samuel Hamilton says earlier in *East of Eden*. "We carry them along with us like invisible tails--the story of original sin and the story of Cain and Abel."

These two stories also haunted Steinbeck throughout his career. Lee alludes to Cain in his speech with his comments on the inherited scars, and to original sin with his description of
the "angry and disgusted God." The final chords of other novels contain reference to original sin with the mention of the symbolic apple. In the last chapter of *In Dubious Battle*, for instance, Mac picks and eats the small and misshapen apple. In the last chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rose of Sharon's dead baby is placed in an apple box. And even in this final chord of *East of Eden*, in many ways Steinbeck's most optimistic work, there is allusion to the Fall of Man for the little translucent cup that Lee holds in his hand contains "ng-ka-py," the Chinese brandy that Samuel Hamilton said tasted "a little like rotten apples."\(^{13}\)

These many levels of development in the conclusion of *East of Eden*, the wide range of notes within the chord, demonstrate why criticism that follows but one level of Steinbeck's writing is incapable of explaining the dynamics of his fiction. The problem is how to examine simultaneously these multiple layers without resorting to the use of a musical staff on which to graph the orchestration. The solution, I believe, lies in a study of the duality within the fiction, illustrated in *East of Eden*'s final chord by the numerous pairs of opposites, Cal-Aron, Cain-Abel, Kate-Adam, mud-flame, perfection-slag heap, mouse-cur, house-cave, celibacy-sexuality, and blessing-sacrifice.

Political observers in India have wryly advised that

\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 236, 144.
their country, with its wildly heterogeneous combinations of races, religions, and languages, rewrite the motto of the American colonists who proclaimed, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall." They have recommended that Indians rally about the appropriately altered slogan, "Divided We Stand." This same phrase could be offered as an explanation of the cohesive tension within Steinbeck's successful novels. Divided they do stand.

The great opposition, the great duality in Steinbeck's works, is between good and evil as even the most casual reading will confirm. Adam Trask is obviously good and Kate Trask is obviously bad. Rarely, however, are distinctions as clear-cut as in *East of Eden*. Mixtures of gray tones are more frequent than stark black and stark white. An additional complication is superimposed with Steinbeck's varying attitudes toward good and evil, resulting in an outlook that is tantamount to dual duality. He observes in *Journal of a Novel* that it is perplexing "how one with such benevolence as I can have at the same time, layer on layer, a callous cruelty, capable of almost anything, of death and hurt--an implacable cruelty needing only a direction as the benevolence does. With a channel, this mind can be a destroying angel." Developing this idea in a later entry, he writes: "You know, Pat, there are times when our thoughts are large and good and full and then there are other times when our thoughts and feelings are small and mean and nervous. Or am
I alone in this. This morning I am amazed at the utterly despicable quality of my thinking. And these are just as definitely a part of me as the thoughts of which I can approve."^{14} Mirroring this division he sees within himself is the polarity he describes in his fiction: "It is astounding to find that the belly of every black and evil thing is as white as snow. And it is saddening to discover how the concealed parts of angels are leprous."^{15}

At other times, however, Steinbeck maintains that the duality is outside the individual. "There is in the air about a man a kind of congealed jealousy. Only let him say he will do something and the whole mechanism goes to work to stop him. The Greeks worked this out to their satisfaction. Jealous gods were always present. I am at war with them today." Elsewhere in the *Journal of a Novel*, he asserts that there is "a double aspect to the world—always two and sometimes more faces to external reality."^{16} From this perspective, the duality is projected upon the outer world, as with the cycles of fertility and aridity that shape the lives of the Waynes in *To a God Unknown*, the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the Hamiltons in *East of Eden*. Steinbeck

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}Journal of a Novel, pp. 12, 111-2.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat (Bantam ed.; New York: Bantam Books, 1965), p. 45.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}Journal of a Novel, pp. 111, 15.}\]
oscillates between the belief that good and evil forces are external to man, and the conviction that they are internal. He reports in Travels with Charley that "in collecting and classifying marine animals . . . what I found closely inter-meshed with how I felt at the moment. External reality has a way of not being so external after all."¹⁷ A theory of personal relativity is likewise advanced in the description of the citizens of Cannery Row: "Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,' by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, 'Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,' and he would have meant the same thing."¹⁸ He ultimately decides while journeying with Charley that the United States, "this monster of a land, this mightiest of nations, this spawn of the future, turns out to be the macrocosm of microcosm me."¹⁹

This recurrent alternation between external duality and internal duality, this dual duality, is evident in the important dual characters in many of the novels—Henry and Coeur de Gris in Cup of Gold; Mac and Jim in In Dubious Battle; Lennie and George in Of Mice and Men; Tom and Casy

¹⁸Cannery Row, p. 1.
¹⁹Travels with Charley, p. 207.
in *The Grapes of Wrath*; Mack and Doc in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*; Adam and Charles, and Aron and Cal in *East of Eden*; and Ethan and Danny in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. In some respects these characters are independent individuals, but in other respects they can be considered halves of a single person. Analyzing *Of Mice and Men*, Antonia Seixas suggests that on one level of the novel "Lennie represents the psychological unconscious; George, the conscious."\(^{20}\) Henry Morgan, in Cambria at the opening of *Cup of Gold*, complains that he is "cut in half" and that "only one half" of him is there. "The other piece is over the sea, calling and calling me to come and be whole again." After he has killed Coeur de Gris following the conquest of Panama, Henry realizes that his friend might have been "a vital half" of Henry.\(^{21}\) Cal and Aron in *East of Eden* are like "two sides of a medal."\(^{22}\) When George shoots Lennie, and when Ethan more indirectly destroys Danny Taylor in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, they kill not only a friend external to themselves, but also a vital part of themselves.

Symphonic music is an excellent model for fiction that presents conflicting ideas on many levels because


\(^{21}\) *Cup of Gold*, pp. 19, 161.

\(^{22}\) *East of Eden*, p. 261.
different instruments are playing different note sequences, harmonizing or, more frequently in Steinbeck's music, grating dissonantly. "It is possible to some people," he writes in *East of Eden*, "and it was possible for Kate, to hold two opposing thoughts at the same time." It was also possible for John Steinbeck.

An investigation of the multilevel duality in his fiction must begin with the isolation of the two over-riding themes that dominate his work and under which subsidiary themes and variations may be grouped. These two themes are stated succinctly in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*: "The differential is the true universal, the true catalyst, the cosmic solvent. Any investigation carried far enough will bring to light these residua, or rather will leave them unassailable as Emerson remarked a hundred years ago in 'The Oversoul'--will run into the brick wall of the impossibility of perfection while at the same time insisting on the validity of perfection." The basic conflict in Steinbeck's novels from first to last is dramatized as this thematic conflict between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection. In *Cup of Gold*, Henry's grandmother, Gwenliana, gives her vision of life:

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24 *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, p. 150.
"This is the tale out of Abred, when earth and water battled. And from the impact of their clash was born a little, struggling life to squirm upward through the circles toward Gwynfyd, the sheening Purity. In that first blundering flesh is written the world's history and the world's journey through the Void.

"And thou--often has Annwn set its fanged maw to entrap the little pinch of life thou carryest about, but thou hast made thy path to go around its snaring. A thousand centuries has thou lived since earth and sea struggled in thy generation, and a thousand eons shalt thou carry about the little pinch of life that was given thee, so only thou shelterest it from Annwn, the Chaos."25

In Steinbeck's last novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, Ethan fondly remembers the face of his son Allen at an earlier age, "the face of joy and excitement that made me sure of the perfectibility of man." But Allen is now "sullen, conceited, resentful, remote and secret in the pain and perplexity of his pubescence, a dreadful harrowing time when he must bite everyone near, even himself, like a dog in a trap."26 Allen in his pubescence is not unlike Ethan in his maturity. Jody, in The Red Pony, looks for perfection in someone outside himself, in Billy Buck, but finds no perfection there. Joe Saul, in Burning Bright, seeks perfection in himself and wishes to give his wife for Christmas a "present of perfection."27 He is unable to give her such a present

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25 Cup of Gold, p. 27.
because he discovers that he is not, and cannot be, perfect.

These two most comprehensive of Steinbeck's themes relate to the nature of man and the universe, this clash between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection. The important subsidiary themes may be subsumed beneath these two major headings. The economic conflict presents the opposites of generosity and greed, so brilliantly developed in the interchapters of The Grapes of Wrath. The historical level of the conflict generates the dissonance between the validity and impossibility of founding a new Eden in California with its lush vegetation in the fertile valleys between the great mountain ranges.

This thematic duality is reinforced on a second level in the polarity of characterizations. Analyzing Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck recalls: "Such things were said of him as, 'He was half-Christ and half-goat.' . . . He was gentle out capable of ferocity, small and slight but strong as an ox, loyal yet untrustworthy, generous but gave little and received much. His thinking was as paradoxical as his life. He thought in mystical terms but hated and distrusted mysticism."28 In his evaluation of his countrymen, Steinbeck concludes that "Americans seem to live and breathe and function by paradox."29

28 The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. xi.
Steinbeck's characters are drawn in terms of the paradoxes he saw in his friend, in his fellow Americans, and in himself. Tom Hamilton, for example, "was a nice mixture of savagery and gentleness. He worked inhumanly, only to lose in effort his crushing impulses." "Tom's cowardice was as huge as his courage, as it must be in great men. His violence balanced his tenderness, and himself was a pitted battlefield of his own forces." In the same novel, Cal Trask is described as "crammed full to the top with every good thing and every bad thing."30

Characters are dominated by this tension between the poles of animality and saintliness with their animal instincts testifying to the impossibility of perfection and their saintly inclinations confirming the validity of perfection. Like the Chinese grocer in Cannery Row, they feel the tug of two strong forces. "Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good--an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register--Lee Chong suspended, spinning, whirling among the groceries and ghosts."31

The pull of animal selfishness can be very strong. Ethan Hawley remembers that at the time of the death of his wife's brother he hated the mortally ill man. "I wanted to

30East of Eden, pp. 34, 354, 517.
31Cannery Row, p. 8.
kill him, to bite out his throat. My jaw muscles tightened and I think my lips fleeced back like a wolf's at the kill." Ethan tries to explain his frightening emotion to the doctor who answers that this feeling often occurs because it is a "return to the time of the pack when a sick or hurt member was a danger. Some animals and most fish tear down and eat a weakened brother."32 But the pull of saintly selflessness can be equally powerful. Father Angelo says of Joseph Wayne at the end of To a God Unknown, "Thank God this man has no message. Thank God he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in . . . else there might be a new Christ here in the West."33 Some characters exemplify the extremes of the opposite poles for Steinbeck believes in the truth of anomalies. But for every Lennie there is a Slim, for every Frankie there is a Doc.

Steinbeck's art can be extremely subtle in drawing characters who are mixtures of these opposing qualities. Lee Chong's unusual personality is blocked out in the first two chapters of Cannery Row with progression from the animal to the saintly end of the spectrum. We first see Lee standing behind the cigar counter of his store. "His fat delicate hands rested on the glass, the fingers moving like small restless sausages. A broad golden wedding ring on the

32 The Winter of Our Discontent, p. 93.

middle finger of his left hand was his only jewelry and with it he silently tapped on the rubber change mat from which the little rubber tits had long been worn." Here Lee duplicates the chronic movements of many adult cats that press their paws rhythmically against soft surfaces in imitation of the motions of nursing. When bargaining with Mack, Lee Chong's mind picks "its way as delicately as a cat through cactus." In the following chapter, an illustration of Lee Chong's more selfless endeavors is given, his exhumation of the remains of his grandfather. "For Lee Chong dug into the grave on China Point and found the yellow bones, the skull with the gray ropy hair still sticking to it. . . . Then Lee Chong sent his boxed and brittle grandfather over the western sea to lie at last in ground made holy by his ancestors."34 But even in this act of devotion, the animal imagery is maintained as Lee Chong, not unlike a cat, digs up the buried bones.

This interplay between the animal and the saintly in Steinbeck's fiction results in some original variations upon the relationship. An attempt to synthesize these opposites is found in "Saint Katy the Virgin," the story of the apotheosis of a pig. This fable demonstrates Steinbeck's frequent utilization of humor and burlesque to mask the treatment of material that is as serious as the content of

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34Cannery Row, pp. 4, 7, 8-9.
his "serious" works. The tension between animal and saint is the basis of his partiality for Saint Francis. It is for Saint Francis that the Pirate buys the candlestick in *Tortilla Flat*, and it is the Pirate's troupe of dogs that is rewarded with a vision of the saint. When Ethan Hawley watches the sparrows "picking and eye-gouging," he says, "And you're the bastards Saint Francis was nice to." Later he wonders "what Saint Francis would say if a dog bit him, or a bird crapped on him. Would he say, 'Thank you, Mr. Dog, *grazie tanto*, Signora Bird'?" In addition to the many direct references to Saint Francis, allusion to him is sometimes made through the city named for him, San Francisco.

St. Katy's "virginity" suggests another problem in reconciling the opposites of animality and saintliness in Steinbeck's dissonant fiction, and this is the antagonism between still another pair of opposites, fertility and sterility. Saints may have the ideal attributes of unlimited generosity and complete selflessness, but lonely saints pursuing their solitary paths are barren. Slim has no children, Casy has no children, Doc has no children. The plot of *Burning Bright* is concerned primarily with this contradiction. Joe Saul is saintly but sterile, so his wife, Mordeen, has a child by the fertile but bestial apprentice named Victor. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Tom Joad and Jim Casy

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35 *The Winter of Our Discontent*, pp. 6, 27.
do not become involved with women on the path toward enlightenment, in contrast to their less spiritual counterparts, Al Joad and Connie Rivers. Jim of *In Dubious Battle* and Aron Trask of *East of Eden* are inclined toward celibacy. After his brief and disastrous marriage with Cathy, Adam Trask withdraws from the world, has no more to do with the female sex, and symbolically allows his land to lie fallow. This inaction is the fate of many of Steinbeck's nobler characters. Since action in the world is tainted, especially sexual activity, they drift to passivity to retain their nobility.

Emotional balance is difficult to achieve. Another breed of character ricochets wildly from celibacy to lustful activity.

Nearly all the time the barrier of loneliness cut Uncle John off from people and from appetites. He ate little, drank nothing, and was celibate. But underneath, his appetites swelled into pressures until they broke through. Then he would eat of some craved food until he was sick; or he would drink jake or whiskey until he was a shaken paralytic with red wet eyes; or he would raven with lust for some whore in Sallisaw. It was told of him that once he went clear to Shawnee and hired three whores in one bed, and snorted and rutted on their unresponsive bodies for an hour.  

The same extremes are found in Tom Hamilton: "For long periods he would welter in howling celibacy, and then he would take a train to San Francisco and roll and wallow in women, and then he would come silently back to the ranch.

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feeling weak and unfulfilled and unworthy, and he would punish himself with work . . ."37

Corresponding to these extremes of fertility and sterility or celibacy within human beings are the cycles of fertility and aridity in nature. This rhythm is essential to the development of the three epics, To a God Unknown, The Grapes of Wrath, and East of Eden. But again there is dissonance and ambiguity in the effects of these cycles on humanity. Fertility in the land is desirable because it brings harvests and prosperity, yet in Steinbeck success often in turn brings weakness and moral decline to the successful. Drought, on the other hand, may result in suffering and privation, but it also strengthens the victims as they endure their hardships.

Steinbeck's novels are built upon the pattern of the quest, symbolic perhaps of an internal search within the individual, but external in development. The duality that permeates his themes and characterizations also causes the ambiguity associated with the goal of the journey through life. The duality in this case resembles the complications that Jessie L. Weston found in the grail legends and analyzed in From Ritual to Romance which T. S. Eliot acknowledges as the source of the title and some of the symbolism of The Waste Land. The Christian grail legends, she explains,

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37 East of Eden, p. 250.
include many important features of the Fisher King myths and other earlier fertility rituals. In *Cup of Gold*, Gwenliana, the old seeress, prophesies that at the end of young Henry Morgan's wanderings he will "become a great shining for the Divine, teaching the things of God." "Shining" and "light" are both used as terms for transcendence in Steinbeck's novels. But after this first prediction, Gwenliana sees the disappointment on Henry's face and offers a more worldly prophecy: "There shall be fighting and shedding of blood, and the sword shall be thy first bride. . . . Thou shall sack the cities of the infidel and spoil him of his plunderings. . . . And at last, when thou are girded with honor and repute, thou shall marry a white-souled maiden of mighty rank--a girl of good family, and wealthy." Gwenliana thus offers him both transcendence and worldly advancement. Henry's goals remain confused throughout his life. He wishes to capture the city of Panama, "the Cup of Gold," and to embrace the beautiful woman known as the Red Saint. He gains the city but loses the "Saint." On the pile of loot in the Palace, he finds the metal cup that symbolizes the dual nature of his quest--a golden chalice with four lambs on the outside and with a relief inside of a girl whose arms are raised in ecstasy.

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39 *Cup of Gold*, p. 28.
Conflicting goals characterize the endeavors of individuals in Steinbeck's other novels. George of *Of Mice and Men* has two dreams, one of saving his money to buy a farm where he can shelter his friend Lennie, and the other of spending his wages each month at a whorehouse in town. During the journey west in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the goals of Jim Casy are selfless and spiritual, while those of most of the members of the Joad party are selfish and worldly. Intimation of the same conflict can be found in the names of Juan Chicoy's wayward bus on which the word "Sweetheart" has been painted over the original phrase, "el Gran Poder de Jesus." Resting in the deserted barn after leaving his vehicle and passengers, Juan remembers the moments of great joy in his life. One occurred when his young cousin, losing her balance while riding in a cart, "put out her hand and touched his leg, and delight bloomed in his stomach and his brain ached with delight." Juan experienced another such blissful moment under completely different circumstances when he was standing with a candle at midnight in a cathedral, "and like a dream, the sweet murmur of the mass came from far away at the high altar and the drowsy loveliness drew down upon him."  

Closely involved with this overlay of fertility upon the religious grail quest is the act of sacrifice that takes

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place along the journey, a symbolic offering to placate an angry deity, a god unknown. In addition to the ritualistic killing of mice and dogs and pigs in Steinbeck's novels, most of them contain the loss of a son or apprentice or brother. Steinbeck undertook to modify this pattern in The Wayward Bus, the first of his books in which the son figure, Pimples in this case, is not sacrificed. This is also the first of his novels that does not contain a violent death although Van Brunt is dying of natural causes as the bus nears its destination. In the next novel, however, Burning Bright, the apprentice figure is again murdered as Mordeen and Friend Ed push Victor into the sea. The conflict within this ritual is double-edged in keeping with the dual goals of the journey through life. If the quest is for spiritual transcendence and the union of all men in brotherhood, murder is an illogical means. If the goal is fertility and progeny and dynasty, the slaughter of the son/apprentice is senseless, self-defeating.

The momentum of the pilgrimage through life is regularly accelerated in Steinbeck's novels from journey to pursuit, but somewhere along the way there is an idyllic interlude, a contrasting period of temporary peace and harmony. The serious novels, in general, concentrate on the aspects of the flight and hunt, while the comic novels elaborate on the idyllic portion of the journey although
vestiges of the hunt still remain. Jim and Mac are pursued by vigilantes in *In Dubious Battle*. Lennie is pursued by the angry ranch workers in *Of Mice and Men*. Tom Joad is pursued by the police in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Nazi officers are pursued by the townspeople in *The Moon Is Down*. Kino and Juana are pursued by professional trackers in *The Pearl*. Juan Chicoy is pursued by Mildred Pritchard, an amateur tracker, in *The Wayward Bus*. The gentle king in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* is pursued by his irate countrymen after his Liberty-Equality-Fraternity speech. Ethan Hawley is pursued by a predatory female with a symbolic name, Margie Young-Hunt, in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

One of the most important functions of Steinbeck's animal symbolism is to reinforce this terror of the hunt. Hovering hawks and owls and eagles glide silently overhead. Stalking beasts of prey hide in the brush. An eagle swoops down and seizes a rabbit in *To a God Unknown*. A heron gobbles up a little snake in *Of Mice and Men*. A cat pounces on a turtle in *The Grapes of Wrath*. A cat tortures a dying mouse in *Cannery Row*. Cal and Aron pierce a rabbit with an arrow in *East of Eden*. Ethan kills two rabbits in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Although he uses many kinds of animals in his fiction, Steinbeck's favorite symbols of pursued man are the rodents and rabbits. Lennie carries a broken mouse in his pocket at the opening of *Of Mice and Men*, and he has a
vision of a rabbit near its close. The three wanderers, Tom Joad, Jim Casy, and Muley Graves, cook and eat three rabbits that Muley trapped in the cotton fields. Ethan Hawley plans to wear the mask of a mouse that he cut from a cereal box when he robs the bank across the alleyway.

Opposed to these rabbits and rodents on this level of duality are the pursuing animals—the dogs, the cats, the wolves, the lions, and the birds of prey. Hunting dogs are especially common in Steinbeck's writings. In Cup of Gold, Merlin asks Henry Morgan, "Have you heard the voices that cry out triumph in the night, and the hunters of souls with their screaming horns and their packs of blue hounds who rush into the villages on the storms?" In In Dubious Battle, the elder Anderson has a handsome pair of pointers. In Of Mice and Men, Slim owns a hound with a litter of puppies. The friendly army officer in Cannery Row also has a hunting dog with a litter. Ethan Hawley frequently encounters and converses with Red Baker, the setter belonging to the aggressive banker of the neighborhood.

In dramatic contrast to the breathless excitement and terror of the hunt are those idyllic interludes when peace reigns and natural enemies live side by side in tranquility. In the short story "Flight," the lion literally lies down with the lamb when Pepé Torres, the sacrificial lamb fleeing

[Cup of Gold, p. 18.]
unknown pursuers in the mountains, meets a lion. Lamb and lion stare curiously at each other and then the lion silently departs. Similar symbolic moments of respite from the chase occur when Lennie cuddles happily in his bunk with the puppy, when Ethan Hawley befriends and feeds the wild alley cat, and when Doc and the boys of the Palace Flophouse and Grill adopt Darling as their canine mascot.

In his Studies in Classical American Literature, D. H. Lawrence emphasizes the importance of symbolism in the work of the authors he examined.

The great difference between the extreme Russians and the extreme Americans lies in the fact that the Russians are explicit and hate eloquence and symbols, seeing in these only subterfuge, whereas the Americans refuse everything explicit and always put up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge. They prefer their truth safely swaddled in an ark of bulrushes, and deposited among the reeds until some friendly Egyptian princess comes to rescue the babe.

Well, it's high time now that someone came to lift out the swaddled infant of truth that America spawned some time back. The child must be getting pretty thin, from neglect.  

Steinbeck most certainly belongs in this tradition of Melville and Hawthorne who favor double meanings. Steinbeck actually uses Lawrence's symbol of the infant Moses in the bulrushes at the end of The Grapes of Wrath when Uncle John sets Rose of Sharon's stillborn baby adrift on the flooded waters in an apple box. "Go down an' tell 'em," he says. "Go down in

the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way." The child, alas, is not only thin and neglected, but dead. Steinbeck uses symbols in the traditional mode in which an object has both a literal meaning and function, and a symbolic meaning and function, as with the grapes of *The Grapes of Wrath*. He also regularly incorporates pairs of symbols. In *The Pearl*, for example, a scorpion bites the baby Coyotito, producing an ugly swelling. This pathology is contrasted with the foreign body that enters the oyster and produces a beautiful swelling, the Pearl of the World. An animal-vegetable dichotomy is important in many of Steinbeck's novels, as in the name of the madam of the whorehouse in *Sweet Thursday*, Flora who is called Fauna. In *The Wayward Bus*, Camille Oakes explains how her friend Lorraine blackmailed a boyfriend into buying her a mink coat in a maneuver similar to that which Mrs. Pritchard uses with her husband to obtain the promise of an orchid house. Animal-vegetable symbolism is also common in the novels with overtones of the story of Cain and Abel in which Cain offered grain to God and Abel sacrificed the firstlings of his flocks. Lennie and George, in *Of Mice and Men*, dream of a farm on which they can raise alfalfa and rabbits. In *East of Eden*, Cal-Cain presents his father with the money he made in wartime profiteering in bean futures, while Aron-Abel gives Adam the example of his good life, and later that

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life itself. Other pairs of symbols include the Pirate-Saint opposition in *Cup of Gold* and *Tortilla Flat*, and the Pirate-Puritan contrast in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Frequently the symbols also have double symbolic meanings. This is true of the candle in *Tortilla Flat*. The Pirate saves his quarters faithfully to buy the candlestick dedicated to Saint Francis, but it is also a candle that begins the fire that burns down one of Danny's houses. Candles can be good, candles can be destructive. It is under a tree that Jim Casy announces his enlightenment concerning the brotherhood of all men, but it is also a tree that destroys the levee that Pa Joad and Uncle John build in a last desperate attempt to save the dwellings of the harassed workers near the cotton fields.

Still another level of Steinbeck's fiction that is rich with duality is the symbolic landscape upon which the allegorical journey takes place. William Butler Yeats has analyzed the recurring landscape in the poetry of Shelley, who influenced Yeats himself in the use of symbols, and has isolated some of the dominant features—the cave and the tower, the stream with the boat, and the star upon the horizon. Steinbeck's symbolic landscape differs appreciably from that of Shelley but important similarities

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can be noted. Steinbeck's symbolic geography most often features a narrow fertile valley with towering mountains on either side, cut by a stream running to the distant sea. As in Shelley's poetry, the cave is important in almost all of Steinbeck's longer works. The last scene, in fact, of his last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, is laid in the cave beneath the pier to which Ethan comes with the intention of committing suicide. The cave is found even in one of his least typical novels, *The Moon is Down*, in which the men of the town work in a coal mine. It is at the entrance to this mine that one of the Nazi soldiers is killed.

In opposition to the cave, one does not find in Steinbeck the tower that is a central symbol in the poetry of Shelley and Milton and, in this century, Yeats, who published collections of poetry entitled *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*. In the works of these poets the tower often stands for intellectual transcendence which is not a major consideration in Steinbeck. Instead of the tower, the opposite of the cave is the house, usually deserted or in ruins. From high in the grove of trees to which he has retreated in the drought, Joseph Wayne, in *To a God Unknown*, gazes down on the dusty, deserted homes of his departed family. The final major incident in *The Pastures of Heaven* is the destruction by flames of the home of the Whitesides. Both of Danny's homes in *Tortilla Flat* eventually burn to the ground. One of the most remarkable passages in *The Grapes of Wrath* is the
description of the fate of a deserted house in the dust bowl, an area filled with broken and forsaken shacks that once were homes. The primitive dwelling of Kino and Juana is destroyed in *The Pearl*. Danny Taylor, in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, still owns the ruins of his family's ancestral home where he and Ethan played as young boys. Even *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* contains a deserted home albeit a most elaborate one--the Palace of Versailles.

To complicate the matter and to create the typical Steinbeckian dissonance, the cave and the house both have alternate interpretations, resulting in another crossover, another example of dual duality. The cave can be a regressive retreat for animals and harried humans like Noah and Kino, or it can serve as a tomb where rebirth is possible. The house can represent fertility and family and society, or it can symbolize the chapel at the end of the spiritual quest, the house of God. The ruined or abandoned building is sometimes the equivalent of the Chapel Perilous of quest literature.

This relationship between cave and house offers an additional explanation of the importance of rabbits and rodents in Steinbeck's fiction. Living in burrows, dwelling in holes, these animals combine the two opposites because their homes are caves. After dining on the three rabbits they cook by the deserted Joad home, Tom and Casy and Muley move down to the nearby watercut to sleep. Muley goes into
the cave that Tom and his brother Noah had dug many years before, but Tom and Casy prepare to sleep on the sand outside. "They were silent, and gradually the skittering life of the ground, of holes and burrows, of the brush, began again; the gophers moved, and the rabbits crept to green things, the mice scampered over the clods, and the winged hunters moved soundlessly overhead." 45

Steinbeck's use of myth resembles his use of symbols. The subsurface mythic levels interact with the surface realism, and he is strongest when both the mythic and the realistic components are strong. But in addition to creating tension, myths are used to create another variety of dissonant duality when one myth is played against another. In his thorough examination of the mythic foundations of Steinbeck's fiction, Joseph Fontenrose points out many instances of the parallel development of two mythic sources within one novel. Cup of Gold, for example, contains elements of both the Grail legend and the Faust legend. 46 Myth is often used in modern literature to impose some kind of order upon the unordered materials of modern life. Steinbeck does introduce mythic structure for this purpose, but he also includes conflicting myths to present the conflicting heritage of our civilization.

We live in a culture where both the Old Testament and the

45The Grapes of Wrath, p. 65.

46Fontenrose, John Steinbeck, pp. 9-12.
New Testament are quoted as authority even if their messages are in some respects contradictory.

As the multilevels of duality are methodically developed, as the conflicting themes and variations are stated and restated, as myth clashes with myth and symbol clashes with symbol, Steinbeck builds his novels toward those final chords so characteristic of his work. A strong measure of ambiguity is found in the endings of his strongest novels, a dissonant grating of triumph and tragedy. Did Mac succeed or fail as the teacher of Jim Nolan who lies dead and faceless in the apple orchard? Did George, gun in hand pointing at the base of Lennie's skull, succeed or fail as his brother's keeper? Huddled in the barn as the flood waters rise, are the Joads victorious or defeated? A triumphant positive answer proclaims the validity of perfection. A tragic negative answer confirms the impossibility of perfection. Steinbeck's answer is dissonance.

Pilon complained, "It is not a good story. There are too many meanings and too many lessons in it. Some of those lessons are opposite. There is not a story to take into your head. It proves nothing."

"I like it," said Pablo. "I like it because it hasn't any meaning you can see, and still it does seem to mean something, I can't tell what."
CHAPTER III

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION AND THE VALIDITY OF PERFECTION

Because of Steinbeck's preoccupation with duality, his novels flow in the mainstream of American literature. He is a legitimate inheritor of the grand tradition of the great authors, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman, who also struggled with the problem of the impossibility of perfection versus the validity of perfection. Nineteenth-century literature was vitally concerned with the opportunity of founding a New Eden in the New World. The Old World was tainted beyond redemption, but a second chance was offered along the eastern coast of North America. Again failure. Steinbeck documents a third and last effort to recreate Eden, this time in the twentieth century, this time in the incredibly beautiful valleys of California.

Numerous and various have been the forms that duality has assumed throughout the intellectual history of civilization—in Homer, in the Bible, in Plato, in Descartes, in Coleridge, in Yeats. Marion Bodwell Smith in *Dualities in Shakespeare* reasons that strong currents of duality are common to all periods of great achievement in literature,
offering the Renaissance as magnificent example.¹ Duality in American thought is emphasized in a key work of modern literary criticism, F. O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance, and in such subsequent investigations as Symbolism and American Literature by Charles Feidelson, Jr., and The American Adam by R. W. B. Lewis.² Steinbeck's duality takes the peculiarly American form of the prolonged abrasion between the expansive philosophy of transcendentalism espoused by Emerson and the limiting doctrines of total natural depravity and predestination inherent in Calvinist Puritanism.

Many of Jim Casy's speeches in The Grapes of Wrath present undiluted transcendental sentiments in the language of rural Oklahoma. "I figgered about the Holy Sperit and the Jesus road. I figgered, 'Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit--the human sperit--the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's part of.' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a suddent--I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it." After Casy's death, Tom Joad

¹Marion Bodwell Smith, Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

resolves to follow in his master's footsteps and his words echo those of Casy. Tom tells his mother, "Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me. But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remember—all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn't have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn't think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't no good alone."3

The concept of mystical union is important in many religions—in Christianity, in Buddhism, in Hinduism—but Emerson differs from advocates of asceticism in his insistence that enlightenment comes not in withdrawal from the world, but in embracing the world.

The world,—this shadow of the soul, or other me,—lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life.

3The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 24-5, 461-2.
In "Circles" Emerson proclaims, "The only sin is limitation."4

Directly opposed to the philosophy of Emerson in Steinbeck's fiction are the doctrines of Calvinism brought from Europe by the Puritans and planted deeply in American soil in the seventeenth century. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin explains the limitations that natural depravity imposes on the human condition:

Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh.

... For when it is said, that the sin of Adam has made us obnoxious to the justice of God, the meaning is not, that we, who are in ourselves innocent and blameless, are bearing his guilt, but that since by his transgression we are all placed under the curse, he is said to have brought us under obligation. Through him, however, not only has punishment been derived, but pollution instilled, for which punishment is justly due.... Hence, even infants bringing their condemnations with them from their mother's womb, suffer not for another's, but for their own defect. For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own unrighteousness, they have the seed implanted in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed-bed of sin, and therefore cannot be but odious and abominable to God. Hence it follows, that it is properly deemed sinful in the sight of God; for there could be no condemnation without guilt.5

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Calvinism thrived in New England. An early American expression of the doctrines can be found in Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom*, the first American bestseller, *The Grapes of Wrath* of its day at the bookstores. On the Day of Wrath, one of the condemned men asks:

O great creator, why was our Nature depraved and forlorn?  
Why so defil'd and made so vild whilst we were yet unborn?

The Judge states the doctrine of predestination in another stanza:

My grace to one is wrong to none:  
none can Election claim.  
Amongst all those their souls that lose,  
none can Rejection blame.  
He that may chuse, or else refuse,  
all men to save or spill,  
May this Man chuse, and that refuse,  
redeeming whom he will.6

Emerson and the Unitarians of the early nineteenth century had a profound influence on America, especially in the massive humanitarian efforts undertaken to aid man along the path toward perfection. But Puritan ideas were not eradicated by any means. The theory of natural depravity has, on the contrary, been reinforced since the time of Emerson with new developments in the fields of economics, biology, and psychology. In *The Duality of Human Existence*, David Bakan reviews the investigation in these sciences that

have given support to Calvinist doctrine. First he summarizes the method of analysis used by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

The psychology which Weber implicitly developed is one which takes account of the complexity of human motivation and the relationships between motives and actions. He eschewed a simple cause-effect model, and especially the overrationalized hedonistic version of the cause-effect model. Indeed his major assertions are of the paradoxes of human motivation and action. Thus, Weber pointed out how the concern with salvation among Calvinists is associated not with neglect but with devotion to secular affairs; asceticism is associated not with eschewing wealth but with its increase; predestination by God is associated not with surrender of initiative but with its heightening; and the alienation of man from man is associated with superiority in social organization. Weber succeeded in drawing attention to the agentic and helped define it: control over others, a high degree of deliberate channeling of activity, accumulation of material good, high initiative, profound alienation of men from each other, are some of the features which emerge as having characterized the Protestant and the spirit of capitalism.

Uncontrolled capitalism can lead to vicious competition like that projected in Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest.

We can see now the articulation of the Darwinian mode of thought in Protestantism. God had predestined the world by making it and leaving it. The classical modality of morality, obedience and punishment, had essentially been dissolved, with a God so transcendent as to be unimportant in the day-to-day activities of mankind. The doctrine of depravity was given confirmation in the significance of the sins of sex, aggression, and avarice. Their relation to election was in terms of survival, so that it was the "fittest," the "favored," as Darwin's subtitle indicates, that is, the elect, who survived. And this, after all, was most important since the doctrine of works makes consequences important and intentions unimportant.
The third science that bolstered the doctrine of natural depravity was psychology in which Freud's psychoanalytical research concluded that man was "under the dominion of something other than his grand and narcissistic consciousness."\(^7\)

These three fields in which Bakan recapitulates the latter-day proofs of important Puritan pronouncements are three fields in which Steinbeck was especially interested and informed. Cruel capitalistic exploitation is a menacing force in *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and other novels. Echoes of Darwinism are ever present in Steinbeck's fiction in the antagonism and aggression of the animal kingdom which is regularly presented as mirroring man's condition. He compares the goal of his scientific investigation of the Sea of Cortez with the objective of Darwin. Steinbeck and Ricketts did not wish to specialize in narrow groups of animal life but to make more comprehensive exploration in "the older method like that of Darwin on the Beagle."\(^8\) The Freudian unconscious always lurks in the background in the writing of Steinbeck.

It doesn't matter that Cathy was what I have called a monster. Perhaps we can't understand Cathy, but on the other hand we are capable of many things in all directions, of great virtue and great sins. And who in his mind has not probed the black waters?


\(^8\)The *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, p. 60.
Maybe we all have in us a secret pond where evil and ugly things germinate and grow strong. But this culture is fenced and the swimming brood climbs up only to fall back. Might it not be that in the dark pool of some men the evil grows strong enough to wiggle over the fence and swim free? Would not such a man be our monster, and are we not related to him in our hidden water? It would be absurd if we did not understand both angels and devils, since we invented them.9

The image of the ineffective barrier is similar to that of the broken wall described by Hawthorne, that master of both Puritanism and psychology, in the forest scene of The Scarlet Letter:

And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired. It may be watched and guarded; so that the enemy shall not force his way again into the citadel, and might even, in his subsequent assaults, select some other avenue, in preference to that where he had formerly succeeded. But there is still the ruined wall, and, near it, the stealthy tread of the foe that would win over again his unforgotten triumph.10

These biological, economic, and psychological factors weigh heavily in the balance of the contradictory forces that Steinbeck recognizes as influencing mankind. This interaction creates a moral dilemma.

There is a strange duality in the human which makes for an ethical paradox. We have definitions of good qualities and bad; not changing things, but generally considered good and bad throughout the ages and throughout the species. Of the good, we think always of wisdom, tolerance, kindliness, generosity,

9East of Eden, p. 114.

humility; and the qualities of cruelty, greed, self-interest, graspingness, and rapacity are universally considered undesirable. And yet in our structure of society, the so-called and considered good qualities are invariable concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are the cornerstones of success. A man—a viewing-point man—while he will love the abstract good qualities and detest the abstract bad, will nevertheless envy and admire the person who through possessing the bad qualities has succeeded economically and socially, and will hold in contempt that person whose good qualities have caused failure. When such a viewing-point man thinks of Jesus or St. Augustine or Socrates he regards them with love because they are the symbols of the good he admires, and he hates the symbols of the bad. But actually he would rather be successful than good. In an animal other than man we would replace the term "good" with "weak survival quotient" and the term "bad" with "strong survival quotient." Thus, man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression toward extinction, but in the unthinking stimulus which really activates him he tends toward survival. Perhaps no other animal is so torn between alternatives. Man might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness.11

This explanation of the dynamics of this central paradox also sheds light on the cause of the dissonance within the multilevels of duality in Steinbeck's fiction. Man is pulled by the opposing forces of the animal and the saintly, but individuals at both ends of the spectrum have "weak survival quotients." The saintly are barren because of celibacy or impotence or general passivity. Barrenness is also, however, found at the other extreme, in the Lennies and the Tularecitos and the Noahs who resemble the rogue males of the animal world. There must be some compromise between the two

11 The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. 96.
qualities for the race to continue. On another level the contrast between house and cave upon the symbolic landscape exhibits a similar complication. The cave may be a retreat for the wounded animals, again the Lennies, Noahs, and Tularecitos, or the cave may be a womb for rebirth or a tomb for resurrection for the Tom Joads and the Joseph Waynes.
The house stands for compromise between the extremes, the house stands for society and family and stability. But in Steinbeck's novels the house is often deserted or decayed or destroyed. In some of the novels, Cannery Row for example, one finds the same interweaving of the Grail Quest with the Fisher King legend that T. S. Eliot incorporates into The Waste Land. In the logic of Steinbeck's duality, this contrast with a fertility myth is essential because anyone pure and noble enough to see the Grail would probably be barren. Galahad probably had an exceptionally "weak survival quotient."

Steinbeck altered the form of his fiction from book to book with amazing versatility. He moved from historical romance to mythic epic to a group of related short stories to a mock epic to a naturalistic novel to a tragedy to other experiments. But in all his novels his preoccupation with duality never weakened. In his journal he records his efforts to create this tension in a chapter of East of Eden: "It must be superbly well done and I want to take plenty of time with it. Here two forces meet and for the first time the good
force wins a temporary victory. But it is a real warfare. 1-

In Steinbeck's fiction good may sometimes win a battle, evil may sometimes win a battle, but the victories are usually temporary and the warfare is inevitably ferocious.

Steinbeck's sixteen novels fall roughly into four chronological divisions. His apprentice period produced *Cup of Gold* (1929), *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), and *To a God Unknown* (1933). In the next period, 1935 to 1947, Steinbeck was at the peak of his powers, and his finest novels appeared—*Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *Cannery Row* (1945)—along with two less impressive novels, *The Moon Is Down* (1942) and *The Pearl* (1947); a collection of remarkable short stories, *The Long Valley* (1938); and an important nonfictional work, *Sea of Cortez* (1941), coauthored with Edward F. Ricketts. Steinbeck's narrative portions of *Sea of Cortez* and a biographical sketch of Ed Ricketts were published in 1951 as *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. The next four novels Steinbeck published, *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *Burning Bright* (1950), *East of Eden* (1952), and *Sweet Thursday* (1945), comprise a revisionist period in which Steinbeck tried desperately to write happier novels in which good conquers evil. His last two novels, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*, mark a change in course and are

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12 *Journal of a Novel*, p. 159.
perhaps the beginning of a new cycle that was never completed. Of special interest to the study of his fiction is Journal of a Novel, a series of letters that Steinbeck wrote to his editor, Pascal Covici, while he was composing East of Eden. These letters were published in 1969, the year following Steinbeck's death.

Cup of Gold can serve as an overture to Steinbeck's novels because it contains many of the important motifs developed with great variation in his later works. The quest structure is obvious in Henry Morgan's life story since he grows up in a Wales still filled with memories of Arthur. Henry even has a Merlin to council him. Yearning for adventure, young Henry sets off for the Spanish Main to make his fortune. Innocent of the deceit of the world, he finds himself an indentured servant in the islands. But he soon proves to be self-reliant. He learns that it is not difficult to lie and to cheat and to murder, so his fortunes improve rapidly. Henry has a "high survival quotient"; in the struggle of the fit, he turns out to be the fittest of all the pirates sailing the Caribbean. He conceives an audacious plan to capture the rich and legendary Spanish city of Panama, which is also called the Cup of Gold. Henry's daring strategy is successful. The important symbolic house in this novel is the Palace of the Governor, but Henry finds here, not satisfaction and fulfillment, but bitter disillusionment.
In this house he is rejected by the beautiful and mysterious woman known as the Red Saint, and in a fit of resentment he kills his friend Coeur de Gris. After Henry's materialist philosophy of aggression fails him, he has no alternative to supply fresh inspiration. He becomes strangely passive, more acted upon than acting in the final section of the book. He all but disappears as a character in his own story. At the time of his death there are intimations of a mystic union. "I am the center of all things and cannot move," he muses. "I am heavy as the universe. Perhaps I am the universe." Nothing in Henry's earlier thoughts or actions prepares the reader for this deathbed awareness of the unity of all things.

Joseph Wayne, hero of To a God Unknown, is bigger than life like Henry Morgan, far above the mundane little problems of existence, but he tries to reach perfection by a diametrically opposing route. Joseph ignores material temptation and identifies totally with nature. His saga is in some ways a reversal of Thoreau's experiment at Walden. Emerson ends his essay Nature with an exhortation for men to enter into the natural world:

\[\text{13} \text{Cup of Gold, p. 196.}\]

\[\text{14} \text{The order of the novels is that followed by Peter Lisca who places To a God Unknown before The Pastures of Heaven because a version of To a God Unknown was written before Steinbeck began work on The Pastures of Heaven. See Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, pp. 39-40.}\]
As when the summer comes from the south the snow-banks melt and the face of the earth becomes green before it, so shall the advancing spirit create its ornaments along its path, and carry with it the beauty it visits and the song which enchants it; it shall draw beautiful faces, warm hearts, wise discourse, and heroic acts, around its way, until evil is no more seen. The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation,—a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God,—he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight.15

Thoreau at Walden finds the joy Emerson envisions. At the end of his record of his months there, the snowbanks do melt and the face of nature does become green. But there is no spring and rebirth at the end of To a God Unknown, only drought and death. Nature is hostile even toward Joseph Wayne who worships her passionately. He must sacrifice his wife, his son, and finally himself upon the altar. After he has opened the blood vessels of his wrist with a knife, the rain begins to fall. "I should have known," he whispers. "I am the rain." As he dies he prophesies, "The grass will grow out of me in a little while."16 An ironic mixture of tragedy and triumph permeates the final pages because Joseph Wayne has triumphed magnificently in identifying with nature, but he loses everything, including his life, in doing so.

All the levels of Steinbeck's duality operate in this novel. Especially dramatic is the contrast between cave and house. At the end Joseph Wayne lives near the cave in the grove of

16 To a God Unknown, p. 179.
pine trees and he looks down upon the dusty and deserted homes that once teemed with the vigorous activities of the Wayne family. No practical compromise between man's animal instincts and his saintly inclinations has been achieved.

The Pastures of Heaven consists of nine related short stories, together with two introductory chapters and an epilogue. All the tales tell of unsuccessful attempts to find paradise in the beautiful California valley called the Pastures of Heaven. The Munroe family ties the incidents together, for one of its members appears in every story as an agent, usually unintentional, of disaster. The most interesting feature of The Pastures of Heaven is the treatment of idealism. The conflict in Steinbeck's fiction is sometimes described with oversimplification as the conflict between dream and reality with the implication that the dream is a result of wilful or pathetic ignorance of the "truth" of the real world. Steinbeck's idealism, however, is much more profound than this superficial analysis insists. To him, the ideal is the real, just as it is in Emerson's transcendentalism. "Build yourself your own world," Emerson advises. "As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions." 17

Many of the characters in The Pastures of Heaven are successful in conforming their lives to the pure idea in their

17Emerson, The Complete Works, I, 76.
minds, but they are coerced by the pressures of society into abandoning their ideals.

Junius Maltby has built a meaningful life for himself and his son Robbie. They may have little money and they may wear shabby clothes, but they are rich in knowledge, imagination, and understanding. When Mrs. Munroe persists in giving Robbie the charitable donation of better clothing, she forces Robbie to admit to himself that he is poor and she compels Junius to acknowledge his failure as a provider. They are last seen heading for San Francisco where they will begin a conventional and dull existence in the city. Junius Maltby's ideal may not have been strong enough to withstand the censure of society, but it was not an ignorant delusion. His world was as "real" as that of the Munroes.

Raymond Banks is a chicken farmer with an unusual taste in recreation. Because he is a friend of the warden of San Quentin Prison he is allowed to be a witness at hangings from time to time. Raymond thinks these visits to the prison are social occasions which are educational and stimulating. When Bert Munroe forces his personal view of hangings upon Raymond, he destroys Raymond's pleasure in the trips. Reality remains the same, hangings remain hangings, but Raymond's attitude has been poisoned by suggestion.

(The point of these and others of the stories is not that there is a conflict between dream and ultimate reality, but that there are many different views of reality.) Although
the opinion of the majority may win out, it is no more correct than that of the minority. The stories in *The Pastures of Heaven* are excellent miniatures, small perhaps in detail but carefully wrought and subtle in their effects. When Bert Munroe originally buys the Battle farm which the community looks upon as cursed, Bert says, "Well, I just happened to think, maybe my curse and the farm's curse got fighting and killed each other off. I'm dead certain they're gone, anyway." T. B. Allen then offers an alternate theory. "Maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated and gone into a gopher hole like a pair of rattlesnakes. Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crawling around the Pastures first thing we know." There are a lot of little curses crawling around. And they kill little good things. Junius Maltby explains to his son, "It seems to me that a good thing or a kind thing must be very large to survive. Little good things are always destroyed by evil little things. Rarely is a big thing poisonous or treacherous. For this reason, in human thinking, bigness is an attribute of goodness and littleness of evil."18 Good is defeated by evil in these first novels of Steinbeck. To increase the odds in favor of the good or kind thing in his next cycle of books, he makes the good or kind thing bigger. His new topic is the possibility of the perfection through the union of all men in a brotherhood of love.

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The house and the cave are important symbols upon the landscape of *The Pastures of Heaven*. Tularecito, the strong but warped foundling, tries to dig a hole so that he may make contact with his people, the gnomes he learned about at school. In the last story of the group, Mr. Whiteside watches his home being devoured by flames that spread from the fields that he and Bert Munroe are clearing of brush. With the burning house are destroyed all of Mr. Whiteside's hopes of a Whiteside dynasty in the Pastures of Heaven.

In this survey of the changing emphasis within the duality in Steinbeck's novels, it is impracticable to identify all the multiple levels of duality within each work. An examination of the cave and house symbolism, however, will give an indication of the general thrust of the conflict within the individual novels.

Danny of *Tortilla Flat* owns two houses but he does not labor to build them like Joseph Wayne in *To a God Unknown*, nor does he capture them as Henry Morgan seizures the Palace in *Cup of Gold*. Danny rather unexpectedly inherits the houses from his grandfather. Danny has never yearned for the stable organized life style represented by a home, but since the two dwellings are left to him, he collects a group of *Paisanos* to occupy them. Much of the humor of *Tortilla Flat* originates in this casual attitude toward social life and social obligations. As Mr. Whiteside watches his mansion burn in *The Pastures of Heaven*, he says he now knows "how a
soul feels when it sees its body buried in the ground and lost." But Danny and his friends are relieved when his first house is burned down. Their only regret is the loss of a partially filled jug of wine left in the building. After Danny's death, his friends allow the second house to burn. They are bored with the responsibilities of friendship, just as Danny was. Brotherhood was a matter of convenience, not something they actively sought. When the house is gone, each goes his separate way to live in gulches and gullies and caves. They all prefer to be wanderers and vagabonds upon the face of the earth.

Mac and Jim of In Dubious Battle have no permanent homes. They wander like the paisanos although with a serious motive, furthering the work of the Party. Their shelters throughout the strike are tents which Steinbeck on several occasions likens to cave: As the strife increases in the apple orchards, the common crime becomes arson, with trucks and barns and diners and homes being ignited. Jim begins his organizational work as an idealist but becomes less compassionate and more animalistic as he becomes more deeply involved in the leadership of the brutal struggle between owners and workers. Mac informs Jim of a secret hiding place by a river supplied with food and blankets to which he should retreat if the strike fails. But Jim is killed by a

\[19\] Ibid., p. 179.
vigilante's shotgun and never reaches this cozy cave.

In *Of Mice and Men*, the owner's house where Curley lives with his wife and father is contrasted with the bunk house where the migrant workers, the bindlestiffs, live in some degree of brotherhood. Because he is black, Crooks must live apart from the other men, in the barn with the animals. Lennie and George dream of a house on a farm where they can raise rabbits and alfalfa. When George is exasperated with Lennie, he rhapsodizes about spending his salary each month at a cat house, a perverse substitute for a home. When Lennie realizes that George is angry with him, he threatens to run off and live in a cave. The goal of permanent brotherhood remains beyond the grasp of these wandering and condemned men.

The history of the Joad dwelling is told in *The Grapes of Wrath*. An empty home was never safe from thieves in this rural area. A family moved out of a house in the neighborhood and Grampa Joad stole half of it, but someone else hauled away the other half before Grampa could return. Tom Joad, coming back from prison, finds his family home deserted. The Joads have become wanderers with no permanent dwelling, only temporary and unsatisfactory shelter along their journey. Most animalistic of the sons, Noah leaves the group to travel alone up a mountain river in search, perhaps, of a cave like the one Lennie talked about. Tom,
the most spiritual of the sons, hides in a culvert after killing Casy's murderer, and in his cave he attains the vision of union with all men that Casy had experienced before him. The rest of the Joads live in half of a boxcar, recalling the half of a house they had in Oklahoma. The novel comes to full circle at the end when the remaining members of the family seek refuge in a barn where they find a wheel, just as Tom had found a single wheel when he came back to the empty Joad home at the beginning of the novel. Only The Grapes of Wrath of Steinbeck's first eight novels has a measure of optimism in its final pages and even this is neutralized by an undertow of defeatism.

Although in artistic terms Steinbeck's duality in these novels produced rich conflict, tension, and ambiguity, he was haunted by this basic contradiction in his thinking and longed to synthesize the opposites into a harmonious philosophy. The Log from the Sea of Cortez contains a record of his quest for reconciliation. He analyzes his experience at the wheel of the Western Flyer, the ship chartered for the expedition:

If you steer toward an object, you cannot perfectly and indefinitely steer directly at it. You must steer to one side, or run it down; but you can steer exactly at a compass point, indefinitely. That does not change. Objects achieved are merely its fulfillment. In going toward a headland, for example, you can steer directly for it while you are at a distance, only changing course as you approach. Or you may set your compass course for the point and correct it by vision when you approach.
The working out of an ideal into the real is here—the relationship between inward and outward, microcosm to macrocosm. The compass simply represents the ideal, present but unachievable, and sight-steering a compromise with perfection which allows your boat to exist at all.

This analogy presents the compromise that Steinbeck makes in his fiction between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection, between the saintly and the animal, and between the cave of the saint and the cave of the beast. He tries to find reconciliation instead of compromise. "Boodin remarks the essential nobility of philosophy and how it has fallen into dispute. 'Somehow,' he says, 'the laws of thought must be the laws of things if we are going to attempt a science of reality. Thought and things are part of one evolving matrix, and cannot ultimately conflict.'" So Steinbeck would like to believe. But he finds no solution to the conflict of thought and thing.

Steinbeck's next novel, *The Moon Is Down*, is a drama of World War II about the Nazi occupation of a Scandinavian country. The house here is the official residence of the mayor of the town. The Nazi officers move into quarters on the second floor, resulting in a house divided against itself. In most of Steinbeck's books on this period, the sympathetic characters are the homeless wanderers and migrants, while the cruel characters are the settled population, the owners of

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20 *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, pp. 37, 257.
the farms and orchards and businesses. The moral confusion suffusing The Moon Is Down results from a situation in which the Nazi soldiers are the wanderers, portrayed rather sympathetically at times, and the landowners are the free townspeople, depicted rather unattractively at times. One frequent criticism of Steinbeck as a novelist is that he gives but one side of the economic battle, that he gives the case of the migrant and vagrant but not of the local establishment. With an occasional exception like Curley in Of Mice and Men, he does develop the personalities of the have-nots more fully than he does the haves. One can see in The Moon Is Down that, because of his concentration upon the duality of human nature, the problem of doing justice to duality within two opposing groups of characters is beyond his powers as an artist. Steinbeck, in his best work, is an excellent novelist, but he never rises to the virtuosity of a master like Tolstoy or Proust. The end of The Moon Is Down is built around a pessimistic variation upon the Grail Quest in which Mayor Orden compares his fate with that of Socrates as he received the cup of hemlock.

Cannery Row is a comic novel in which strong currents of violence and pessimism are mixed with rowdy and contagious humor. Mack and Doc essay different modes of transcendence and both fail. The house symbol here is the Palace Flophouse which Mack and the boys obtain in a devious manner from Lee
Chong, the Chinese grocer. The boys never pay any rent for their quarters so they have no legitimate right to this building in which they live in an atmosphere of skid row brotherhood. **Cannery Row** is a comedy, but a very dark comedy.

Despite Steinbeck's efforts to achieve a synthesis between transcendence and depravity, his work becomes more and more bitter. **The Pearl** is his most negative novel, infused with harsh dissonance. When Kino sees the scorpion move down the rope from which the baby's cradle hangs, he hears a new song in his mind, "the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy, of any foe of the family, a savage, secret, dangerous melody, and underneath, the Song of the Family cried plaintively." Juana's reaction to the scorpion displays a typical Steinbeckian mixture of paganism and Christianity: "Under her breath Juana repeated an ancient magic to guard against such evil, and on top of that she muttered a Hail Mary between clenched teeth." After discovering the magnificent pearl, Kino finds only depravity in the village as his home is destroyed and his boat is ruined. Fleeing into the wilderness, Kino and Juana find only adversity in hostile nature. "Beware of that kind of tree there," Kino tells her. "Do not touch it, for if you do and then touch your eyes, it will blind you. And beware of that tree that bleeds. See, that one over there. For if you break it the red blood will flow from it, and it is evil luck." Kino and Juana are tracked by men who resemble and behave like
animals. Kino and Juana hide in a cave in the side of a mountain like pursued animals but find no security. In order to survive, Kino must become a beast of prey himself and kill his pursuers. His infant son is killed by the hunters. When Kino and Juana go back to their village completely defeated, he digs into his clothes and pulls out the pearl. "He looked into its surface and it was gray and ulcerous. Evil faces peered from it into his eyes, and he saw the light of burning. . . . And the pearl was ugly; it was gray, like a malignant growth. And Kino heard the music of the pearl, distorted and insane."^{21} The evil of the pearl has overwhelmed its beauty and its potential for good. Kino must throw the Pearl of the World, and the world itself, back into the sea.

After this completely pessimistic work, Steinbeck changed his direction. The next four novels, *The Wayward Bus*, *Burning Bright*, *East of Eden*, and *Sweet Thursday*, constitute a revisionist cycle in which Steinbeck reworks his now familiar materials into books that have more positive conclusions about man and the universe. They attempt to conform to the moral criticism of literature he advocates in *Journal of a Novel*:

> It is the fashion now in writing to have every man defeated and destroyed. And I do not believe all men are destroyed. I can name a dozen who were not and

^{21} *The Pearl*, pp. 6, 92-3, 117.
they are the ones the world lives by. It is true of
the spirit as it is of battles—the defeated are for­
gotten, only the winners come themselves into the
race. . . . The writers of today, even I, have a
tendency to celebrate the destruction of the spirit
and god knows it is destroyed often enough. But the
beacon thing is that sometimes it is not. And I
think I can take time right now to say that. There
will be great sneers from the neurosis belt of the
south, from the hard-boiled writers, but I believe
that the great ones, Plato, Lao Tze, Bhudda how the
hell do you spell Bhudda, Christ, Paul, and the great
Hebrew prophets are not remembered for negation or
denial. . . . It is the duty of the writer to lift up,
to extend, to encourage. If the written word has
contributed anything at all to our developing species
and our half developed culture, it is this: Great
writing has been a staff to lean on, a mother to con­
sult, a wisdom to pick up stumbling folly, a strength
in weakness and a courage to support sick cowardice.
And how any negative or despairing approach can
pretend to be literature I do not know. It is true
that we are weak and sick and ugly and quarrelsome
but if that is all we ever were, we would millennia­s
ago have disappeared from the face of the earth, and
a few remnants of fossilized jaw bones, a few teeth
in a strata of limestone would be the only mark our
species would have left on the earth.22

This attitude that ethical values are necessary to the survi­
val of the race shows considerable change from the explana­
tion in The Log from the Sea of Cortez that man's good
qualities lead toward extinction and his bad qualities
increase his chances of survival.

The Wayward Bus exhibits a concentrated attempt by
Steinbeck to recover from the deep pessimism of The Pearl and
achieve a brighter ending for the allegorical journey. The
trip which the passengers on Juan Chicoy's bus make is from
Rebel Corners to San Juan de la Cruz, and the book's epigraph

22Journal of a Novel, p. 154.
is from *Everyman*. This is the first of Steinbeck's novels in which the son or apprentice or brother figure is not sacrificed. Pimples, Juan's apprentice, not only remains with his employer to the end of the story, but also gains a new and more attractive name, Kit. This is also the first of his novels which does not contain a violent death of some kind although Van Brunt is dying of natural causes as the bus at last approaches San Juan de la Cruz. The house versus cave dichotomy is evident when the bus becomes mired in the mud. Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, greedy and insensitive, retire to a nearby cave, while Juan Chico wanders to a deserted house and barn. Mildred Pritchard follows him, tracing his footprints in the soil in a manner reminiscent of the professional trackers who pursue Juana and Kino in *The Pearl*. Juan Chico is not defeated at the conclusion of *The Wayward Bus* only because his goals are so unexceptional. He has no longing for union with other men in brotherhood. He is quite willing to leave his passengers to fend for themselves when he wants to run away. His only desire at the end of the novel is that his wife, Alice, will be sober when he gets home. In spite of Juan's energy and ingenuity, he passively accepts the limitations of his life.

In *Burning Bright* Joe Saul, the noble character, is impotent while the bestial Victor fathers the child born to Joe Saul's wife, Mordeen. Joe Saul displays the passivity common to Steinbeck's good men. Their goodness is often
preserved through inaction rather than through decisive action. In an effort to make this story universal, Steinbeck changes the setting from a tent, a temporary structure he often equates with a cave, to a solid farmhouse to a ship at anchor. These shifts in scene create an aura of instability about the house symbol though the plot is concerned with building a family. Joe Saul accepts the child as his own and accepts the brotherhood of all men, but the murder of Victor, the infant's natural father, seriously undermines the positive conclusion. The duality throughout the many levels of the novel contradict the effort on the surface to synthesize.

There can be no doubt that Steinbeck intended *East of Eden* to be the major work of this period of his career, comparable to his earlier epic, *The Grapes of Wrath*. "I want to take enough time so that I will avoid the rather terrible exhaustion of the Grapes of Wrath. I'll tell you one thing though--although this book is more subtle and perhaps less emotional in an obvious way, it is going to be more peopled than the Grapes. We are going to meet--try to know and move on from--one hell of a lot of people." And there can also be no doubt that he wanted to resolve in this novel the conflict between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection. "Now this I must say and say right here and so sharply and memorably that it will not be forgotten in the rather terrible and disheartening things which are to come
in this book; so that although East of Eden is not Eden, it is not unsuperably far away."

Duality is powerful throughout the novel. Based on the story of Cain and Abel, the volume contains many characters who bear names beginning with C or A—Cyrus, Alice, Charles, Adam, Cathy, Abra, Cal and Aron. One half expects that after his conversion Cal will change his name to Al. Samuel Hamilton represents ultimate good while Cathy, later Kate, personifies ultimate evil, resembling in her appearance and movements the serpent from the Garden of Eden. The most interesting of the characters are those containing a mixture of good and bad qualities, especially Tom Hamilton and Cal Trask, for they more accurately conform to the theme of the novel. "I believe," the narrator explains, "that there is one story in the world, and only one, that has frightened and inspired us, so that we live a Pearl White serial of continuing thought and wonder. Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil. I think it is the only story we have and that it occurs on all levels of feelings and intelligence."24


24 East of Eden, p. 366.
The most important house symbol of *East of Eden* is the ruined adobe home that stands on the land Adam Trask buys in the Salinas Valley. With the determination of a new Adam building a new Eden in California, he sets about to restore this empty building to its former beauty. When Cathy leaves him, however, he halts the rebuilding of the house and allows it to enter a second decline. The unfinished restoration of the house and the fallow fields are evidence of the weakening of Adam's will and the onset of the lethargic passivity that is to characterize him for the remainder of his life. Kate is more successful in maintaining her house, the most notorious and depraved brothel in the region. The relationships of the inhabitants of this whorehouse are perverse parodies of family ties. Kate is so very evil that she does not belong even in this house. She builds a lean-to next to her bedroom and it is in this little annex that she spends most of her waking hours.

The final chord in the last chapter is rich in dissonant duality that contradicts the superficial reconciliation of the opposing themes when Adam blesses Cal with the word "Timshel." The correct translation of this Hebrew word from Genesis had been the subject of discussions between Adam and Samuel and the subject of a long investigation by linguistic scholars. The message of the novel is that one is not forced to be good or evil but may choose his path in life. Therefore, Cal, a mixture of everything that is good
and everything that is bad, may reject his heritage from his mother and may become virtuous. While Cal may have this option, it is made clear in the novel that Kate did not. Since not all individuals have this ability to choose, Steinbeck seems to have attempted to solve the problem of natural depravity by becoming mired in the problem of freedom of the will. Whether Kate is a monster because she is naturally evil or is a monster because she is unable to choose good is a technical distinction because she is a monster either way.

Steinbeck returned once more to the waterfront of Monterey and to comedy in *Sweet Thursday* to provide a happy ending for Doc. He does create a happy ending in which Doc rides off into the sunset with Suzy, the reformed prostitute, as his bride, but this is possible only because Doc is significantly different from the Doc of *Cannery Row*. His goal in life is now more humble, only to finish the paper about octupi for a scientific journal. Doc is unable to complete his work because he too now suffers from that passivity so common to Steinbeck's virtuous men. The symbolic house is important to the central joke of the novel. Mack and the boys still live in vagrant brotherhood at the Palace Flophouse which they believe is owned by Jesus and María, Lee Chong's successor at the neighborhood grocery store. Mack concocts an elaborate scheme to place the ownership of the building in more sympathetic hands. He organizes a
raffle in which Doc is to win the title of the house. Doc is awarded the Palace Flophouse in a rigged drawing at a party. Doc then informs the boys that they owned the building all along but did not know it. Lee Chong had given them the Flophouse but kept the transfer a secret so they would not be tempted to do foolish things like raffle it off. Thus Mack and the boys are entitled to their life there and are not the outcasts they believe themselves to be. The cave and the house are opposed in the transformation of Suzy. She moves out of the whorehouse and into the cave-like boiler where she is reborn as an upright woman, a suitable wife for Doc. The problems of the plot are resolved by Hazel who sneaks into Doc's laboratory at night, approaches his bed like a comic Grendel, and breaks his arm with a softball bat. Since Doc cannot drive his car with a broken arm, he must admit he needs Suzy. This dubious happy ending is achieved at a great price because the characters have none of the originality and vitality of the people in Steinbeck's earlier comedies.

The Short Reign of Pippin IV has much of the musical comedy spirit of Sweet Thursday. The Republic of France, reduced to chaos by conflicting minority parties, decides to become a kingdom once more and chooses for her royal ruler an obscure astronomer, Pippin Heristal, who is descended from an early noble family. Pippin reluctantly accepts the crown and moves into a deserted home, the Palace of Versailles, which symbolizes the failure of the communal
spirit within the entire nation. Pippin tires of his dull existence at the revived court and makes excursions among the common people on a motorbike that he keeps hidden in a cave. When Pippin decides that France needs a strong king, not a mere figurehead, he attempts to lead his countrymen toward Liberty and Equality and Fraternity, but these revolutionary concepts upset the nation, Pippin is deposed, and he is last seen returning contentedly to the life of an obscure astronomer. Although there is an unreal and almost dreamlike atmosphere to the novel and the characters are no more convincing than those of Sweet Thursday, The Short Reign of Pippin IV does mark Steinbeck's return to the idea of brotherhood that was important to his novels of the thirties, in contrast to the problems of individual morality that dominate his later books.

Steinbeck's last novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, reverts to the style of the novels of the thirties with its strong element of animal imagery. In some respects it also represents a full circular return to his very first novel, Cup of Gold, with its pirate morality. Ethan Hawley, like Henry Morgan, decides to climb to financial success and to ignore all ethical restraints. Ethan travels regularly from the old house in which he lives with his wife and two children to a cave under the pier where he meditates and where, in the last scene, he plans to commit suicide. The
ruined house of the novel is the family home of Danny Taylor, and it symbolizes both the brotherhood of Danny and Ethan in their youth and the ethical values of an older way of life. Ethan Hawley is a failure in the eyes of the world in spite of his good and decent qualities. He decides to become an aggressive and cruel animal. He even sacrifices his best friends and his benevolent employer to gain wealth and power. But the quest for imperfection brings Ethan no more satisfaction than his quest for perfection had. Although Ethan decides not to kill himself, he sees no hope for himself. He plans to pass on to his daughter the Chinese talisman from the curio case. Perhaps in the generations of the future the conflict between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection will be resolved. Perhaps. And perhaps not.

Duality is both Steinbeck's subject and his method. The conflicting forces he dramatizes become increasingly powerful in the works of the late thirties and early forties—Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, and Cannery Row. In the wanderers and vagabonds and vagrants and migrants he found the characters best suited to his vision of life. Unattached, they may journey freely across the symbolic landscape, moving logically from cave to house and from house to cave. Rootless, they are affected by the changing winds. They exemplify quite literally Emerson's concept in "Circles": "People wish to be
settled: only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."

In these novels of the unsettled, the multi-level duality results in dissonance that echoes the mixed American heritage of transcendentalism and Puritanism, and creates the ambiguity that haunts men torn between radically opposing views of mankind.

Steinbeck's works are strongest when the opposing forces within them are strongest. When evil completely overpowers good, as in *The Pearl*, the tension is weak. At the other extreme, *Sweet Thursday* lacks almost any sense of evil, and good's victory is unimpressive because the enemy is so feeble. In his later books Steinbeck wanted to reconcile his opposites and present a positive philosophy for men to lean on. Although there is some degree of synthesis upon the thematic level in such novels as *Burning Bright* and *East of Eden*, the many layers of duality beneath the surface contradict the superficial resolution. In addition, the heroes of the late novels who attain some happiness do so, not by victory over strong negative forces, but by lowering their standards. In a tainted world, passivity seems the only way to be good.

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CHAPTER IV

TORTILLA FLAT: THE BURLESQUE OF DUALITY

Steinbeck's four important novels of the thirties may, for the sake of illuminating contrast, be divided into two polar pairs. All four contain his basic matter but his technique in each varies greatly. The second pair consists of The Grapes of Wrath, epic in scale, containing countless characters and covering many miles of travel; and Of Mice and Men, an incredibly compressed drama with a small cast and very limited compass and duration. The first pair is composed of two equally contrasting novels, the subjectively narrated Tortilla Flat and the objectively narrated In Dubious Battle. The reader must find his own way through the moral labyrinths of In Dubious Battle, while in its comic predecessor the reader is guided by a verbose narrator who explains the behavior of the characters. In the end, however, the reader must still make his own evaluation, but here the problem is whether or not he accepts the narrator's judgments.

Tortilla Flat utilizes the vocabulary of the duality between good and evil to a greater extent than any other of Steinbeck's novels. The tone of the narrator is lofty in describing the actions of characters who are almost all
basically amoral. The titles of the chapters exhibit this tension: "How the poison of possession wrought with Pilon, and how evil temporarily triumphed in him"; "How Jesus Maria Corcoran, a good man, became an unwilling vehicle of evil"; "How three sinful men, through contrition, attained peace. How Danny's Friends swore comradeship"; and "How Danny's Friends became a force for good. How they succored the poor Pirate."

The contrast between this elevated moral language and the opportunistic attitudes of Danny and his companions creates an aura of irony that pervades this novel about the paisanos who live in the hills above Monterey. Tortilla Flat, which is not flat, is the location of two houses that Danny inherits from his grandfather when Danny returns from soldiering in World War I. Danny moves into one of these houses and rents the other to Pilon who, in turn, rents it to Pablo. They soon invite Jesus Maria Corcoran to join them. When the second house burns to the ground because of their carelessness, the three paisanos move in with Danny. Big Joe Portugee is also invited to live in the house. Intending to steal the money that the Pirate, a shabby beggar, is saving for a candlestick to be dedicated to Saint Francis, the Paisanos insist that the Pirate and his five dogs come to stay at the house. When the men learn the Pirate's story, they determine to aid him in his project. The Pirate donates the candlestick and attends the service at which it
is first displayed. After the group has many adventures, Danny grows increasingly weary of the responsibilities of ownership and comradeship. He disappears and is gone for three weeks. The other men find him and bring him back to the house. They give a gigantic party for all of the inhabitants of Tortilla Flat. At the height of the merrymaking, Danny becomes violent and goes outside to fight a mysterious opponent. A scream is heard and a mortally injured Danny is found at the bottom of the neighboring ravine. After watching Danny's military funeral, the group of paisanos returns to Danny's house and allows it to burn down. The men all go their separate ways.

The many levels of duality found in Steinbeck's more serious fiction are also present in Tortilla Flat, usually exaggerated or altered to produce comic effects. The contrast between the animal and the saint is especially strong in this novel. The devout Pirate has his pack of dogs--Fluff, Enrique, Pajarito, Rudolph, and Señor Alec Thompson--that follows him about and sleeps at his feet. The "god" Danny has his five reasonably faithful followers--Pilon, Pablo, Jesus Maria, Big Joe, and the Pirate himself--who follow his lead and sleep on the floor of his house. The saintly Pirate lives like an animal in his chicken coop before moving in with Danny and his friends. The Pirate and his dogs are devoted to Saint Francis who occupies a special place in Steinbeck's pantheon because he is associated with animals and is the patron saint
of San Francisco, the economic and cultural center of Northern California. In *Tortilla Flat* he builds a bridge between the extremes of saint and beast when the dogs, not the men, are blessed with a vision of the saint. As the Pirate sits in the church gazing at the golden candlestick, the five dogs rush in and interrupt the service. The Pirate takes them out into the woods and recounts the priest's homily.

The trees hushed their whispering. The forest was silent and enchanted. Suddenly there was a tiny sound behind the Pirate. All the dogs looked up. The Pirate was afraid to turn his head. A long moment passed. And then the moment was over. The dogs lowered their eyes. The treetops stirred to life again and the sunlight patterns moved bewilderingly.

The Pirate was so happy that his heart pained him. "Did you see him?" he cried. "Was it San Francisco? Oh! What good dogs you must be to see a vision."

The dogs leaped up at his tone. Their mouths opened and their tails threshed joyfully.

Other characters also evince a mixture of the qualities of animals and saints. Much of the humor of the novel is generated in the exaggerated contrasts. Pilon is "a mystic." Jesus Maria is said to be a "humanitarian" for "kindness was always in him." Pilon once said of him, "If that Jesus Maria had gone into the Church, Monterey would have had a saint for the calendar, I tell you." After the group, actively including Jesus Maria, has beaten Big Joe severely for stealing the Pirate's coins and after salt has been rubbed into Big Joe's fresh wounds, it is Jesus Maria, "that prey to the humanities," who unties Big Joe's thumbs and offers him a
drink. Jesus Maria says, apologizing for his tenderness, "Even the enemies of Our Savior gave him a little comfort."

Danny is portrayed in extreme terms. "Danny walked down the street to Torrelli's; and the beast in him chafed. From a savage and snarling wolf, it had become a great, shaggy, sentimental bear." After the hero's death, the narrator reports that "Danny is now a god." And God too is associated with animals in Pilon's thoughts as he watches the sea gulls in the evening: "These birds are flying across the forehead of the Father. Dear birds, dear sea gulls, how I love you all. Your slow wings stroke my heart as the hand of a gentle master strokes the full stomach of a sleeping dog, as the hand of Christ stroked the heads of little children."¹

Upon the symbolic landscape the two houses that Danny inherits are contrasted with the woods and gulches and gullies in which the paisanos live before they move inside. The houses stand for communal existence and for brotherhood between the extremes of the lonely animal and the lonely saint. Danny and his friends did not seek or desire this form of life and adopt it only when occasion casually arises. Both the houses are eventually destroyed by flames, but there is no regret as there is in The Pastures of Heaven when Mr. Whiteside's mansion burns down or in In Dubious Battle when buildings are ignited by both strikers and vigilantes. Instead, in this

comedy, there is joy and relief as the houses burn.

Dual symbolism is found in the two opposite uses to which candles are put. The central episode of the plot concerns the Pirate's efforts to save the money to donate for the purchase of a golden candlestick for Saint Francis. But it is also a holy candle that burns down the first of Danny's houses, a candle that Pablo originally purchased for Saint Francis and neglected to take to church. Instead, the candle serves to illuminate the room where the paisanos drink wine and tell stories. They fall asleep with the candle still burning. "The candle aimed its spear of light at heaven, like an artist who consumes himself to become divine." A wind blows a calendar into the flame, a fragment of wallpaper catches fire, and the house is soon burning out of control. "In the sky, saints and martyrs looked on with set and unforgiving faces. The candle was blessed. It belonged to Saint Francis. Saint Francis will have a big candle in its place tonight."2

Tortilla Flat contains opposition between the birth and death of children or animals although the contrast is not so strongly developed here as in the later works of the thirties--in The Red Pony in which one colt dies and another colt is born, in Of Mice and Men in which the live puppies are contrasted with the one Lennie kills, in The Grapes of

2Ibid., pp. 34-5.
Wrath in which Rose of Sharon's stillborn infant represents birth and death. In *Tortilla Flat*, Teresina's ninth child is born and she is soon pregnant again. The father of the tenth is one of the men living at Danny's house, but Teresina is not sure which one. Teresina is never quite sure about these matters. Opposed to this birth is the death of the infant son of the Mexican corporal whom Jesus Maria befriends and invites to visit the house.

Although their actions are presented in terms of right and wrong, good and evil, white and black, the *paisanos*, except for the Pirate, have no interest in morality. Danny, Pablo, Pilon, Jesus Maria, and Big Joe usually subscribe to Hobbes's opinion in the *Leviathan* that "whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good: and the objects of his hate and aversion, evil: and of his contempt, vile and insensible. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used in relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so . . . ."

The *paisanos* also illustrate Hobbes's philosophy that the will is dominated, not by reason, but by passion, and that reason is used as a tool of passion. They are experts in the art of using reason to attain self-righteously their selfish ends, as is shown in the episode in which they debate whether

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to pay Danny the two dollars that they owe him. Danny wants
the money to buy a gift of candy for Mrs. Morales.

"Candy is not good for people," Pablo observed.
"It makes their teeth ache."

"That is up to Danny," said Jesus Maria. "If he
wants to ache Mrs. Morales' teeth, that is his busi-
ness. What do we care for Mrs. Morales' teeth?"

A cloud of anxiety had settled on Pilon's face.
"But," he interposed sternly, "if our friend Danny
takes big candy to Mrs. Morales, he will eat some too.
So it is the teeth of our friend that will ache."

"Pablo shook his head anxiously. "It would be a
bad thing if Danny's friends, on whom he depends,
should bring about the aching of his teeth."

"What shall we do then?" asked Jesus Maria,
although he and everyone else knew exactly what they
would do.

Although all five members of the group are skillful at using
reason as a tool of desire, Pilon is especially adept and has
a reputation to maintain. When he hears how Emilio explained
to Cornelia that her affection for a baby pig would change to
anger as the pig grew older so she would not be unhappy to
kill and eat it as a mature pig, Pilon says a few words in
praise of Emilio's argument, but his comrades know that
"Pilon is jealous of a rival logician." Pilon's powers of
reasoning are magnificent. One day when he is hungry, he
comes upon a young rooster near the edge of the woods.

Pilon mused, "Poor little bare fowl. How cold it
must be for you in the early morning, when the dew
falls and the air grows cold with the dawn. The good
God is not always so good to little beasts." And he
thought, "Here you play in the street, little chicken.
Some day an automobile will run over you; and if it
kills you, that will be the best thing that can happen.
It may only break your leg or your wing. Then all of
your life you will drag along in misery. Life is too
hard for you, little bird."
To the glory of his soul be it said that no cry of pain came from that thicket. That chicken, which Pilon had prophesied might live painfully, died peacefully, or at least quietly.

When Pilon wants to ingratiate himself with the Pirate so he can find a way to steal the coins the man has saved, Pilon argues, "The Pirate has money, but he has no brain to use it. . . . I will give freely of my mind. That shall be my charity toward this poor little half-made man." When Pilon wishes to sell "a wash bowl and pitcher, two red glass vases, and a bouquet of ostrich plumes" from Danny's house, he explains to the owner, "It is not good to have so many breakable things around. . . . When they are broken you become sad. It is much better never to have had them."4

Relativists all, the paisanos clothe their deeds in morality. The narrator goes even farther in the imaginative use of moral terms. The persona is very much in evidence throughout Tortilla Flat. In the preface he explains that "Danny's house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny's friends were not unlike the knights of it." He states that the reason he is writing this account of Danny's experiences is to provide factual information about the hero so that researchers in the future will know the truth behind the legend. He makes use of the personal pronoun in the narration that follows. "During the time I have been telling this, Teresina's ninth child was born, and for the moment she

4 Tortilla Flat, pp. 27, 115, 12, 44, 13–4.
was unengaged." He tells of the arrival of the priest when Danny is dying: "I shall not go into the bedroom with Father Ramon, for Pilon and Pablo and Jesus Maria and Big Joe and Johnny Pom-pom and Tito Ralph and the Pirate and the dogs are there; and they are Danny's family. The door was, and is, closed. For after all there is pride in men, and some things cannot decently be pried into." In the last chapter the narrator calls attention to himself with his rhetoric, proclaiming as Danny's house begins to burn, "Thus must it be, 0 wise friends of Danny. The cord that bound you together is cut. The magnet that drew you has lost its virtue. Some stranger will own the house, some joyless relative of Danny's. Better that this symbol of holy friendship, this good house of parties and fights, of love and comfort, should die as Danny died, in one last glorious, hopeless assault on the gods." 5 The words "glorious" and "hopeless" suggest the combination of triumph and tragedy that Steinbeck incorporates into the endings of his more powerful novels. Danny the god is born when Danny the man dies.

One of the most important species of novel in the twentieth century has been the novel about writing a novel—Proust's Remembrance of Things Past and Gide's The Counterfeiters, to cite two outstanding examples. Tortilla Flat, in many respects a novel about creating a legend, displays

5Ibid., pp. 1, 106, 145, 151.
kinship to these modern works. It also traces its heritage back to the great line of comic tradition, Rabelais to Cervantes to Fielding. The tone of the chapter titles resembles that of the headings to the adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel: "How Gargantua Was Instructed by Ponocrates in Such a Manner That He Did Not Waste an Hour of the Day," "How Pantagruel Equitably Settled a Dispute That Was Marvelously Obscure and Hard to Decide, So Justly That His Judgment Was Said to Be Highly Admirable." Certainly the chapter in Tortilla Flat, "How, under the most adverse circumstances, love came to Big Joe Portugee," ending with Big Joe and Tia Ignacia copulating in the middle of a muddy street during a rainstorm, owes more to Rabelais than it does to Arthurian romance. Steinbeck and his critics have acknowledged the novel's debt to the Morte Darthur, but his attitude towards the glorious knights, and knighthood in general, resembles that of Rabelais and Cervantes more than it does the perspective of Malory. The influence of Fielding upon Steinbeck is great. The Grapes of Wrath, for instance, makes successful use of the rhythmical pattern of chapters and interchapters that structures Tom Jones. Fielding's distinction between affectation and hypocrisy, developed in the preface to Joseph Andrews, is important in Steinbeck's comic novels. The flaw of the paisanos of Tortilla Flat and the bums of Cannery Row is merely affectation, while the members of the establishment of Monterey and of Pacific Grove,
the leaders of the business, social, and religious communities, are guilty of hypocrisy. The narrator of *Tortilla Flat*, explaining to the reader the problems of creating a legend, is a direct descendent of the narrator of *Tom Jones* who outlines his objectives and techniques in writing a comic epic. The narrator of Danny's story points out and elaborates upon the technical devices important to all of Steinbeck's fiction. In the first paragraph of the preface, the persona explains the significance of the symbolic house: "in *Tortilla Flat* if you speak of Danny's house you do not mean a structure of wood flaked with old whitewash, overgrown with an ancient untrimmed rose of Castile. No, when you speak of Danny's house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men, from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow." The house retains this symbolic meaning throughout all of Steinbeck's novels. Sweetness and joy and philanthropy may be realized when men come together in a house, but in Steinbeck's fiction the ideal is only temporarily achieved, and most of the houses are ruined or deserted. In this novel, "the Pirate lived in a deserted chicken house in the yard of a deserted house on *Tortilla Flat*." The narrator gives his reasons for writing the story about the paisanos:

In Monterey, that old city on the coast of California, these things are well known, and they are repeated and sometimes elaborated. It is well that this cycle be put down on paper so that in a future time scholars, hearing the legends, may not say as
they say of Arthur and of Roland and of Robin Hood--
"There was no Danny nor any group of Danny's friends, nor any house. Danny is a nature god and his friends primitive symbols of the wind, the sky, the sun."
This history is designed now and ever to keep the sneers from the lips of sour scholars.

Regularly throughout the novel, the narrator calls attention to the use of symbolism. "In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated." "The bag of money had become the symbolic center of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved." The final pages recount the destruction of the house, "this symbol of holy friendship." Not only is a symbol called a symbol, but a ritual is called a ritual. "The Pirate ritualistically opened the bag and gave the quarter to Danny." Like Fielding in his critical interchapters, Steinbeck specifies his techniques and what effects they are to have on the dear reader, then allows them to produce the desired effects.

The narrator promises to give facts in order to combat the testimony of hearsay, but concerning a very important event, the death of Danny, he suddenly has no facts to offer. He makes sport of those who value facts: "Sometime a historian may write a cold, dry, fungus-like history of The Party." The narrator reverts back to the first person: "But I say, and the people of Tortilla Flat would say, 'To hell with it.'" There is no way to find out how many women Danny

6 Ibid., pp. 1, 42, 1, 93, 151, 94.
bedded down. "No one kept actual count, and afterward, naturally, no lady would willingly admit that she had been ignored; so the reputed prowess of Danny may be somewhat overstated." The reader is never told how Danny becomes injured but is given some alternate possibilities that suggest Hawthorne's legend-making in *The Scarlet Letter*. "In twenty years it may be plainly remembered that the clouds flamed and spelled DANNY is tremendous letters . . ." This extraordinary possibility is reminiscent of the A that may or may not have appeared in the sky over Salem on the night Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the square after the death of Governor Winthrop. Danny challenges the men at the party to fight. No man is willing to accept his challenge. "Danny drew himself up. It is said that his head just missed touching the ceiling." Danny goes outside to find, he says, "The Enemy who is worthy of Danny!" The people in the house can hear him roar his challenge. "And then, behind the house, in the gulch, they heard an answering challenge so fearful and chill that their spines wilted like nasturtium stems under frost. Even now, when the people speak of Danny's Opponent, they lower their voices and look furtively about. They heard Danny charge to the fray. They heard his last shrill cry of defiance, and then a thump. And then silence." Perhaps Danny had grown insane and killed himself. Since the ravine serves as toilet for the inhabitants of the house, perhaps Danny went out to relieve himself and tumbled down
the slope in a drunken stupor. Perhaps, like Don Giovanni, Danny met a vengeful, supernatural opponent. Or perhaps Danny's opponent in this novel of duality was another aspect of Danny himself. The narrator only offers alternate possibilities. He agrees with Pilon that "the good story lay in half-told things which must be filled in out of the hearer's own experience."7

In this novel about storytelling, the climactic chapter is really the fourteenth which contains a contest in storytelling. Like minstrels of old, the paisanos compete in their efforts to weave effective tales and to criticize each other's art. Two of these stories present comic versions of material that is repeated within a tragic framework in later novels of the thirties. First Danny tells of the baby pig that Emilio Murietta stole from its mother and gave to Cornelia Ruiz. When Cornelia's friends come to admire the piglet, Sweets Ramirez accidentally steps on its tail. The baby pig squeals, its mother hears the cry, and the sow charges through the front door of the house, upsetting furniture and ladies as she reclaims her offspring. This hilarious version of a story about the angry sow in the living room is echoed somberly in the account in *The Grapes of Wrath* of the pig that entered the house and ate Milly Jacobs's baby, a catastrophe that prompted Ma Joad to guard the front

7Ibid., pp. 142-4, 33.
door of her home with a strong gate.

Next Pablo tells the story of Bob Smoke who always carried the flag in local parades. Although Bob Smoke longs to be respected in the community, everyone laughs at him. To gain sympathy, he stages a suicide attempt which he knows will be interrupted. When Bob Smoke hears Charlie Meeler approaching, he puts the pistol to his head. When Charlie sees the gun in Bob's hand, Charlie jumps to grab the weapon, but in the confusion it fires and shoots off the tip of Bob's nose. Now with the end of Bob's nose missing, the world laughs even more loudly at Bob Smoke. Serious variations on this incident are found in *In Dubious Battle* when Jim's entire face is shot off by a shotgun, and in *The Grapes of Wrath* when Tom Joad's nose is broken, altering his appearance and changing his identity.

The final story in this chapter is told by Jesus Maria and is about Petey Ravanno and his father who fall in love with two coquettish sisters, Gracie and 'Tonia, who ignore the men's pleas of love. Petey, like Bob Smoke, plans a fake suicide to impress Gracie with his devotion. He hangs himself but his father rescues him in time. The ruse does melt Gracie's heart and she marries Petey. Then Old Man Ravanno tries the same strategy. In a tool house he arranges a rope about his neck. As his fellow workers at the service station arrive, he bravely steps off the workbench. But suddenly the door of the tool shed blows shut. The body is
discovered an hour later. Pilon objects to this last story because it has "too many meanings and too many lessons in it. Some of the lessons are opposites." Pablo, on the other hand, defends Jesus Maria's tale: "I like it because it hasn't any meaning you can see, and still does mean something, I can't tell what."\(^8\) Pablo's argument could also apply to *Tortilla Flat* which does mean something although it is difficult to analyze. Because of Steinbeck's frequent use of stories and parables to foreshadow the endings of his novels, his use of short tales to epitomize the meaning of longer tales, it is possible that he is suggesting that Danny commits suicide at the end of the book, or at least pretends to commit suicide as Bob Smoke and Petey Ravanno did. Perhaps at the edge of the ravine he screamed his warning that echoed across the gulch, and when none of his friends came to dissuade him, he jumped.

*Tortilla Flat* is a novel primarily about the art of storytelling. Although many of the incidents and characters are truly humorous, the greatest comic effects result from the grand manner in which the story is told. Most of the *paisanos* are totally amoral, but their actions are related in moral terms of good and evil, of white and black. It is as if the characters were suspended in the center of a basin of water. The narrator tilts the basin from side to side,

\[^{8}\text{Ibid.}, p. 122.\]
and the characters move from extreme to extreme even though the waves on which they ride are created by the narrator.

The following extended quotation, describing Pilon carrying two gallons of wine he bought to repay Danny, illustrates this method:

The feet of the bad Pilon had stopped moving. In truth the bad Pilon for the moment had ceased to exist. (Hear this, recording angel!) There was, nor is, nor ever has been a purer soul than Pilon's at that moment. Galvez' bad bulldog came to Pilon's deserted legs standing alone in the dark. And Galvez' bulldog sniffed and went away without biting the legs.

A soul washed and saved is a soul doubly in danger, for everything in the world conspires against such a soul. "Even the straws under my knees," says Saint Augustine, "shout to distract me from prayer."

Pilon's soul was not even proof against his own memories; for as he watched the birds, he remembered that Mrs. Pastano used sea gulls sometimes in her tamales, and that memory made him hungry, and hunger tumbled his soul out of the sky. Pilon moved on, once more a cunning mixture of good and evil. Galvez' bad bulldog turned snarling and stalked back, sorry now that he had let go such a perfect chance at Pilon's legs.

Pilon hunched his arms to ease the weight of the bottles.

It is a fact verified and recorded in many histories that the soul capable of the greatest good is also capable of the greatest evil. Who is there more impious than a backsliding priest? Who more carnal than a recent virgin? This, however, may be a matter of appearances.

Pilon, just back from Heaven, was, although he did not know it, singularly receptive of every bitter wind, toward every evil influence that crowded the night about him. True, his feet still moved toward Danny's house, but there was neither intention nor conviction in them. They awaited the littlest signal to turn about. Already Pilon was thinking how stupendously drunk he could get on two gallons of wine, and more, how long he could stay drunk.

It was almost dark now. The dirt road was no longer visible, nor the ditches on either side. No moral conclusion is drawn from the fact that at this moment, when Pilon's impulses were balanced as
precariously as a feather, between generosity and selfishness, at this very moment Pablo Sanchez happened to be sitting in the ditch at the side of the road, wishing he had a cigarette and a glass of wine.

Ah, the prayers of the millions, how they must fight and destroy each other on their way to the throne of God.

Pilon is trapped. Pablo has seen the two bottles that Pilon is carrying. Pilon must share the wine whether he wishes to or not, but not with Danny.

Pilon was saved from selfishness. True, he did not take the wine to Danny's house, but instantly he invited Pablo to share it at the rented house. If two generous paths branch from the highroad of life and only one can be followed, who is to judge which is best?

This short episode takes the form of a miniature journey that displays the many levels of duality within Tortilla Flat. The narrator presents the incident in terms of good and bad that are ridiculous when applied to Pilon who is one of the most self-centered individuals who ever walked the streets of Monterey. The reader has no doubt that Pilon will spend the two dollars he owes Danny before he ever sees Danny, and the reader can predict that Pilon will buy wine which he will want to drink all by himself if he can avoid sharing it with his friends. Pilon is traveling allegorically along "the highroad of life." He is supposed to be going toward the house which is the symbol of brotherhood and love. But there are two possible destinations: "two generous paths branch from the highroad of life and only one can be followed." The

9Ibid., pp. 16-8.
narrative is filled with terms of moral extremity quite beyond Pilon's orbit: "bad Pilon," "purer soul," "a soul washed and saved," "a soul doubly in danger," "a cunning mixture of good and evil," "the soul capable of the greatest good," "the greatest evil," "every evil influence," and "moral conclusion." Pilon with the bulldog at his knees is compared with Saint Augustine with the straw at his knees. The sky and Heaven are opposed to the dirt road with the ditches on either side. God on His throne is contrasted with Pablo in his ditch. The angel is opposed to the sea gull, and the saintly and animal qualities are contrasted in an image that includes a feather which suggests the wings of both angels and sea gulls: "Pilon's impulses were balanced as precariously as a feather, between generosity and selfishness." The narrator's descriptions ricochet from extremes of good to extremes of evil, from extremes of perfection to extremes of imperfection, as Pilon saunters along the dirt road thinking only of his gullet. 

Tortilla Flat is an extremely wise and funny book. Many critics have noted that it burlesques both Arthurian romance and American capitalism. I think it also burlesques, and much more importantly, a writer whose fiction invariably contains many levels of duality, a writer much like John Steinbeck.
CHAPTER V

IN DUBIOUS BATTLE: THE OBJECTIVE TREATMENT OF DUALITY

Steinbeck regularly altered his technique with each succeeding novel, but no change is more dramatic than that between Tortilla Flat and In Dubious Battle. The narrator of Tortilla Flat not only addresses an explanatory preface to the reader and makes occasional use of the pronoun I, but he also comments freely throughout the chapters, analyzing characters and evaluating their predicaments. In Dubious Battle, on the other hand, is Steinbeck's most realistic and most objective work. The story is told exclusively through dialogue and through the objective descriptions of the participants and their actions. In spite of the heavy load of exposition the conversations must carry, especially in the opening chapters, the dialogue is always natural and realistic without a false note, perfect for the characters, ranging from the simple, uneducated language of old Dan to the scientific vocabulary of Doc Burton, the raisonneur of the middle section of the novel.

In Dubious Battle is Steinbeck's closest approximation of classical naturalism. Although symbolism and myth are used
to strong effect, they are always controlled by the developing realistic situation, never rendering the naturalistic texture of the novel. The comparison of man with animals is always present in Steinbeck's fiction, and here biological functions are emphasized throughout. Mac brazenly and ignorantly supervises the delivery of Lisa's baby. The great problems at the strikers' camp are procuring food, preparing food, distributing food. Doc Burton is called to the scene to be in charge of sanitation. One important episode takes place in the makeshift toilet where Jim meets the disgruntled striker. The illness of old Dan is described with clinical detail. Brutality is pictured vividly when the strikers stomp on the scab workers in the apple orchard, when Mac calmly tortures the high school vigilante and methodically bruises his face and breaks his nose, when an unseen assailant fires a shotgun into Jim's face.

Jim's reminiscences about the fate of the members of his family are models of dispassionate description in the naturalistic tradition of individuals created and warped and destroyed by their environment. "My whole family has been ruined by this system." His sister May vanishes one day and is never seen again or heard from. His father, a sticker in a slaughterhouse, was active in labor strife and "always got the hell beat out of him. He used to come home all covered with blood. He'd sit beside the cook stove. We had to let him alone then. Couldn't even speak to him or he'd cry. When
my mother washed him later, he'd whine like a dog." The father was killed by "a charge of buckshot in the chest from a riot gun," as the son is later killed by a charge of buckshot in his face. Jim's harried mother became even more subdued after her daughter's disappearance. "She moved kind of like a machine, and she hardly ever said anything. Her eyes got a kind of a dead look, too." Jim, in jail for vagrancy when he learns his mother is dying, obtains permission to visit her. "She just stared at me. I asked her if she wanted a priest, but she didn't answer me, just stared. 'Bout four o'clock in the morning she died. ... I guess she just didn't want to live. I guess she didn't care if she went to hell, either." 1

The novel follows Jim Nolan from his escape from his drab furnished room on the first page to his death on the last page. Jim joins the Party and is apprenticed to Mac, an experienced Party worker. They go to the Torgas Valley to organize a strike among the apple pickers there. In a migrant workers' jungle, Mac delivers the baby of London's daughter-in-law in order to impress London, a man greatly respected by the fruit tramps. Mac and Jim succeed in organizing a strike with London and Dakin as leaders. The strikers obtain permission to set up their camp on the farm of Anderson whose son Al is a Party sympathizer. Mac sends for Doc Burton to take charge of the sanitation and medical needs of the camp.

The owners of the orchards import scab labor to break the strike. In a confrontation at the railway station, Joy, a punch-drunk but loyal Party member is slain. Despite the strong leadership and the organizing skills of Mac and Jim, the strike makes no progress because of the unity of the owners. Violence leads to greater violence on both sides of the barricades. Anderson's barn is burned and he orders the strikers ousted from his property. Doc Burton disappears. Jim takes command of the strike, surprising everyone, including his teacher Mac, with his strength, his drive, and his indifference to the pain and suffering of others. The night before the campers are to be forced out of the county by men armed with machine-guns, Mac and Jim are ambushed in an apple orchard. Jim is killed. Mac realizes that Jim's death will arouse the strikers to one last, futile stand against the owners of the valley. He carries Jim's faceless body to the platform in the field and begins to speak: "Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself—"

The overall pattern of the journey through life is stated by Doc in a conversation with Jim: "It seems to me that man has engaged in a blind and fearful struggle out of a past he can't remember, into a future he can't foresee nor understand. And man has met and defeated every obstacle, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself. How

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2 Ibid., p. 250.
mankind hates itself." Jim objects, insisting, "We don't hate ourselves, we hate the invested capital that keeps us down."

Doc replies that the other side in the battle is made up of men like the strikers. "Man hates himself. Psychologists say a man's self-love is balanced with self-hate. Mankind must be the same. We fight ourselves and we can only win by killing every man." This opposition between love and hate, self-love and self-hate, dominates the novel. Love suggests the validity of perfection, hate proves the impossibility of perfection.

When Jim joins the Party he is reborn. He says in his first interview that he had once spoken with Party men in jail. "Everything's been a mess, all my life. Their lives weren't messes. They are working toward something. I want to work toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again." Jim desires to belong to a group, to partake of brotherly love after having long been a loner. He does not want always to fight alone as his father did. Harry Nilson informs him that joining the Party will help him reach his goal. "You're going to be surprised when you see you stop hating people. I don't know why it is, but that's what usually happens." It does not happen to Jim Nolan, however. He strives for brotherhood which is love, and for

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3Ibid., p. 184.
4Ibid., pp. 6, 7.
power over men which is hate. The two goals are incompatible.

With Jim and Mac, Steinbeck has perfected his treatment of dual characters. The relationship is suggested but not fully developed in Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris in *Cup of Gold*, but Henry's friend always remains a shadowy figure. A more expanded version of this duality is found in *Tortilla Flat* with Danny and Pilon although Pilon never emerges completely from his position as one of the group of *paisanos*. With *In Dubious Battle*, however, the dual relationship reaches the stage that shapes Steinbeck's fiction of this period.

Like Lennie and George and like Casy and Tom Joad, the heroes of this novel are individuals in their own right but also are mirror images of each other in important respects. They are not protagonist and antagonist but two independent characters who travel parallel paths, and yet they are also complementary parts of one personality. Their relationship is that of two friends but also that of father and son, of master and apprentice, of older brother and younger brother. When they receive their assignment in the Torgas Valley, Mac tells Jim, "I'll train you, and then you can train new men. Kind of like teaching hunting dogs by running them with the old boys, see?" Mac displays little affection toward anyone for he has forced himself to be dispassionate. He trains his apprentice to be coldly objective. When Jim is sympathetic toward the old apple picker Dan, Mac remains indifferent. Only after
Dan has fallen out of a tree and his injury has caused tension among the workers does Mac see any value in him. "The old buzzard was worth something after all," he says. "We can use him now." Following their meeting with Anderson who consents to their use of his property as a campsite, Jim says, "I like him." Mac retorts, "Don't go liking people, Jim. We can't waste our time liking people." Mac teaches Jim all too effectively to be cold and indifferent. By the time Mac, in spite of his philosophy, begins to feel affection for Jim as a person, Jim has become suspicious of all human warmth. When Mac realizes that a disastrous ending to the strike is probable, he pleads with Jim to save himself. Jim is adamant. "You protect me all the time, Mac. And sometimes I get the feeling you're not protecting me for the Party, but for yourself." Mac's face turns red with anger. "O.K., then. Get your can knocked off. I've told you what I think's the best thing. Be pig-headed, if you want." They have reversed their positions completely since the opening of the novel. Saving love is not possible even between these close friends, these brothers, these two parts of a whole.

Mac does his job too well. Jim is idealistic but Mac insists he become practical. Early in the strike when they return from a visit with Anderson, Jim is bursting with enthusiasm. "Lord, I'm excited. Look at the stars, Mac. Millions of 'em." The star is Steinbeck's frequent symbol

5Ibid., pp. 21, 72, 82, 246.
for the spiritual and the ideal. Mac growls, "You look at the road." 6

In their relationship as master and apprentice, Jim imitates Mac as faithfully as a son mimics a father. In this novel of ends and means, Jim observes Mac using everyone as means to his ends. Although he knows nothing of midwifery, Mac does not hesitate to deliver Lisa's baby, no matter what the risks, in order to impress her father-in-law. He uses Dan, he uses Al Anderson, he uses Al's father, he uses everyone who can be used. Jim imitates Mac so successfully that Dakin says as they prepare to use the body of Joy to further their cause, "Pal of yours, and you won't let him rest now. You want to use him. You're a pair of cold-blooded bastards." With his saintly dedication, Jim eventually outdoes his tutor. When Anderson's farm is burned down, Mac gets angry and allows Sam to retaliate by burning a judge's house. Jim reprimands Mac, not for his decision, but because he lost his temper. Still angry, Mac admits that Jim is right. "You're turning into a proper son of a bitch. Everybody's going to hate you, but you'll be a good Party man." 7 This is the Jim who sought love when he joined the Party.

When the strikers capture the high school boy with a gun, they decide to make him a "billboard" to frighten other

6 Ibid., p. 82.
7 Ibid., pp. 119, 193.
would-be vigilantes. "The boy tried to retreat. He bent down, trying to cower. Mac took him firmly by the shoulder. His right fist worked in quick, short hammer blows, one after another. The nose cracked flat, the other eye closed, and the dark bruises formed on the cheeks. The boy jerked about wildly to escape the short, precise strokes. Suddenly the torture stopped." Mac administers the beating because Jim has a wounded shoulder. He tells Jim, "I couldn't of done it if you weren't here, Jim. Oh, Jesus, you're hard-boiled. You just looked. You didn't give a damn." Mac gazes at Jim "with something of fear in his eyes. 'You're getting beyond me, Jim. I'm getting scared of you. I've seen men like you before. I'm scared of 'em, Jesus. Jim, I can see you changing every day... God Almighty, Jim, it's not human. I'm scared of you.'" Jim's idealistic dedication has been totally perverted. He explains, "I'm stronger than you, Mac. I'm stronger than anything in the world, because I'm going in a straight line." Jim takes over complete direction of the strike, working through Mac and London. He asks for "a police committee of five to beat the hell out of any guy that goes to sleep or sneaks away." Jim has assumed a role like that of the police who used to beat hell out of him. His camp now resembles the company he worked for and detested before becoming a member of the Party, "a place where they talked of loyalty to the firm, and loyalty meant spying on the people
around you." Mac has initiated Jim all too well into evil opportunism. His rapid change is reminiscent of the transformation of young Robin in Hawthorne's story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Robin comes to the strange town to seek his relative, but by morning he has altered so completely that he laughs as he watches his helpless kinsman Major Molineux, tarred and feathered, being paraded through the streets.

At some moments Jim's contrasting characteristics surface and reveal his basic duality. The gentle Jim of old reappears in his scenes with Lisa who likes to hear him talk. As twilight approaches on his last day on earth, he sits with her and remembers his boyhood. "One time in town, when I was a little kid, the sun was going down, and there was a board fence. Well, a grey cat went up and sat on that fence for a moment, a long-haired cat, and that cat turned gold for a minute, a gold cat." In contrast to the pattern of flight and pursuit, these meetings with Lisa represent the idyllic interludes in the journey. She is the still point in the enveloping violence, and it is appropriate that he is with her when he remembers the long-haired cat looking golden in the sunset, the hunter at rest in a moment of peace.

Jim's major quest ends in hate, not love, but within this larger framework is a miniature quest of four pages that

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8 Ibid., pp. 198-9, 202, 7.
9 Ibid., p. 247.
has the opposite ending. The episode combines the spiritual and the biological, beginning with a trip to the toilet and ending with a memory of a vision. "I'm going down to the can, Mac," Jim says and walks down the street of tents in which the strikers and their families are, at this early hour, awakening from sleep. He hears the voice of a woman complaining to her husband: "I want to get out o' this dump. What good we doin' here? An' I got a lump in my stomach big's your fist. It's a cancer, that's what it is. Card-reader tol' me two years ago I'd get a cancer if I din' watch out. Said I was the cancer type." His journey thus begins with this reference to prophecy. The mention of "cancer type" suggests astrology also. Legends and myths often open with prophecy like that of Merlin in the Arthurian saga and in Steinbeck's Cup of Gold, like that of Madame Sosostris in the first section of Eliot's The Waste Land. "As Jim passed another tent, a tousled head stuck out, 'Come on in quick, kid. He's gone.'" Jim rejects the woman's offer and resists temptation. "Fifteen yards away, in the open, stood the square canvas screen. Inside there was a two-by-four supported at each end, over a hole. There was room on board for three men." Jim quarrels with a cantankerous striker who tries to convince him that London, the leader of the strike, is dishonest. Jim tells the man he is lying and rejects the temptation to turn against his leader and symbolically rejects the devil who is often identified with defecation. The nameless man in the toilet becomes more
vehement and warns, "Wait'll you get well an' somebody's going to slap that smart puss right off you." This prophecy comes true at the end of the book when Jim's face is shot off by a blast from a shotgun. Returning along the camp street, Jim sees an attractive woman with dark hair. They exchange greetings. As he passes still another tent, the woman with the tousled head again invites Jim to come inside. He glances at her, does not reply, and continues on his way. Thus Jim in this short journey has resisted temptation three times.

He describes to Mac the smile of the woman with the beautiful dark hair. He explains that his mother was Catholic even though his father objected to all religions. She attended church secretly.

"When I was a kid she took me in sometimes, too. The smile on that woman—that's why I'm telling you this—Well, there was a Mary in there, and she had the same kind of smile, wise and cool and sure. One time I asked my mother why she smiled like that. My mother said, 'She can smile because she's in Heaven.' I think she was jealous, a little." His voice tumbled on, "And one time I was there, looking at that Mary, and I saw a ring of little stars in the air, over her head, going around and around, like little birds. Really saw them, I mean. It's not funny, Mac. This isn't religion—it's a kind of what the books I've read call wish-fulfillment, I guess. I saw them, all right. They made me feel happy, too." 10

In this miniature quest Jim has proved himself pure and been rewarded with a smile from a face like that of the Mary in his childhood vision. This quest that ends in love is counterpointed with the longer quest that ends in hate.

10 Ibid., pp. 216-9.
The journey pattern of *In Dubious Battle*, beginning with the trip in the boxcar to the T orgas Valley, changes to that of flight and then pursuit as Mac and Jim become the two strikers that the owners wish most to capture or kill. Twice they fall into traps. In the first ambush Jim is wounded in the shoulder, in the second he is killed. Reinforcing the atmosphere of pursuit is the imagery of the hunting and the hunted of the animal world. As the men walk in the orchard, "a barn-owl, screeching overhead with a ripping sound, startled the men." Mac explains to Jim that the noise is that of an owl out hunting mice. It is in the orchard later that Jim is hunted and killed. Jim remembers that his father fought "like a cat in a corner with a pack of dogs around."

In this novel in which the hunter is hunted, Anderson's two magnificent pointers are destroyed when the barn containing their kennel is burned by vigilantes. One of the most powerful property owners in the valley is named Hunter. Over the entrance to his land is a sign, "Hunter Bros. Fruit Co. S Brand Apples." Judge Hunter becomes the hunted and his house is burned down in revenge by a striker. When London is driving Mac and Jim to the meeting with Dakin, he swerves to avoid hitting a shepherd dog, a nonhunting working breed. London says he does not like to hit dogs. "Don't mind cats. I killed three cats on the way here from Radcliffe."\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 102, 16, 54.
The opposition between house and cave upon the symbolic landscape is strong. The house is the symbol of order and security and brotherhood between the extremes of the cave of the animal and the cave of the saint. But in this novel most of the symbolic homes are in ruins. Mac, at his first meeting with Jim, becomes vehement about the American Legion. "Ten of the brave bastards licked me one night. And after they'd licked me unconscious they jumped on me and broke my right arm. And then they set fire to my mother's house."

Violence in the Torgas Valley reaches a peak when the lunch wagon belonging to Al Anderson is burned down by a gang. Dakin goes berserk when a group of vigilantes set fire to the truck that serves him as a home. Mr. Anderson's barn is ignited by more vigilantes, and Sam retaliates by setting fire to the home of Judge Hunter. The valley becomes wild with firebrands, firebugs, and threats of arson. The headline of the local newspaper places arson before murder—"STRIKERS BURN HOUSES—KILL MEN!" With both sides burning buildings there is no hope of order or safety.

Opposed to the burning houses are the caves of retreat. On the train traveling to the Torgas Valley, Jim's "sleep was a shouting, echoing black cave and it extended into eternity." The tents in the camp serve as temporary shelters where the pursued strikers sleep. Mac and Jim shared "a

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12Ibid., pp. 17, 212.
little pup-tent with no cloth floor. They crawled into the little cave and curled up in their old comforters." Along the streets of the camp, "each tent was a little cave of darkness." Mac has a refuge in case the strike goes against the organizers and tells Jim, "If hell should pop and we get separated, you get to that bridge and go underneath, clear up under the arch, on the side away from town. You'll find a pile of dead willows there. Lift 'em aside. There's a deep cave underneath. Get inside and pull the willows over the hole." But Jim never gets the chance to reach the cave and possible resurrection.

Sensuality and celibacy are contrasted in Jim and Mac. Jim states early in the novel that he is afraid of women because he does not wish to be trapped into marriage. "Used to be, when I got riled up I'd go to a cat-house. You wouldn't believe it, Mac, but ever since I started to grow up I been scared of girls." Mac, however, is always on the lookout for girls and complains that the women available at camp are either too young or too unattractive. Jim tells him, "You seem to have trouble keeping your economics out of the bedroom." Mac replies that he does not want to do so. "Every time the sun shines on my back all afternoon I get hot pants. What's wrong with that?" When Jim assumes leadership of the strike, he stresses his purity. "I've got to know my

13Ibid., pp. 28, 110, 216, 214.
power. I'm stronger than you, Mac. I'm stronger than anything in the world, because I'm going in a straight line. You and all the rest have to think of women and tobacco and liquor and keeping warm and fed."\(^{14}\) It is to this denial of the flesh that Jim attributes his strength.

At one point the workers in the apple orchard are arguing and Mac suggests that their topic is perhaps "Darwin versus Old Testament." Biological naturalism in this novel about the knowledge of good and evil is contrasted with Old Testament myth. The symbolic tree of the Garden of Eden is prominent. Most of the scenes take place in or near the apple orchards. It is while high in a tree picking apples that Jim learns the harsh facts of migratory life from old Dan whose fall from the ladder has overtones of the Fall of Man. When trapped by enemies in an orchard, Jim climbs into a tree to save his life, climbs into the Tree of Life. As he walks among the fruit trees with Jim at the opening of the final chapter, Mac plucks from a limb "a small misshapen apple the pickers had left." "God that tastes good," he says. "I'd forgot about apples." It is Mac who has instructed Jim in the knowledge of evil, overwhelming Jim's longing for good. The Old Testament symbolism is intertwined with that of the New in the person of Jim who is associated also with the story of Christ. When Doc enters the tent and finds the

\(^{14}\)Ibid., pp. 27, 53, 199.
wounded Jim sitting with Lisa and her baby, he notes that they look like "the holy family." Observing the spirit of the strikers, Doc says, "Pure religious ecstacy. I can understand that. Partakers of the blood of the Lamb." Jim proves to be the sacrificed Lamb. Immediately before he runs off to the ambush in the orchard, Jim is preparing to address the strikers. "His face was transfigured. A furious light of energy seemed to shine from it." When Mac touches Jim's dead body he exclaims, "Oh, Christ!" Jim's body is placed against a corner post of the platform with suggestion of the tree and the cross. The idea of Christian sacrifice is, in turn, meshed with pagan sacrifice in the killing of animals such as the cattle the woman donates to the cause of the strikers.

Steinbeck's use of extremely objective realism in his treatment of multilevel quality creates a crisis in the narration of the novel. As Jim makes his first tentative moves toward brotherhood and, he hopes, perfection when he joins the Party, he is a sympathetic but rather conventional hero resembling those of numerous proletarian novels of the thirties and naturalistic works of earlier decades. The reader has no difficulty accepting him and approving his actions. After the strike has been organized and Jim's character begins to change under the tutelage of Mac, the

\[15\]Ibid., pp. 68, 238, 75, 185, 249.
reader is provided with an intelligent guide through the psychological mazes. In Chapter 7 Doc Burton arrives in the Torgas Valley to serve as medical officer for the camp. "A young man with golden hair stepped into the room. His face was almost girlish in its delicacy, and his large eyes had a soft, sad look like those of a bloodhound." Doc's mind also has some of the qualities of a bloodhound as he tries to track truth through the jungle of underbrush in this novel of ends and means. Doc is an able observer, a professional observer. He explains, "My senses aren't above reproach, but they're all I have. I want to see the whole picture—as nearly as I can, I don't want to put on blinkers of 'good' and 'bad,' and limit my vision. If I used the term 'good' on a thing I'd lose my license to inspect it, because there might be bad in it. Don't you see? I want to be able to look at the whole thing." His awareness of the mixture of good and bad in the whole thing makes Doc Burton an ideal commentator for a novel by Steinbeck. He tells Mac, "You practical men always lead practical men with stomachs. . . . And when someone wonders what it is that makes a man with a stomach more than your rule allows, why you howl, 'Dreamer, mystic, metaphysician.' . . . In all history there are no men who come to such wild-eyed confusion and bewilderment as practical men leading men with stomachs." Doc Burton can analyze the complicated mixtures of traits within a single personality. "Mac, . . . you're the craziest mess of cruelty and
hausfrau sentimentality, of clear vision and rose-colored
glasses I ever saw. I don't know how you manage to be all of
them at once.\footnote{16} The reader grows dependent upon Doc Burton
to clarify the complexities. But on the night the Anderson
barn is burned, Doc Burton disappears. For the final quarter
of the book, the reader finds himself without a guide as
violent actions lead to more violent actions. Part of the
sense of cruelty this work projects results from the
mysterious loss of Doc Burton whom the strikers and the
reader need. There is a tendency to postpone making judgments
concerning Jim's rapid development as a leader of men in
hopes that Doc Burton will reappear. At the finale, when the
young boy rushes in to tell Jim and Mac that Doc Burton has
been found and they run to greet him, the reader shares the
excitement because he too wants desperately to recover Doc.
When the message proves to be a ruse to lure Jim and Mac away
from the safety of camp, the reader is doubly shocked.

This narrative device is extremely effective.
Steinbeck has led the reader into the situation, provided a
commentator, and then abruptly removed him, leaving the
shaken reader completely dependent upon his own resources to
struggle with the problems of ends and means, of good and
evil. The dubious battle is within the appraiser. He watches
with pity and horror as Mac tragically and triumphantly

\footnote{16}Ibid., pp. 88, 103, 105-6, 150.
carries the body of Jim, his apprentice, his rival, his master, to the platform as the weary strikers assemble. The stunning shock is increased when Mac turns to the men who have known Jim, and to the reader who has known Jim longer and better, and says, using this salutation for the first time in the book, "Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself—"
In the late 1930's, John Steinbeck was at the summit of his powers and produced two masterpieces which are similar in their characters and themes but are totally different in execution. Both are structured upon the journey pattern and both focus upon the wanderings of migrant workers upon the face of the earth, but *The Grapes of Wrath* is a gigantic epic of a novel while *Of Mice and Men* is a short, tightly compressed novel imitating tragic drama. *The Grapes of Wrath* is such a brilliant long novel that most observers recognize it to be a work of art; *Of Mice and Men* is such a powerful short novel that many critics are suspicious of it. Their suspicions are, I believe, unfounded.

*Of Mice and Men* recounts the experiences of George Milton and Lennie Small who, with their fellow workers, illustrate the extreme alienation of modern man. "Guys like us," says George, "that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place." Except for George and Lennie, all the men are separated from each other, and most of them are desperately,
terrifyingly alone. "We kinda look after each other," George explains to Slim. "Ain't many guys travel around together," Slim says. "I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other." Crooks, isolated in his segregated room, describes the terror of loneliness to Lennie: "A guy needs somebody--to be near him. . . . A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. . . . I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick." Crooks recalls happy moments from his childhood when he shared life with two brothers. "They was always near me, always there. Used to sleep right in the same room, right in the same bed--all three." Curley's wife later tells the men assembled in Crook's room, "You're all scared of each other, that's what. Ever' one of you's scared the rest is goin' to get something on you." Her accusation echoes the words of Slim, "scared of each other." Opposed to this centrifugal force of fear is the centripetal pull of affection that brings individuals closer together. After George has berated him in the opening scene, Lennie seeks to regain his friend's approval. "Lennie crawled slowly and cautiously around the fire until he was close to George." When Curley's wife displays a growing interest in him, Lennie slowly begins to trust her. "He moved cautiously close to her, until he was right against her." In the final scene, the frightened Lennie rises to his knees as George approaches his hiding place. "George came stiffly near and sat down beside him." When Slim comforts George after Lennie's death, he too draws
near. "Slim came directly to George and sat down beside him, sat very close to him." ¹

Throughout *Of Mice and Men*, lonely people reach out to make contact with each other. Sometimes these efforts succeed but most often they fail. The dominant physical sense in the novel is tactile. This emphasis on touch and on hands underlines Steinbeck's biological naturalism while also symbolizing emotional longings that are occasionally rewarded but most frequently thwarted. The whole story can be told in terms of touching and feeling and handling. The hands of George and Lennie are contrasted in the opening pages. George has "small, strong hands," well defined as are all his features. Lennie, coarser and more like a beast, "dabbled his big paw in the water" of the pool. The rodent of the title is introduced in this scene:

George looked sharply at him. "What'd you take outa that pocket?"
"Ain't a thing in my pocket," Lennie said cleverly.
"I know there ain't. You got it in your hand. What you got in your hand—hidin' it?"
"I ain't got nothin', George. Honest."
"Come on, give it here."
Lennie held his closed hand away from George's direction. "It's on'y a mouse, George."
"A mouse? A live mouse?"
"Uh-uh. Jus' a dead mouse, George. I didn't kill it. I found it dead."
"Give it here!" said George.
"Aw, leave me have it, George."
"Give it here!"
Lennie's closed hand slowly obeyed. George took

the mouse and threw it across the pool to the other side, among the brush.

Although the dreams of the men in the bunk house do correspond to the plans in the lines of Robert Burns, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft a-gley," the central image of the novel is the dead mouse in the hand of the man. By the final chapter, which is set beside the same pool of water, the image has become frighteningly enlarged. Lennie, who literally held the dead mouse in his hand, now is dead. Figuratively he is, in Jonathan Edwards's metaphor, a sinner in the hands of an angry God. The incident with the mouse first reveals Lennie's overpowering desire to touch and stroke things which appeal to him. George asks, "What you want of a dead mouse, anyways?" Lennie sadly replies, "I could pet it with my thumb while we walked along." George reminds Lennie that he invariably killed the live mice that his Aunt Clara used to buy for him. Lennie tries forlornly to explain: "I'd pet 'em, and pretty soon they bit my fingers and I pinched their heads and they was dead--because they was so little." This is Lennie's tragedy. Although he is filled with affection, he cannot help but kill the beings he loves, the beings he touches.

The two men have recently fled from the town of Weed where Lennie's longing to touch attractive objects caused

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2Ibid., pp. 3, 5-6, 6, 10.
turmoil. George angrily recalls Lennie's behavior: "Jus' wanted to feel that girl's dress--jus' wanted to pet it like it was a mouse-- Well, how the hell did she know you jus' wanted to feel her dress? She jerks back and you hold on like it was a mouse." The two men were forced to hide all day in an irrigation ditch to elude their vindictive pursuers.

The people on the ranch are characterized in terms of hands. First Lennie and George meet the old swamper Candy who is carrying a broom in his left hand. "He pointed with his right arm, and out of the sleeve came a round, sticklike wrist, but no hand." Candy is an unwanted, completely expendable old man because of his handicap. Curley, son of the owner of the ranch, wears "a work glove on his left hand." He assumes a fighting stance when he sees the new workers. "His arms gradually bent at the elbows and his hands closed into fists." When Curley is gone, Candy explains that the boss's son is a boxer. "Curley's pretty handy." George says that Curley had better watch his step with Lennie even though "Lennie ain't handy." Candy relates that Curley has been married for only a few weeks. "You seen that glove on his left hand? . . . Well, that glove's fulla vaseline. . . . Well, I tell ya what--Curley says he's keeping that hand soft for his wife." Soon Curley's wife comes into the bunk house. "Lennie's eyes moved down her body, and though she

3Ibid., p. 12.
did not seem to be looking at Lennie she bridled a little. She looked at her fingernails." After she leaves, the men next meet Slim, the majestic skinner, "the prince of the ranch." He is the most spiritual of the workers. "His hands, large and lean, were as delicate in their action as those of a temple dancer." Each of these main characters has been identified, partially at least, through his hands. Lennie's big paws crush whatever he touches. Curley's hands hit at enemies, real or imagined. The fingernails of his predatory wife are spotlighted. Pathetic Candy has but one hand. Contrasted with these personalities is Slim, noble and compassionate, with hands like "a temple dancer."

In the next chapter George tells Slim of his long relationship with loyal Lennie. "I've beat the hell outa him, and he coul'da bust every bone in my body jus' with his han's, but he never lift'ed a finger against me." George collects the cards on the table, arranges "a solitaire hand," and continues his discussion of Lennie. "Dumb bastard like he is, he wants to touch ever'thing he likes. Just wants to feel it." Lennie enters with the puppy Slim has given him. George orders him to take it back to its mother in the barn. "I didn't mean no harm, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' wanted to pet 'um a little." Whit describes the tension in the atmosphere as Curley jealously seeks out Slim. "Curley's

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\[^{4}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp.} \ 20, \ 27, \ 28, \ 29, \ 30, \ 34, \ 37.\]
just spoilin' or he wouldn't start for Slim. An' Curley's handy, God damn handy. Got in the finals of the Golden Gloves." The Golden Gloves are contrasted with Curley's glove filled with vaseline.

After he overhears Lennie and George speak of their dream of buying a little farm of their own, Candy asks if he can share their dream. "I lost my hand right here on this ranch. . . . An' they give me two hundred an' fifty dollars 'cause I los' my hand. An' I got fifty more saved up right in the bank, right now." The three men decide that with Candy's savings and their wages for the month they might be able to purchase the farm soon. The foundation of their hope is, ironically, the compensation Candy received for the loss of a hand.

When Slim returns to the bunk house, his healing hands are black with the tar he has been applying to the split hoof of a mule. Curley follows Slim inside, becomes angry, and attacks Lennie. "Lennie's hands remained at his side; he was too frightened to defend himself." George urges Lennie to protect himself. "He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, 'Get 'em, Lennie!'" Obeying George, Lennie grabs at his assailant. "The next minute Curley was flopping like a fish on a line, and his closed fist was lost in Lennie's

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5 Ibid., pp. 44, 45-6, 47.
6 Ibid., p. 65.
big hand." When Curley collapses in pain, George commands his friend to release him. "Leggo his hand, Lennie. Leggo. Slim, come help me while the guy got any hand left." Lennie drops Curley who sits on the floor gazing at "his crushed hand." Slim says, "He ain't hardly got no han' left." After helping Curley out, Slim comes back and examines Lennie's huge hands. "Christ awmighty, I hate to have you mad at me."7

Crooks, the crippled Negro stable buck, must live alone in a shed beside the barn, far away from the white workers. He must touch only himself. In his room on Saturday night he soothes his pain. "Now and then he poured a few drops of liniment into his pink-palmed hand and reached under his shirt to rub again." Lennie comes to the door and Crooks frowns. "His hand came out from under his shirt." Crooks soon decides he wants to join Candy and Lennie on their farm because he can "lend a hand" even if he is crippled. The conversation is interrupted by Curley's wife. "She stood in the doorway, smiling a little at them, rubbing the nails of one hand with the thumb and forefinger of the other." She asks the men how her husband injured his hand. Candy says that "he got his han' caught in a machine."8 She laughs, knowing that "the machine" that broke his hand was Lennie.

7Ibid., pp. 68-71.
8Ibid., pp. 74, 84, 86.
In the following chapter, Lennie sits in the barn gently stroking the dead puppy his uncontrollable hands have killed. When Curley's wife enters, Lennie hides the puppy in the hay. She tells him, "Well, Curley got his arm in a sling— an' if Curley gets tough, you can break his other han'." She boasts that she once met a man at a dance hall who said she should become a motion picture star. "She looked at Lennie, and she made a small gesture with her arm and hand to show she could act. The finger trailed after her leading wrist, and her little finger stuck out grandly from the rest." Their conversation takes a fatal turn when they begin to discuss how they both like to touch sensuous objects. Lennie says, "I like to pet nice things with my finger, sof' things." She says, "Ever'body likes that. I like to feel silk an' velvet. Do you like to feel velvet?" Lennie remembers that his Aunt Clara once gave him a small piece of velvet that he loved to feel. Curley's wife says, "When I'm doin' my hair sometime I jus' set and stroke it 'cause it's so soft." She invites Lennie to touch her hair. "Feel right aroun' there an' see how soft it is." Lennie eagerly strokes her hair with a "big finger." He cannot control his hands. When she desper- ately demands he let go of her hair, he hangs on with a tightening grasp. "She screamed then, and Lennie's other hand closed over her mouth and nose... She struggled violently under his hands."9 Lennie shakes her roughly,

9Ibid., pp. 94, 97-9.
breaks her neck, and then flees from the barn.

Curley's wife had tried unsuccessfully to attract the attention of the ranch hands. Lennie's touch killed her and now two of the other men also touch her dead body. George comes to the barn at Candy's bidding. "He put his hand over her heart." Slim holds her wrist. "One lean finger touched her cheek, and then his hand went under her slightly twisted neck and his fingers explored her neck. When he stood up the men crowded near and the spell was broken."

Lennie hides in the brush by the pool. George finds him, and the two men sit close together, dreaming of their farm for the last time. George silently raises the gun and aims at the back of Lennie's head. "The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger." George tosses the gun away as the other men approach and see Lennie's body. They question him. "But George sat stiffly on the bank and looked at his right hand that had thrown the gun away." Unemotionally he explains what happened, but his interest is elsewhere. "He looked steadily at his right hand that had held the gun." Except for Slim, everyone's efforts to reach out and touch another individual leads to disaster—from those of the untouchable Crooks to those of the very touchable wife of Curley. The alienated

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10 Ibid., pp. 103-15.
11 Ibid., pp. 117, 118.
wanderers fail to make meaningful and satisfying contact with other human beings, and their failures result in even greater loneliness, or death. As much as Lennie wishes to express love, his hands cannot be controlled and they crush everything he touches. And even the hand of George, more reasonable and more intelligent than Lennie, must hold the gun that kills the friend he loves.

The powerful emotional impact that John Steinbeck achieves at the end of Of Mice and Men has rarely been denied, but, ironically, the very force of the final incident in this apparently simple story of two migrant workers has caused many critics to be suspicious of the novel. How can such an uncomplicated little tale, they ask, produce a final effect which seems to be completely out of proportion to the ingredients of the work? Answers to this question vary, but most frequently these critics insist that Steinbeck somehow used tainted means to create this ending, powerful as it is, and they dismiss the novel as either cheap melodrama or cheap sentimentality. Before offering my explanation of the dynamics of this last scene, I will discuss briefly the charges most often brought against the book, which, like many of Steinbeck's, has attained a level of popular success that in itself might make it suspect with those critics who automatically, and perhaps unconsciously, equate popularity with lack of quality and who believe that the appearance of an author upon a bestseller chart is tantamount to sin.
The death of a beloved pet is most certainly a device closely associated with sentimentality, and in *Of Mice and Men* not one, but two dogs are killed--Candy's old sheepdog and Lennie's puppy. Another novel in which two dogs are killed is *The Man of Feeling* by Henry Mackenzie which is considered a typical example of the sentimental novel of the eighteenth century at its worst. A distinction, however, must be made between a writer like Mackenzie who wishes to arouse feelings of great sentiment in the reader with the deaths of the dogs, and a writer like Steinbeck who uses the dogs as means of portraying the excessive sentimentality of the characters involved--Candy whose very name indicates his sweetness, and Lennie who loves little animals to such an excess he crushes them to death. *Of Mice and Men* is a novel about lonely, isolated, alienated men unable to love other people. Only Lennie and George know what close friendship is, and they are unique in this world of solitary migrants because they do stick together and depend upon each other. Incapable of any relationships with women other than a monthly trip to Gladys's whorehouse, they pour their affection upon animals, Slim on his mules and the bitch with the litter, Candy on his feeble dog. These men in the bunk house treat animals like human beings and treat Crooks, who must live in the barn, like an animal. Despite his sentiment for his dog, it never occurred to Candy to visit or talk to Crooks until Lennie makes the initial contact. There is mawkish sentiment in *Of Mice and Men*
because Steinbeck is contrasting the mawkish sentiment man can show to animals with the indifference man can show to the needs of other human beings.

George and Lennie themselves are not sentimentalized. Lennie is never seen suffering to an extreme degree because he has no memory of past misfortune and lacks the perception necessary to realize the effects his actions will produce in the future. In Classical Greek sculpture, the distinction is made between pathos and ethos in the representation of figures. Those exhibiting a high degree of pathos show suffering man with distorted features, mouth twisted and eyes rolling wildly about. Figures exemplifying ethos, on the other hand, like those in the metopes of the Parthenon, may be wounded, perhaps with a spear in their back or a lion's claw in their flesh, but they retain a serene expression with eyes level and direct. In the latter type of art, the empathetic beholder must imagine the pain that the figure is enduring, and the intelligent beholder can appreciate the effort he exerts to appear serene. This latter principle is followed by Sophocles in his tragedies. After the spectator has heard the revelations in *Oedipus Rex*, he can realize that Jocasta is suffering without the necessity of her wailing and gnashing her teeth and rolling on the floor. In like manner, George gives no outward sign of his distress when he discovers that Lennie has killed Curley's wife.
In a moment Candy came back, and George was with him. George said, "What was it you wanted to see me about?"

Candy pointed to Curley's wife. George stared. "What's the matter with her?" he asked. He stepped closer, and then he echoed Candy's words. "Oh, Jesus Christ!" He was down on his knees beside her. He put his hand over her heart. And finally, when he stood up, slowly and stiffly, his face was as hard and tight as wood, and his eyes were hard.

George does not wallow in his grief but only asks, "What then is to be done?" The final incident is also stark and direct.

And George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger. The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again. Lennie jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering.

George shivered and looked at the gun, and then he threw it from him, back up the bank, near the pile of old ashes.12

George's sentiments are not revealed, and the reader must decide for himself how George is reacting now that he, like Candy and Slim and Crooks and Whit and Carlson, is finally and totally alone.

When Of Mice and Men is termed melodramatic, the implication is that Steinbeck created improbable characters and incidents to effect the final tragedy of George and Lennie. But if one examines the opening scene carefully, he realizes that Lennie is already on collision course with catastrophe and that melodramatic contrivance is unnecessary. Lennie's behavior at Weed, where he grabbed hold of the dress

12Ibid., pp. 103, 117.
of the girl, almost resulted in his capture by angry pursuers. The reader soon comprehends that Lennie can only be saved from his fate if he understands his situation and if he can cooperate with George's attempts to protect him. But by the end of the first chapter the reader knows that Lennie is incapable of either intelligent understanding or the essential cooperation. Lennie is doomed because there is no ranch anywhere in the world where he would not raise havoc with his uncontrollable strength and his habit of reaching for whatever appeals to him at the moment. Rather than furthering the progress of the inevitable, the characters and incidents that Steinbeck has created serve primarily to postpone the inevitable and give the reader some slight hope that catastrophe may somehow be averted at the ranch. They function as reversals in Aristotle's meaning of the word. Since Curley is so unpopular, there is hope that when he and Lennie clash all sympathy will be with Lennie. This is what does happen when Lennie crushes Curley's hand. Since all the men in the bunk house agree that Curley's wife is a tramp, the reader surmises that she will not become overwrought if Lennie approaches her. This prediction is reinforced when she does find Lennie attractive and affectionately calls him the "machine." A similar pattern of hope and reversal is concealed in the symbolic killing of Candy's old dog, to which many critics have objected as an obvious psychological preparation for the killing of Lennie with the same gun. The incident's more
important function is, however, to give the reader hope that tragedy can be avoided and that perhaps Lennie will be able to remain with George until they both reach old age like Candy and his dog. These reversals, along with George's ultimate recognition of the fact that Lennie must be killed, resemble features that Aristotle found in complex tragedy. While Of Mice and Men is certainly not an ideal Aristotelian tragedy, it does contain some of the important elements found in Greek tragedy. Aristotle states:

Let us then determine what are the circumstances which strike us as terrible or pitiful.

Actions capable of this effect happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another. If an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or intention, except so far as the suffering itself is pitiful. So again with indifferent persons. But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another—if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done—these are the situations to be looked for by the poet.\(^{13}\)

Part of the reason for the shock at the end of Of Mice and Men lies in the fact that the killing of a friend by a friend, not in a moment of passion, but with cool deliberation, does generate pity and terror. And the pity is not the result of sentimentality nor the terror the result of melodrama.

Rather than being caused by tainted means, the stunning impact at the end of Of Mice and Men results from the explosive compression of Steinbeck's multilevel duality within a

\(^{13}\)Aristotle Poetics (trans. S. H. Butcher), 14. 3, 4.
story that appears to be uncomplicated, but which contains many levels of development beneath the surface account of a few days in the life of two ranch workers. Basically the same material that is enlarged to epic scale in *The Grapes of Wrath* is compressed with remarkable economy into the dramatic form of *Of Mice and Men*. It is this compression that produces the explosion at the end of the novel.

Thematicallly, George Milton represents the hope of perfection because he is capable of being truly unselfish, capable of denying his own desires in order to care for his mentally incompetent companion. Sympathetic and compassionate, he humbly advances the cause of the brotherhood of all men. Lennie personifies the impossibility of perfection, and in this tragedy the impossibility of perfection outweighs the possibility of perfection. Directly in the Puritan tradition is the depiction of Lennie as a symbol of natural depravity. As George says of him, "all the time he done bad things, but he never done one of 'em mean." Lennie constantly does do "bad things" but never out of hate or jealousy or revenge. He wants desperately to love but even his affection is doomed to kill. He wants desperately to obey George's instructions, but he can never succeed in disciplining himself. "I didn't mean no harm, George," is the only explanation he can offer. This theme of depravity is underlined with George's comments that Lennie would "drink out of a gutter" and that their previous job was "digging a cesspool." When
the gigantic rabbit appears in Lennie's fantasy, he tells Lennie, "Christ knows George done ever'thing he could to jack you outa the sewer, but it don't do no good."¹⁴

Biological determinism is strong in Of Mice and Men with repeated intimations of predestination according to physical types. Curley, Slim, and Crooks have nicknames appropriate to their appearances. The physiques of George and Lennie are described in detail in the first chapter, and they are as different in body type as they are in personality: "The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides but hung loosely." Curley's physical attributes are offered as explanation of his mental attitudes: "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy. You seen little guys like that, ain't you? Always scrappy?"¹⁵ Disaster results when Curley tries to reach beyond his limitations and attempts to be something that he is not and cannot be.

¹⁴ Of Mice and Men, pp. 104, 3, 25, 112.
¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 2, 29.
Sex is a sinister force in *Of Mice and Men*. It is symbolic that the moment of brotherhood in Crooks's room, when Candy and Lennie have accepted the black stable buck, is interrupted and destroyed by Curley's wife. She not only separates the men when they are beginning to feel some sympathy for each other, but she also is the immediate cause of Lennie's death. She represents evil sensuality like that of the serpent that devours the rat in Steinbeck's chilling short story "The Snake." She stands for the lust that keeps dreams of perfection beyond man's grasp.

The characters range from the animal to the saintly. At one extreme is Lennie, very much the animal. At the other pole is Slim with his "calm, God-like eyes." "There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. . . . His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought." As is typical of Steinbeck's method of characterization, the analysis of saintly attributes is tempered with allusion to animals in order to maintain a balance. Slim, we are also told, "was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule."

The last sentence of the description of Slim compares the "delicate" movements of his hands with "those of a temple dancer." Slim's first words, in the next paragraph, again
create balance: "It's brighter'n a bitch outside." 16

Old Testament motifs are interwoven with those of the New Testament to create tension in the novel. The story of Cain and Abel is opposed by the Sermon on the Mount. George's answer to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a quiet yet resounding "Yes." From the start, the boss is suspicious of George's constant efforts to protect his friend.

"I said what stake you got in this guy? You takin' his pay away from him?"
"No, 'course I ain't. Why ya think I'm sellin' him out?"
"Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is."

George willingly accepts his role as Lennie's keeper. Even after Lennie has killed Curley's wife, and the men are preparing to search for him, George asks that they show mercy. "The poor bastard's nuts. Don't shoot 'im. He di'n't know what he was doin'." 17

The opposition between cave and house upon the symbolic landscape is fully developed in the opening chapter. George and Lennie dream of buying a home where George can look after Lennie and where Lennie can look after George. Lennie delights in hearing his friend talk about their goal.

"Someday--we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and--"

16 Ibid., pp. 44, 37.
17 Ibid., pp. 25, 107.
"An' live off the fatta the lan'," Lennie shouted. "An' have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we're gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George."

The house represents a life of brotherhood and harmony.

Lennie's alternative to the symbolic house is the symbolic cavern. Whenever George becomes impatient and angry with him, Lennie threatens to run off by himself.

"George, you want I should go away and leave you alone?"
"Where the hell could you go?"
"Well, I could. I could go off in the hills there. Some place I'd find a cave."
"Yeah? How'd you eat. You ain't got sense enough to find nothing to eat."
"I'd find things, George. I don't need no nice food with ketchup. I'd lay out in the sun and nobody'd hurt me. An' if I foun' a mouse, I could keep it. Nobody'd take it away from me."18

In diametric contrast to the house of brotherhood is the cave of the animal where Lennie might live as a solitary rogue male beast.

The house image itself is divided into two opposites in George's mind. His alternative to the happy little farm house is not a cave but a whorehouse. When he is exasperated with Lennie, he thinks of what he might do without the burden of his defective friend. "God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever

18 Ibid., pp. 15, 13.
I want. Why, I could stay in a cat house all night." Neither of George's visionary houses are family homes where children are born and reared. Human reproduction is ignored in these fantasies. The farm dwelling would shelter only men—Lennie and George and later Candy. The cat house would be populated with women. This dichotomy is common in Steinbeck, fully developed, not in fantasy but in reality, in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday: Mack and the boys live at the Palace Flophouse while the madams, Dora and Fauna, and their prostitutes inhabit the Bear Flag Restaurant. In East of Eden, for another example, Adam Trask, his sons Aron and Cal, and the servant Lee live in an exclusively male home in the country while Kate Trask runs a brothel in town. Even though Steinbeck is popularly thought of as advocating earthy promiscuity, at times he actually seems to suggest that the world be re-organized along the lines of a Shaker community with men and women living in separate dormitories. The men would, however, unlike the Shakers, have visitation rights to the women's quarters once a month. The only woman in Of Mice and Men is Curley's wife whom most of the men consider a tramp. Since Lennie's greatest interest is in raising rabbits, the opposition in George's contrasting dreams is between rabbit farm and cat house. Elaborating upon their projected life in the house, George mentions pets:

"We'd have a setter dog and a couple stripe cats, but you gotta watch out them cats don't get the little rabbits."
Lennie breathed hard. "You jus' let 'em try to get the rabbits. I'll break their God damn necks. I'll . . . I'll smash 'em with a stick." He subsided, grumbling to himself, threatening the future cats which might dare disturb the future rabbits.19

It would no doubt be safer in the future if the cats lived in one house and the rabbits in another.

Additional tension is generated in Of Mice and Men in the contrast between the tragic game of life in which the loser wins death, and the inconsequential games that adults and children play. Lennie and George participate in a game of fetch in the first chapter. George takes the dead mouse away from Lennie and throws it across the stream. Later George hears Lennie splashing in the water, wading to the other side. "I want that mouse," George tells him on his return:

Lennie reluctantly reached into his pocket. His voice broke a little. "I don't know why I can't keep it. It ain't nobody's mouse. I didn't steal it. I found it lyin' right beside the road."

George's hand remained outstretched imperiously. Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again. George snapped his fingers sharply, and at the sound Lennie laid the mouse in his hand.20

In this ominous game, the dead mouse moves significantly from the hand of Lennie to the hand of George.

Each of the four succeeding chapters at the ranch contains a game. Chapter 2 opens with a description of the bunk house. "In the middle of the room stood a big square

19 Ibid., pp. 11-2, 64.
20 Ibid., p. 9.
table littered with playing cards, and around it were grouped boxes for the players to sit on." This arrangement of boxes suggest comradeship even in the empty room. But George plays the loner's game of solitaire. "He walked to the square table and sat down on one of the boxes. . . . George cut the cards and began turning them over, looking at each one and throwing it down on a pile." Later "George stared at his solitaire lay, and then he flounced the cards together and turned around to Lennie." In Chapter 3 George again begins to play solitaire in the bunk house. Trying to be sociable, he asks the men, "Anybody like to play a little euchre?" Whit says, "I'll play out a few with you." Whit soon loses interest in the game so George plays on alone. "It was obvious that Whit was not interested in his cards. He laid his hand down and George scooped it in. George laid out his deliberate solitaire hand—seven cards, and six on top, and five on top of those."21

At the beginning of Chapter 4, Crooks complains when Lennie enters his room in the shed because Crooks is not allowed in the bunk house. "They play cards in there, but I can't play because I'm black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me." Crooks talks about his childhood: "My old man had a chicken ranch, 'bout ten acres. The white kids come to our place, an' sometimes I went

21 Ibid., pp. 19, 30, 32, 53, 56.
to play with them, and some of them was pretty nice." Candy joins Lennie and Crooks, and Crooks now has two white "kids" playing in his room, playing Let's Pretend, as they dream of living in harmony on a farm somewhere. Curley's wife appears and puts an end to their play. Candy is angry and tells her, "Maybe you just better go along an' roll your hoop." But she stays and the game is over forever.

Chapter 5 takes place in the barn. Lennie's climactic scene with Curley's wife is counterpointed with sounds of a horseshoe tournament the ranch hands have organized this Sunday afternoon. Lennie is alone in the barn at first with the dead puppy. "From outside came the clang of horseshoes on the playing peg and the shouts of men, playing, encouraging, jeering." Curley's wife enters and wants to talk to Lennie, but he is cool toward her advances because George has warned him to stay away from her. She kneels near him, explaining, "All the guys got a horseshoe tenement goin' on. It's only about four o'clock. None of them guys is goin' to leave that tenement. Why can't I talk to you?" He still refuses to be friendly with her. She says, "Don't worry about talkin' to me. Listen to the guys yell out there. They got four dollars bet in that tenement. None of them ain't gonna leave till it's over." She tells him about her unhappy life and her hasty marriage. "Lennie sighed deeply. From outside came the

\[22\text{Ibid.}, pp. 75, 77, 87.\]
clang of a horseshoe on metal, and then a chorus of cheers. "Somebody made a ringer," said Curley's wife." After Lennie kills her, he piles hay upon her body. "From outside the barn came a cry of men and the double clang of shoes on metal." Lennie leaves and the barn is quiet. "Even the clang of the pitched shoes, even the voices of the men in the game seemed to grow more quiet." Then suddenly the deathlike calm is over. "Outside, the men's voices became louder and clearer." Candy comes into the barn, finds the body, and gets George. George tells Candy to summon the other players. "Outside the noise of the game stopped. There was a rise of voices in question, a drum of running feet and the men burst into the barn."23 The game is over. In these five chapters, games have served as ironic counterpoint to the plot. In the last chapter, plot and game are united as the lynching party and Lennie play a grisly game of Hide and Seek.

The goals of the quest in Of Mice and Men are confused, as in all of Steinbeck's novels: the farm house or the cave for Lennie, the cat house or the farm house for George. Covering a short span of time, the book concentrates on the pursuit stage of the journey through life. Lennie has barely escaped capture in Weed before the opening scene, and in the end the lynching party is searching for him. The excitement of the pursuit is intensified with reference to animals, to

23Ibid., pp. 92, 95-7, 100-2, 105.
the chase of the hares by the hounds. On the first page, the ominous sign of the dog is seen in the sand. "Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening, and the damp flats are covered with the night tracks of 'coons, and with the spread pads of dogs from the ranches, and with the split-wedge tracks of deer that come to drink in the dark."

At the close of this chapter, as George and Lennie lie down to sleep, the calls of the hunters are heard: "The red light dimmed on the coals. Up the hill from the river a coyote yammered, and a dog answered from the other side of the stream. The sycamore leaves whispered a little in the night breeze." This "red light" is an excellent example of a single symbol that can unite many levels of Steinbeck's fiction. The red light suggests George's reverie about going into town at the end of each month and spending the night in a cat house. The red light also indicates a temporary halt in the migrants' wanderings and the final stop for Lennie who is later killed at this same spot beside the stream. And the red light hints at the eyes of menacing animals, the dog and the coyote, when seen in the dark of night.

Pursued man is identified with the rodents and the rabbits. Lennie carries with him the dead mouse, but even before Lennie and George make their appearance in the grove, "the rabbits sat quietly as little gray, sculptured stones."

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24 Ibid., pp. 1, 18.
When they hear the movements of men, "the rabbits hurried noiselessly for cover." It is to this same protective cover that George advises Lennie to return: "Lennie--if you jus' happen to get in trouble like you always done before, I want you to come right here an' hide in the brush." At the end of the story, Lennie is quiet and sculptured and dead on the same sand bank on which the gray rabbits sat.

In Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck brings to perfection his technique of developing dual characters whose relationship encompasses several layers of meaning. Predecessors of Lennie and George are Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris in Cup of Gold and Jim and Mac in In Dubious Battle. Like Lennie, both Coeur de Gris and Jim are shot and killed. Like George, both Henry Morgan and Mac live on, although a vital part of themselves dies with their friends. Steinbeck's dual characters are in the tradition of Othello and Iago in Shakespeare and, in American literature, of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth of The Scarlet Letter. D. H. Lawrence, who himself utilizes dual characters in, for example, Women in Love, analyzes Dimmesdale and Chillingworth: "The black, vengeful soul of the crippled, masterful male, still dark in his authority: and the white ghastliness of the fallen saint! The two halves of manhood mutually destroying one another."

25 Ibid., pp. 2, 17.
26 Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 99.
George, the two halves of manhood, do mutually destroy each other. Steinbeck uses dual characters in a mode different from that of Shakespeare in *Othello* and Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. George and Lennie are not protagonist and antagonist but dual protagonists.

On the uppermost level of their relationship, Lennie and George are friends, fellow workers, bindlestiffs, who travel together from job to job. George explains his friendship with Lennie to Slim: "Him and me was both born in Auburn. I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him when he was a baby and raised him up. When his Aunt Clara died, Lennie just come along with me out workin'. Got kinda used to each other after a little while." Slim observes that such friendship is unusual in the world of ranch hands.

On a second level, the overtones of Cain and Abel in the novel suggest that Lennie and George are symbolic brothers. Steinbeck was fascinated with the story of Cain and Abel: "this story with its implications has made a deeper mark in people than any other save possibly the story of the Tree of Life and original sin." Cain becomes "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth," and to look after Lennie, George too must become a fugitive and a vagabond. Cain was jealous of Abel because he believed that God preferred his brother's

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27 *Of Mice and Men*, p. 44.
28 *Journal of a Novel*, p. 120.
sacrifice of the firstlings of his flocks to Cain's offering of the grains of the field. Lennie is a "bucker" of barley who "can put up more grain alone than most pairs can." But Lennie dreams of raising livestock, dreams of raising rabbits. The small animals that he loves but kills are confused and pathetic sacrifices to appease an angry and distant God. Cain murdered Abel because he was jealous of him and hated him, but George must kill the murderer Lennie because he is his brother's keeper.

On a third level, George and Lennie resemble father and son. George proves himself a capable parent in managing the activities of his backward dependent. He accurately anticipates the problems that lie ahead of them and he coaches Lennie as to how he should behave in future situations. Lennie, on the other hand, mimics George's speech and actions with the devotion of a small boy whose model is his father. "Lennie, who had been watching, imitated George exactly. He pushed himself back, drew up his knees, embraced them, looked over to George to see whether he had it just right. He pulled his hat down a little more over his eyes, the way George's hat was." When distressed, Lennie finds comfort in holding his dead mouse as a child clutches a pacifier. While George does not approve of this infantile behavior and throws the mouse away, he later relents and assures Lennie he can get another

29 Of Mice and Men, p. 38.
pacifier. "You get another mouse that's fresh, and I'll let you keep it a little while." George is ever alert to possible danger and is cautious when Lennie builds the fire: "I'll give you a match when you get the sticks together." George takes paternal pride in Lennie's few impressive abilities: "I ain't nothing to scream about, but that big bastard there can put up more grain than most pairs can." Lennie's threats to run off and live in a cave by himself are like those of a small boy seeking reassurance that he is wanted. George has two conflicting dreams, the first of saving his money to buy a farm where they can raise alfalfa and rabbits, and the second of leaving Lennie and of spending all his wages on pleasure. These contradictory desires are typical of many young fathers who want to provide security and happiness for children, but who at times may wish that they were unburdened and could lead more adventurous lives. Despite his great love for Lennie, George must kill his symbolic son. In her article about Steinbeck and Hawthorne, Agnes McNeill Donohue discusses Hawthorne's story "Roger Malvin's Burial," in which Reuben Bourne shoots his son. "Hawthorne's Puritan Jehovah allows Reuben to live but at a rather exacting price--not less than everything." In Steinbeck too the price is often not less than everything, including the ultimate sacrifice of

30 Ibid., pp. 4, 10, 8, 38.
31 Donohue, "'The Endless Journey to No End,'" p. 262.
a child. Joseph Wayne sends his son away in To a God Unknown; Mac loses Jim, his spiritual son, in In Dubious Battle; Mama Torres loses her favorite, her Pepé, in "Flight"; Rose of Sharon's baby is born dead in The Grapes of Wrath; the infant Coyotito is killed in The Pearl; and George must put the pistol to Lennie's head.

On a fourth level, Lennie represents part of George himself. Antonia Seixas suggests that on one level Lennie stands for the psychological unconscious and George for the conscious. While their functions cannot perhaps be divided so definitely, they are in many ways components of one individual. Of Mice and Men is written as a drama in the form of a novel and Steinbeck was able to convert the book rather easily into a play, a play that bears some resemblance to the work of Eugene O'Neill. Of all American writers of the twentieth century, Steinbeck's career is most like O'Neill's in that both men radically changed the outward form of their creations from work to work. There is more than a touch of O'Neill's expressionalism in Of Mice and Men which recalls scenes from The Emperor Jones in which characters, The Little Formless Fears, The Planters, The Congo Witch-Doctor, and The Crocodile God, are projections of the mind of the only "real" person on stage, Brutus Jones. On this level, Of Mice and Men can be read as a monodrama in which the single character

George Milton, escapes from pursuers in Weed and spends a night among the willows by the pool of the stream. He wrestles with an angel or a devil who is part of himself, resolves he must change, and destroys part of himself. And this part is Lennie.

Lennie symbolizes that mighty, youthful, primitive power that must be controlled or eliminated for man to live in society. Although perenially accused of being a primitivist at heart, Steinbeck time and time again demonstrates that primitive power must be curbed. To best survive in a threatening world, man should be poor and powerless. Kino must throw his pearl back into the sea. Billy Buck must prove to Jody that he is not omnipotent. And the Indian must die in the story told in The Grapes of Wrath by the man who was a "recruit against Geronimo":

Them Injuns was cute--slick as snakes, an' quiet when they wanted. Could go through dry leaves, an' make no rustle. Try to do that sometimes.

They was a brave on a ridge, against the sun. Knowed he stood out. Spread his arms an' stood. Naked as morning, an' against the sun. Maybe he was crazy. I don't know. Stood there, arms spread out; like a cross he looked. . . . Maybe that Injun knowed somepin. Knowed we couldn't shoot. . . . An' then the captain got mad. "Shoot, you crazy bastards, shoot!" he yells. An' we just laid there. . . . An' I laid my sights on his belly, 'cause you can't stop an Injun no other place--an'--then. Well, he jest plunked down an' rolled. An' we went up. An' he wasn't big--he'd looked so grand--up there. All tore to pieces an' little. Ever see a cock pheasant, stiff and beautiful, ever' feather drawed an' painted, an' even his eyes drawed in pretty? An' bang! You pick him up--bloody an' twisted, an' you spoiled somepin better'n you; an'
"eatin' him don't make it up to you, 'cause you spoiled somepin in yaself, an' you can't ever fix it up." 33

Like the brave, Lennie represents primitive power. He carries about with him the little animals that he thoughtlessly kills as Moby Dick carries the body of Parsee. George must kill this uncontrollable force that is Lennie, even though George is killing something inside himself and killing something better than himself.

By standing for so many things at the same time, George and Lennie cannot be labeled with any simple identification. By assuming more and more dimensions, they begin to mirror the complexity of a living human being who can be, at the same time, an animal, a hero, a father, a son, a brother, a worker, and a friend; and who can also be, at the same time, cruel and kind, harsh and gentle, intelligent and stupid. By making them so many things, Steinbeck makes them more George and more Lennie, but George and Lennie raised to the fourth or fifth power.

The final chapter of Of Mice and Men contains the final dissonant chord that is typical of Steinbeck's technique. Here he builds to the finale, recapitulating the many themes on the many levels of this short, compressed novel. "The deep green pool of the Salinas River was still in the late afternoon." 34 The dark pool is Steinbeck's frequent symbol for

33The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 359-60.
34Of Mice and Men, p. 109.
the unconscious. "Maybe we all have in us a secret pond where evil and ugly things germinate and grow."35 "A water snake glided smoothly up the pool twisting its periscope head from side to side; and it swam the length of the pool and came to the legs of a motionless heron that stood in the shallows." The heron gobbles up the snake. "Another little water snake swam up the pool, turning its periscope head from side to side." This second snake is not eaten by the heron because at that moment Lennie appears and frightens the bird away. The two snakes with only their heads out of the water recall the opening scene when Lennie and George arrive from Weed where they escaped their pursuers by spending the day in the water of an irrigation ditch with only their heads in the air. The little incident looks forward as well as backwards because but one of the two snakes is eaten by the heron, and but one of the two migrant workers will be killed. The symbolic cave is reintroduced as Lennie looks to the mountains and says, "I can go right off there an' find a cave."36 But he stays.

Lennie, alone by the river, has dual visions. In fantasy he sees first a woman who is his Aunt Clara and then a gigantic rabbit. But both speak in the same voice, Lennie's voice, and both berate him for his bad conduct. "George came quietly out of the brush and the rabbit scuttled back into

35 East of Eden, p. 114.
36 Of Mice and Men, pp. 109, 110.
Lennie's brain." The imaginary rabbit disappears at George's approach just as the real rabbits ran for cover when George and Lennie entered the grove at the opening of the book. As George and Lennie have their last conversation, the sounds of the men who are hunting Lennie grow closer, creating the excitement and terror of the hunt for Lennie who is hidden in the brush like a rabbit. "From the distance came the sound of men shouting to one another. George turned his head and listened to the shouts." "On the wind the sound of crashing in the brush came to them." "There were crashing footsteps in the brush now. George turned and looked toward them." 37

Lennie expects George to be angry with him and expects George to say how simple his life would be without Lennie. George tries to act as Lennie thinks he should. Just as Lennie mentioned his alternate goal, the cave, so George mentions his, the whorehouse. "An' when the end of the month come I could take my fifty dollars an' go to a . . . . cat house . . . ." But George cannot go on. Then the two men talk of the goal they have in common, the farm with the pigs and the chickens and the alfalfa and, above all, the rabbits. Then George shoots Lennie in the back of the head with Carlson's gun. Slim and Curley and Carlson enter on the run. "But George sat stiffly on the bank and looked at his right hand that had thrown the gun away." 38 Now George has killed

37 Ibid., pp. 114, 117.
38 Ibid., p. 114.
like Cain. "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."39 The short scene after Lennie's death shows Steinbeck's subtle technique at its best. Words are exchanged between the men but they are superficial. In this novel in which the sense of touch is so crucial, the actions say more than the words. "Slim came directly to George and sat down beside him, sat very close to him." George "looked steadily at his right hand that had held the gun."

Slim twitched George's elbow. Come on, George. Me an' you'll go in an' get a drink." George let himself be helped to his feet. "Yeah, a drink."40

There is a slight ray of hope for an end to alienation as Slim touches George's elbow and helps him to his feet.

The closing of Of Mice and Men is a mixture of triumph and tragedy. George has succeeded triumphantly as his brother's keeper--by tragically killing his brother. The true cause for the explosive ending of the novel is the simultaneous detonation upon all levels of the story when George shoots Lennie. In the selection from the Poetics quoted above, Aristotle states that when enemies kill each other, no great emotion is aroused in the beholder. The poet should look for tragic incidents "between those who are near and dear to one another--if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill,

39Genesis 5: 10.
40Of Mice and Men, pp. 117, 118.
a brother, a son his father, a mother her son. . . ." When George shoots Lennie, many such tragic incidents take place at once. When George kills Lennie, a friend kills a friend, a brother kills a brother, a father kills a son, and a man kills part of himself. The ending of Of Mice and Men generates so much emotion and causes such a strong reaction, not because it uses sentimentality or melodrama, but because of the incredible skill with which its many levels are compressed within so few words. Of Mice and Men is a consummate work of art.
CHAPTER VII

THE GRAPES OF WRATH: THE EXPANSION OF DUALITY IN AN EPIC

The Grapes of Wrath is a great novel because it contains full measure of Steinbeck's strongest techniques in a framework perfect for their expression. The multilevels of duality are developed completely and powerfully, creating rich symphonic dissonance in the conflict between man's potential and his performance, in the tension between man's hope for the future and his memory of the past, in the friction between the centripetal force of love and the centrifugal force of hate. All of Steinbeck's novels are built upon the allegorical journey through life, and the travels of the migrant Okies, like those of the migrant workers Lennie and George, fit naturally into this overall design. The movements of the Joad family from the arid plains across the cruel desert through the difficult mountains and into the lush California valleys are solidly realistic and pregnantly symbolic at the same time. Steinbeck lived with the migrants along this route and documented their plight in a series of newspaper articles later printed as a pamphlet, Their Blood Is Strong. The abundance of factual details about the existence of a particular group
of people at a particular moment in history contrasts potently with the broad mythic overtones drawn from a variety of sources.

The scale is epic in *The Grapes of Wrath* with the Joad family representing a mass movement west. "A half-million people moving over the country; a million more, restive to move; ten million more feeling the first nervousness." As he waits with Tom Joad beside the disabled truck along the great highway, Jim Casy looks westward.

"Tom, they's hunderds a families like us all a-goin' west. I watched. There ain't none of 'em goin' east--hunderds of 'em. Did you notice that?"

"Yeah, I noticed."

"Why--it's like--it's like they was runnin' away from soldiers. It's like a whole country is movin'."

"Yeah," Tom said. "They is a whole country movin'. We're movin' too."¹

Like Lennie and George in *Of Mice and Men*, the Joads, by being so positively and indelibly the Joads, become universal, in contrast to the characters in *Burning Bright* whom Steinbeck so consciously conceives as universal but who are finally neither individual nor universal.

How Steinbeck expanded his basic material in *The Grapes of Wrath* can be most easily seen in a comparison with his preceding novel, the tightly compressed *Of Mice and Men* which covers a journey of a few miles and a few days in contrast to the thousands of miles and the many weeks of the Joad saga.

of Wrath is huge. The travelers in the short tragic novel number two but a group of thirteen makes the trip from Oklahoma to the West. This group consists of men and women in every age bracket from the young children, Ruthie and Winfield, to the grandparents. The relationship between George and Lennie encompasses many variations for they are at the same time friends, brothers, father and son, and master and apprentice. Tom Joad has all these relationships but they too are expanded. He is Casy's friend and disciple, he is son to Ma and Pa, grandson to Pa's parents, and he has different brotherly experiences with his two sisters, his three brothers, and his brother-in-law. Lennie faithfully copies George's every mannerism in Of Mice and Men; in The Grapes of Wrath an entire chain of imitative being is evident. Al copies Tom who emulates Casy who follows the example of the historical and human Jesus. Only one woman appears in Of Mice and Men and she is nameless, always identified as "Curley's wife." The Joad novel, on the other hand, contains more women characters who are carefully developed than any other of Steinbeck's novels. The scope of the epic movement of the Okies is also expanded with the portrayal of the duality in nature that is the mirror of duality in man, especially in the cycles of drought and flood. Man is not shown in a vacuum but within an expanding universe.

Although the long battle over whether The Grapes of Wrath is art or propaganda has been won for the side of art
as the problems of the 1930's become less distinct and urgent in the mind of the nation, the greatness of Steinbeck's art in this book has never been fully explained. The multilevels of duality in this expansive epic demand equally expansive criticism. Following one single line of thematic or symbolic development can no more suggest the dissonant grandeur of *The Grapes of Wrath* than playing a melody with one finger on a piano can demonstrate the complex development of a symphony. Full appreciation requires constant awareness of the depth as well as breadth.

Steinbeck presents paradox upon paradox as the Joad family suffers hunger and want in the land of plenty, as the Joad family painfully learns that the richest agricultural land on the continent depends upon peon labor. Paroled from prison where he had been confined for manslaughter, Tom Joad returns to his home in rural Oklahoma. Along the way he meets Jim Casy and learns that the former preacher has changed his beliefs and now maintains that all things are holy, that there is no such thing as sin. Tom finds the Joad house deserted because the drought has forced sharecropping farmers off their land which is being combined into larger farm units to be worked with machinery. Tom finds that his family has moved temporarily into the home of his Uncle John and that they are preparing to leave for California. Tom and Casy join the group which consists of Ma and Pa Joad, Grampa and Granma Joad, Uncle John, the three other Joad sons, Noah, Al, and Winfield,
and the two daughters, Ruthie and Rose of Sharon, along with Rose of Sharon's husband, Connie Rivers. They travel in an old automobile that has been converted into a truck. The grandparents die along the way, Noah leaves the family to live alone in the wilderness, and Connie Rivers deserts his pregnant wife. When the family arrives at last in a California valley, the Joads discover that no jobs are available for them. Jim Casy is arrested while shielding Tom in an argument with the police. The Joads learn that the owners of the farms and orchards have encouraged an overabundance of labor in order to keep wages low. They find some days of peace in the government camp at Weedpatch, but they eventually must move on because no work is obtainable in the area. They labor briefly at a peach orchard but must flee when Casy is killed in a labor dispute and Tom kills Casy's murderer. While Tom hides in a culvert, the rest of the family picks cotton, making their home in an abandoned boxcar. When this work ends, the Joads are again desperate. The rising flood waters menace their home. Ill and deserted by her husband, Rose of Sharon bears a stillborn infant. Tom resolves to carry on Casy's mission and leaves the family in order to serve mankind. Leaving Al with his girl friend and her parents in the boxcar, Ma leads the remaining members of the family through the flood waters to a barn on higher ground. There they find a boy tending his father who is starving. At Ma's suggestion, Rose of Sharon lies beside the man and offers him the milk from her breast.
On the thematic level, the novel is energized by the conflict between two views of man, the Puritan and the transcendental, proclaiming respectively the impossibility of perfection and the validity of perfection. Two of the important critical essays on The Grapes of Wrath discuss these opposing doctrines. In "The Philosophical Joads," Frederic I. Carpenter summarizes the three influences he believes dominate the novel:

For the first time in history, The Grapes of Wrath brings together and makes real three great skeins of American thought. It begins with the transcendental oversoul, Emerson's faith in the common man, and his Protestant self-reliance. To this it joins Whitman's religion and the love of all men and his mass democracy. And it combines these mystical and poetic ideas with the realistic philosophy of pragmatism and its emphasis on effective action. From this it develops a new kind of Christianity—not otherworldly and passive, but earthly and active. And Oklahoma Jim Casy and the Joads think and do all these philosophical things.

There most certainly is a mixture of Emerson, Whitman, and James as one important force within the novel, although how Christian this combination is may be questioned. Like Emerson, Jim Casy denies the divinity of Christ and accepts as his model the inspired and inspiring, but human Jesus.

The second major force in The Grapes of Wrath is described by Agnes McNeill Donohue in "The Endless Journey to No End": Journey and Eden Symbolism in Hawthorne and Steinbeck." While "not suggesting that the final scene of Rose of Sharon dispensing the milk of human kindness does not

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affirm even in the midst of almost total human disaster and degradation the goodness of the human heart," she maintains that "Steinbeck is as interested in human depravity as he is in innocence."

Man's depravity and nature's hostility conspire to defeat man in Oklahoma and California. If *The Grapes of Wrath* is truly a work of art and not just a propagandistic, deterministic sociological tract, then Steinbeck is not only concerned with showing man as a hapless victim of circumstances, but as a foolish, cooperative auxiliary to circumstances, gulled by his own corrupted nature. In asserting the primacy of the debased human heart, Steinbeck does not portray victimized worms but tragic human beings trapped by their own errors in judgment. The Puritan tradition of man's corrupted will is implicit in Steinbeck's Okies, but he sees them ruefully and compassionately.³

The thirteen members of the group represent various combinations of these two views of man, with Casy at the transcendental end of the range and Uncle John at the Puritan extreme. Casy's words at times are pure Emerson: "I figgered about the Holy Sperit and the Jesus road. I figgered, 'Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit--the human sperit--the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of.' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a suddent--I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it." Casy is an idealist in Emerson's mold. After the Joads have heard the man on the road detailing the horrors of life in distant

³Donohue, "'The Endless Journey to No End,'" p. 259.
California, Pa Joad is disturbed and asks Casy if he thinks the man is telling the truth. Casy says, "He's tellin' the truth, awright. The truth for him. He wasn't makin' nothin' up." All Casy expects of a man is "the truth for him."

Recalling Casy's words after his death, Uncle John says, "He knowed about sin. I ast him about sin, an' he tol' me; but I don't know if he's right. He says a fella's sinned if he thinks he's sinned." The mind of the individual creates its own world and values for Casy.

At the other extreme Uncle John holds to the Puritan view of mankind, insisting upon total natural depravity. Casy believes that men can be united in love, but Uncle John maintains that men are divided by their guilt. He is tormented above all by the memory of the death of his pregnant young wife "which marked him with guilt and shame and left an unbreaking loneliness on him." Uncle John confesses time and time again, "I ain't done nothin' that wasn't part sin." He can relieve the pressures of self-hate only by getting drunk. After one of his sprees, Tom goes in search of him so that the group may depart in the truck. But Uncle John does not wish to return. "No. Go on. Ain't goin'. Gonna res' here. No good goin' back. No good to nobody--jus' a-draggin' my sins like dirty drawers 'mongst nice folks." While the other

4 The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 24-5, 210, 295.

5 Ibid., pp. 104, 253, 305.
members of the family do make fun of Uncle John, his suffering is nevertheless real—and unbearable. The symbolism at the end of the novel supports rather than ridicules his belief in original sin. Uncle John desperately tries to help Pa and the other men build a dam of mud and sticks to protect their boxcar homes, in one of which Rose of Sharon, not unlike John's young wife, awaits the birth of her child. But his one effort in brotherhood fails as a giant tree rips the wall of mud. The Eden symbolism is compounded when Uncle John is given the duty of burying the stillborn infant in its apple box coffin.

On their journey the Joads encounter individuals and groups professing religious beliefs that take for granted the depravity of man. When Granma is dying, a woman camping nearby insists upon holding a prayer meeting. Ma Joad refuses to allow the religious gathering at Granma's bedside so the meeting is held at a distance from the tent. Ma and Rose of Sharon can hear the chanting become faster and faster. "Now a response filled in the pause, and the exhortation went up with a tone of triumph, and a growl of power came into the voice." The people sound like animals. "Male and female voices had been one tone, but now in the middle of a response one woman's voice went up and up in a wailing cry, wild and fierce, like the cry of a beast; and a deeper woman's voice rose up beside it, a baying voice, and a man's voice traveled up the scale in the howl of a wolf." Another voice sounds like "the gabbling screams of a hyena." As the meeting closes, "the
sobbing changed to a little whining, like that of a litter of puppies at a food dish." At Weedpatch Mrs. Sandry represents the extreme fundamentalist faction of the campers. She tells Ma, "You come to an awful place. They's wicketness all around about. Wicket people, wicket goin's-on that a lamb'-blood Christian jes' can't hardly stan'. They's sinners all around us." She repeats with approval the words of a preacher from a nearby town who says, "They's wicketness in that camp... The poor is tryin' to be rich... They's dancin' an' huggin' when they should be wailin' an' moanin' in sin." This minister, or one very much like him, is shown in action in the following interchapter. "And the preacher paced like a tiger, whipping the people with his voice, and they growled and whined on the ground." When his followers are squirming in misery, he picks each up and throws him into an irrigation ditch, shouting, "Take 'em, Christ!" Then he kneels and prays "all men and women might grovel and wine on the ground." 6

The two opposing views of the nature of man are also evident in the contradictory theories concerning the reason for the stillbirths occurring among the migrant women. Mrs. Sandry relates to Rose of Sharon the fate of another young woman: "Girl a-carryin' a little one, jes' like you. An' she play-acted, and she hug-danced. And... she thinned out and she skinnied out, an'--she dropped that baby, dead." Rose of

6 Ibid., pp. 232-3, 364-5.
Sharon is horrified but the woman continues her grisly story:
"Dead and bloody. 'Course nobody wouldn' speak to her no more. She had a go away. Can't tech sin 'thout catchin' it."

The gentle manager of the camp tries to comfort the distraught Rose of Sharon. He explains to her that the girls' tragedies were caused by the conditions under which they were forced to live: "They were too hungry and too tired. And they worked too hard. And they rode on a truck over bumps. They were sick. It wasn't their fault." The manager of the camp believes in perfectibility, believes that humanitarian efforts can create an atmosphere in which people can live without suffering and self-hate. His philosophy is the same as that of Casy the transcendentalist. What Mrs. Sandry says in contempt about the manager applies also to Casy: "He don' believe in sin. Tol' me hisself. Says the sin is bein' hungry. Says the sin is bein' cold. Says--I tell ya, he tol' me hisself--can't see God in them things."  

On another level, the characterizations reflect this thematic duality in the polarity between animal and saint. In the interchapter that pictures the evicted farm families leaving their homes and disposing of their few belongings, one of the short scenes presents a miniature version of this important contrast:

The women sat among the doomed things, turning them over and looking past them and back. This book.

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7Ibid., pp. 342-3.
My father had it. He liked a book. *Pilgrim's Progress*. Used to read it. Got his name in it. And his pipe—still smells rank. And this picture—an angel. I looked at that before the first three came—didn't seem to do much good. Think we could get this china dog in? Aunt Sadie brought it from the St. Louis Fair. See? Wrote right on it. No, I guess not. Here's a letter my brother wrote the day before he died. Here's an old-time hat. These feathers—never got to use them. No, there isn't room.

This short paragraph includes strong examples of Steinbeck's use of opposition in the allegorical journey that is like *Pilgrim's Progress*. Birth of the children is contrasted with death of the brother. The animal is represented by the china dog and the saintly is represented by the angel and St. Louis, while the feathers at the end combine the concepts of animal and angel.

As Tom Joad walks barefoot down the dirt road in search of his family, he plays rapid rabbit to the slow land turtle, but when he talks to Casy he reveals that his nickname in prison was Jesus Meek because his fellow convicts had read the card his grandmother sent him one Christmas:

"Merry Christmas, purty child,
Jesus meek an' Jesus mild,
Underneath the Christmas tree
There's a gift for you from me."  

The gift that Tom has now found beneath a tree is Jim Casy singing, "Yes, sir, that's my Saviour." And if Tom Joad is ironically Jesus Meek, Jim Casy is truly Jesus Mild. Both, however, spend the night sleeping in a gulch like rabbits.

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When Ma Joad is first described she is cooking pork for breakfast. "Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding." As "arbiter" of the family, "she had become as remote and faultless as a goddess." But as is typical of Steinbeck's method of characterization, allusion swings from the saintly to the animal, as Pa Joad tells the superhuman goddess that when she realized that the stranger was her son Tom, she "jus' stood there like a hammered sheep."\(^{10}\)

Saintly sexual abstinence is contrasted with animal sensuality. One of the chief reasons that led Casy to give up his old life as a preacher was his uneasiness over the morality of his lying with a spiritually and sexually aroused girl after each of his prayer meetings. "I was savin' their souls. An' here with all that responsibility on me I'd just get 'em frothin' with the Holy Sperit, an' then I'd take 'em out in the grass." During Casy's period of retreat in the wilderness, he decides that he had done no wrong. "The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do." But in spite of Casy's new conviction that sex, or anything else, is not sinful, he has no contact with women in the novel. Nor does Tom Joad. Just released from prison Tom says, "I been a long time without

\(^{10}\text{Ibid., pp. 79-81.}\)
a girl. . . . It's gonna take some catchin' up." Tom does not catch up. Although they speak of lusting after the flesh, Tom and Casy belong to the ranks of Steinbeck's heroes who are celibate, impotent, sterile, or merely inactive. Tom tells Casy, "Say, the day I come outa McAlester I was smokin'. I run me down a girl, a hoor girl, like she was a rabbit. I won't tell ya what happened. I wouldn't tell nobody what happened." Casy laughs at Tom's confession. "I know what happened. I went a-fastin' into the wilderness one time, an' when I come out the same damn thing happened to me," Tom says, "Well, I saved my money anyway, an' I give that girl a run." In another scene Tom tells his mother that he wishes he could act like other men do. "I wanta go out like Al. An' I wanta get mad like Pa, an' I wanta get drunk like Uncle John." She replies that he cannot be like them. "They's some folks that's just theirs elf an' nothin' more. There's Al—he's jus' a young fella after a girl. You wasn't never like that, Tom." Sexual activity is identified with the less exemplary characters like Connie Rivers and Al Joad. Tom says of his brother at one point, "He's out lookin' for a girl. He don't care 'bout nothin' else. Couple days he'll get him a girl. Think about it all day an' do it all night. He don't give a damn 'bout steps up or down or sideways." Tom does give a damn about steps up.

In spite of Steinbeck's reputation as an earthy writer, free and loose with conventional morality, and in spite of Casy's proclamation that there is no sin, sexuality in *The Grapes of Wrath* is presented in a context of crime and punishment. Near the deserted Joad house, Tom and Casy come upon a gathering of dogs. One of the Joad's dogs, Flash, is mounting a bitch as the other dogs watch. On the trip west the first death that occurs is that of one of the Joads' dogs that is hit by an automobile on the highway. That spry little animal of a grandfather has difficulty buttoning his trousers. When Ma tells him he will not be allowed to wander about unbuttoned in California, he replies, "They think they're gonna show me how to act out there? Why, I'll go aroun' a-hangin' out if I wanta." Grampa is the next to die on the journey. The Biblical passage that is picked rather haphazardly to serve as his epitaph is appropriate: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Rose of Sharon and Connie's sexual interlude takes place on the bed of the truck which they are sharing with the body of Granma. Although they do not realize she is dead, the scene is nevertheless macabre. "Connie loosened a blanket from the load and covered himself and Rose of Sharon with it, and in the heat they struggled together, and held their breaths. And after a time Connie threw off the blanket and the hot tunneling wind felt cool on their wet bodies."  

12 Ibid., pp. 100, 156, 247-8.
"Heat" links the scene with the dogs in an earlier chapter. Connie and Rose of Sharon are wrapped in a blanket as Grampa's corpse was wound in a quilt donated by the Wilsons. Blessed are he and she whose sin is covered. Connie eventually deserts his wife. Their baby is born dead.

Reinforcing the association of animality with sex are some of the jokes told in *The Grapes of Wrath* which, like the humorous stories told in Steinbeck's other novels, are often based on the taboo of bestiality. Tom tells Casy an anecdote about Willy Feeley. He takes a heifer to be serviced by a bull belonging to the Graves family. Willie sits with Elsie Graves on the fence watching the bull and heifer. He becomes excited, and Elsie asks him, "What's a matter, Will?" He answers, "I wisht I was a-doin' that!" Elsie replies, "Why not, Will? It's your heifer." In the diner on the highway the truck driver tells Mae, the generous waitress, a similar joke: "Little kid come in late ta school. Teacher says, 'Why ya late?' Kid says, 'Had a take a heifer down--get 'er bred.' Teacher says, 'Couldn't your ol' man do it?' Kid says, 'Sure he could, but not as good as the bull.'"¹³

In the duality of *The Grapes of Wrath*, sexuality is linked irrevocably with depravity and the impossibility of perfection, while forbearance is required for transcendence. The conflicting ideas are woven together dissonantly in the

¹³Ibid., pp. 74-5, 171.
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songs heard in the novel. When Tom first encounters Casy, the preacher is singing the words "Yes, sir, that's my Saviour" to the melody of "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." Uncle John, haunted by guilt and shame, ricochets between celibacy and visits to whores. When Tom finds him drunk along the side of the road, he is singing, "I've give my heart to Jesus, so Jesus take me home. I've give my soul to Jesus, so Jesus is my home." As Tom approaches, Uncle John's song changes to "Oh, the night that Maggie died, she called me to her side, an' give to me them ol' red flannel drawers that Maggie wore. They was baggy at the knees--".

The novel takes the form of the journey to California which represents the journey through life, the structuring pattern of all of Steinbeck's long fiction and alluded to in The Grapes of Wrath with the copy of Pilgrim's Progress that the sharecropper family owns. The journey begins calmly and happily with Tom's return from prison and his joyous meeting with Casy. The first note of alarm is heard when Tom finds that his family home is deserted. The journey turns into flight when Tom and Casy join the Joad clan and set out for California in the rebuilt Dodge. The migrants are described as "people in flight from the terror behind them." "Joads and Wilsons were in flight across the Panhandle. They were in flight out of Oklahoma and across Texas." In Arizona "they

14 Ibid., pp. 18, 30.
were in flight from the sun and the drought." In California flight becomes active pursuit as the Joads are shunted from county to county, as the Joads hide Tom from the police. Escaping from the peach orchards after Tom has killed Casy's murderer, Ma Joad says, "Gives ya a funny feelin' to be hunted like. I'm gettin' mean." 15

Before the final frantic stages of the hunt, however, is the contrasting idyllic movement, always an important interlude in Steinbeck's fictional symphonies. The family finds temporary refuge and peace at the government camp at Weedpatch where harmony and brotherly love prevail, where Ma once more feels like a human being, where Tom has his lyrical breakfast scene, sharing biscuits and gravy with the generous strangers from a neighboring tent. The peace at Weedpatch is temporary because it is unnatural. A fence and guards must keep intruders out. The utopia has no practical basis so the Joads must move on in search of jobs and food. The Joads must become once more the pursued.

The terror of the hunt is intensified throughout the book with descriptions of the hunters and the hunted of the animal world. When Tom releases the land turtle he has been carrying--the turtle that is the symbol of migration--"the cat leaped at it and struck at its straining head and slashed at its moving feet." Steinbeck's favorite symbols, however,  

15Ibid., pp. 132, 178, 221, 446.
here and in all his works, are the rabbits and rodents, the eternal victims of the hunt. The caterpillar tractor that knocks over the homes of the sharecroppers and forces them off the land is referred to as a "cat". It moves the houses "like a dog shakes a rat." At the Joad home Tom and Casy meet Muley Graves who now lives like a hunted beast in the open fields, eating the small animals he catches in his wire traps. The three men are hungry so Muley empties his sack on the porch.

"Two cotton tails and a jackrabbit fell out and rolled over limply, soft and furry." The three men cook the three rabbits on a wire over an open fire. "A big owl shrieked as it went overhead, and the firelight showed its white underside and the spread of its wings." "Jesus Christ," says Tom, "let's eat this meat 'fore it's smaller'n a cooked mouse." The fate of one of the abandoned houses is outlined in Chapter 11. Town boys who come to shatter the windows notice that it "smells like a rat died here." The house cats become wild, "hunting gophers and field mice." The mice move from the fields into the decaying house, and then the owls and weasels come to hunt. "A dust settled on the floors, and only mouse and weasel and cat tracks disturbed it," mute evidence of the endless pursuit in nature.16

On the highway leading west, a jackrabbit got caught in the lights and he bounced along ahead, cruising easily,

16 Ibid., pp. 46, 48, 54, 126, 127.
his great ears flopping with every jump." Another vehicle approaches the Joad truck from the opposite direction. "The rabbit hesitated, faltered, then turned and bolted toward the lesser lights of the Dodge. There was a small soft jolt as he went under the wheels." "We sure squashed him," says Casy, who himself later dies when he is blinded by the confusing beams of two flashlights in the dark night and he is squashed with a pick handle. As the death of the jackrabbit foreshadows the martyrdom of Casy, so Ma's example of a cynical Depression joke crudely anticipates the final scene in which Rose of Sharon gives milk from her breast to the starving stranger: "Fella says, 'Depression is over. I seen a jackrabbit an' they wasn't nobody after him.' An' another fella says, 'That ain't the reason. Can't afford to kill jackrabbits no more. Catch 'em and milk 'em an' turn 'em loose. One you seen 'rob'ly gone dry.'" While the animals take over the deserted Okie shanties in the dust bowl, the Okies live like animals in California. Al explains to Tom the life of the migrants in the Hooverville that the local authorities repeatedly destroy in order to force the Okies to move on to other areas: "Fella tol' me some a them people been burned out fifteen-twenty times. Says they jus' go hide down the willows an' then they come out an' build another weed shack. Jus' like gophers." The boxcar that the Joads and the Wainrights share near the cotton fields resembles nothing so much as a rabbit hutch. After Tom and Ma crawl into his hidden cave within
the berry bushes, he tells her, "I been livin' like a rabbit some time."¹⁷ Blackberry bushes, like stands of wild roses, serve as excellent protective cover for rabbits and other small game.

But even the life of man the rodent, and of boy the rodent, has its happy, contrasting moments. On his first day in California, Tom lazes in the refreshing water of a stream.

He peeled off his clothes and waded into the stream. And the moment the water was about him, his thirst was gone. He lay back in the shallows and his body floated. He held himself in place with his elbows in the sand and looked at his toes, which bobbed above the surface.

A pale skinny little boy crept like an animal through the reeds and slipped off his clothes. And he squirmed into the water like a muskrat, and pulled himself along like a muskrat, only his eyes and nose above the surface. Then suddenly he saw Tom's head and saw that Tom was watching him. He stopped his game and sat up.

Tom said, "Hello."
"'Lo!"
"Looks like you was playin' muskrat."
"Well, I was."¹⁸

The boy leaves. Ma summons Tom to tell him that the police have told her that the family cannot stay here. They must move on. Joyous interludes are brief—for man and boy and muskrat.

The goals of the quest are mixed. At one extreme is Casy's desire to be with people, to become united with all

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 203, 437, 399-400, 460.
¹⁸Ibid., pp. 235-6.
"I'm gonna work in the field's, in the green field's, an' I'm gonna be near to folks. I ain't gonna try to teach 'em nothin'. I'm gonna try to learn." At the other extreme is Al who is seeking only pleasure. "I'm gonna have me a hell of a time when we get to California." This contrast in motives is epitomized in the titles of the only two books mentioned in the novel besides the Bible—Pilgrim's Progress and The Winning of Barbara Worth. Casy does reach the gates of the Heavenly City and Al does win Agnes Wainright.

In keeping with the duality on the other levels, many of the symbols have dual interpretations in addition to their literal meanings. An example of this is the use of tools. The workmen's tools stand for meaningful employment and laboring together. When Tom gets the opportunity to help Timothy and Wilkie Wallace lay drainage pipe, he is elated. Timothy brings two picks and three shovels from the barn and hands a pick to Tom who exclaims, "Jumpin' Jesus! If she don't feel good!" Tom is in harmony with man and the earth as he digs. "Damn it. . . . a pick is a nice tool (umph), if you don't fight it (umph). You an' the pick (umph) workin' together (umph)." But Tom and the other migrants have little chance to do the work they do best with the tools they are experienced in using. The only time the Joad men and Casy are able to work together with pick and shovel is when they

19 Ibid., pp. 101-2, 193.
are digging Grampa's grave. In *The Grapes of Wrath* these tools become weapons of aggression. This motif is introduced in Tom's account of the drunken fight in which he killed Herb Turnbull. "I don' know how she started. An' then I felt that knife go in me, an' that sobered me up. Fust thing I see is Herb comin' for me again with his knife. They was this here shovel leanin' against the schoolhouse; so I grabbed it an' smacked 'im over the head." Tools are weapons throughout the novel. Casy is killed with a "new white pick handle" after his brief reunion with Tom. "The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crashed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone, and Casy fell sideways out of the light."20 Tom glances at the fallen leader, grabs the pick handle, and crushes the skull of the killer. Swords are not beaten into blowshares in *The Grapes of Wrath*; idle farm tools are turned into lethal weapons.

Two of Steinbeck's most important symbols in his later fiction are the tide pool and the star, opposites he wishes to reconcile in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*:

And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying 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, known and unknowable. This is a simple thing to say, but the

profound feeling of it made a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and with his own voice discovered and reaffirmed with astonishment the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things—plankton, a shimmering phosphorescence on the sea and the spinning planets and an expanding universe, all bound together by the elastic string of time. It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again.21

The tide pool represents the competitive, selfish animal world of fish-eat-fish in the sea and dog-eat-dog on the land, while the star stands for spirituality and transcendence. The opposing symbols of "the known and the unknowable" dominate the ending of Chapter 6 when Tom and Casy prepare to spend the night sleeping in the open in the gulch near the empty Joad house. Tom advises Casy to go to sleep because they must start early in the morning, but Casy says that he doesn't want to sleep. Casy "drew up his feet and clasped his legs. He threw back his head and looked at the sharp stars." In contrast to the stars is the life about him, the Oklahoma equivalent of the tide pool: "gradually the skittering life of the ground, of holes and burrows, of the brush, began; the gophers moved, and the rabbits crept to green things, the mice scampered over clods, and the winged hunters moved soundlessly overhead." A temporary union of the known and the unknowable is achieved through alcohol by the nameless drunken man in one of the interchapters. "Sitting in a ditch,

21 The Log from the Sea of Cortez, pp. 216-7.
the earth grew soft under him." The liquor has dulled the memories of the pains of the competitive tide pool. Now "there was no loneliness, for a man could people his brain with friends, and he could find his enemies and destroy them." He decides he would like to stay drunk forever because "the stars are close and dear and I have joined the brotherhood of the worlds. And everything's holy—everything, even me." As Ma Joad waits near the culvert in which Tom has been hiding to see her favorite son for the last time perhaps, she sits in the same fetal position Casy assumed as he looked up at the stars from the tide pool.

She clasped her knees and sat silently. In a few minutes the thicket crept to life again. The field mice moved cautiously over the leaves. A skunk padded heavily and unselfconsciously down the trail, carrying a faint effluvium with him. And then a wind stirred the willows delicately, as though it tested them, and a shower of golden leaves coasted down to the ground. Suddenly a gust boiled and racked the trees, and a cricking downpour of leaves fell. Ma could feel them on her hair and her shoulders. Over the sky a plump black cloud moved, erasing the stars. The fat drops of rain scattered down, splashing loudly on the fallen leaves, and the cloud moved on and unveiled the stars again. Ma shivered. The wind blew past and left the thicket quiet, but the rushing of the trees went on down the stream. From back at the camp came the thin penetrating tone of a violin feeling about for a tune.  

These moments of union are the still points in the novel about which swirl the disruptive and divisive forces of suspicion, hate, and greed.  

\[22\text{The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 65, 362, 459.}\]
Upon the symbolic landscape, the two kinds of caves are opposed in *The Grapes of Wrath*--the cave of animal retreat versus the cave of spiritual rebirth. When Casy and Tom decide to spend the night near the forlorn Joad home before continuing on to Uncle John's, Muley suggests they sleep in a nearby cave. Tom remembers that he and his brother Noah had dug that cave when they were boys searching for treasure. Muley, reduced to living like a hunted animal, goes into the cave. "I like it here," he tells them. "I feel like nobody can come at me." Tom and Casy reject the safety and the limitations of the burrow, preferring to sleep on the sand beneath the stars.

After Casy is released from jail and is leading a strike, he and Tom meet for the last time. Escaping pursuers, they are forced like animals to enter a cave. They flee along a stream toward the arch of a bridge. "The black span was a cave before them." The apprentice follows in the footsteps of his master. "Casy bent over and moved through Tom behind. Their feet slipped into the water... Then they came out on the other side and straightened up." Although they bend like animals, with feet in the tide pool, this cave is not a dead end like Muley's but a passageway to "the other side" where they "straighten up" like proud men once again. "Two flashlight beams fell on the men, caught

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them, blinded them." Voices are heard in the dark night. "That's him. That shiny bastard. That's him." Like the symbolic star, the words "shiny" and "shining" suggest transfiguration in Steinbeck's fiction. Casy's last words echo those of Christ as he says, "You fellas don't know what you're doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids."

Casy's head is crushed with a pick handle. Casy has emerged from the cave triumphant in death, and triumphant over death when Tom Joad resolves to continue his mission, but even at this moment of spiritual attainment there is a strong allusion to the animal, to the jackrabbit that was blinded by the headlights as Casy was blinded by the flashlights, the jackrabbit that was squashed as Casy was crushed.

Tom does not forgive Casy's assailants because they know not what they do, but retaliates, grabbing the pick handle and crushing the head of Casy's murderer, Ma devises a strategem for hiding Tom in the truck. "We'll put one mattress on the bottom, an' then Tom gets quick there, an' we take another mattress an' sort of fold it so it makes a cave, an' he's in the cave; and then we sort of wall it in." Tom escapes with the family. When they move into the boxcar, he hides in still another cave, this time the culvert to which his mother brings his food. A hunted animal, he lives "like a rabbit." The last meeting of mother and son takes

\[24\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 426.}\]
place within the mound of blackberry bushes in a "coal-black
cave of vines." Tom recounts his spiritual transformation,
his affirmation of Casy's doctrine of the oversoul. "I'll be
ever'where--wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so
hungry people can eat, I'll be there... An' when our folks
eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build--
why, I'll be there." Yet even as the transfigured Tom Joad
accepts Casy's mission and, if necessary, Casy's martyrdom,
there is suggestion of the animal world in the crown of thorns
which is the circle of berry bushes, a snug retreat where
rabbits and other small animals cannot be surprised by their
enemies.

The cave of retreat represents the extreme of animality
in man including the qualities of greed and selfishness, but
also of fertility. The cave of rebirth symbolizes the
extremes of spirituality with attendant attributes of gener-
osity and love, but also, unfortunately, sterility. A
compromise between these opposites is necessary for the
continuation of mankind, for family life, for communal
existence, and the symbol of this compromise is the house.

But the houses in The Grapes of Wrath are ominously deserted
or ruined. In spite of the opening descriptions of the
disastrous effects of the drought on the Oklahoma land, the
tone of the narrative portions of the novel is cheerful and

25Ibid., pp. 442, 460, 463.
humorous in the first chapters as Tom hitches a ride, defeats the curious truck driver in his game of cat and mouse, meets Casy, and joins forces with the humanist preacher. Only in the last paragraph of Chapter 4, when the travelers reach their destination, Tom's house, does the mood suddenly change:

"They moved over the curving top of the hill and saw the Joad place below them. And Joad stopped. 'It ain't the same,' he said. "Looka that house. Somepin's happened. They ain't nobody there.' The two stood and stared at the little cluster of buildings." In the following interchapter, a desperate farmer tries to defend his house from the destructive tractor driven by an employee of the owner of the land, but the farmer has no success. The tractor's "iron guard bit into the house-corner, crumbled the wall, and wrenched the little house like a bug." When Tom and Casy draw near the Joad home they find it deserted and desolate. "Two of the supports of the porch roof were pushed so that the roof flopped down on one end. And the house-corner was crushed in. Through a maze of splintered wood the room at the corner was visible. The front door hung open inward, and a low strong gate across the front door hung outward on leather hinges." In the last lines of Chapter 10, the Joad family and Casy drive away from Uncle John's dwelling, and another house is abandoned. The group sitting on the top of the truck gazes back. "They saw the house and the barn and a little smoke rising from the chimney. They saw the windows redden under the first color of the sun. They saw Muley
standing forlornly in the doorway looking after them." The next chapter describes the fate of one of these empty houses and of all of these empty houses. "The doors of the empty house swung open, and drifted back and forth in the wind. . . . The weeds sprang up in the front of the doorstep, where they had not been allowed, and grass grew up through the porch boards. . . . One night the wind loosened a shingle and slipped it to the ground. The next wind pried into the hole where the shingle had been, lifted off three, and the next a dozen. The midday sun burned through the hole and threw a glaring spot on the floor."26 Nature is ready always to destroy the feeble structures of mankind.

Not only does the house itself have major symbolic importance in Steinbeck's novels. The method by which the house is acquired by its owners is of equal significance. In Tom's prophetic utterance made in the cave within the blackberry mound, he announces, "An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build--why, I'll be there." Constructing one's own house is the ideal method of building a life of necessary compromise between extremes. This Joseph Wayne does in To a God Unknown and this Mr. Whiteside does in The Pastures of Heaven. Other houses are obtained in less desirable ways. Henry Morgan in Cup of Gold and the Nazi officers in The Moon Is Down win the houses they

26Ibid., pp. 31, 41, 42-3, 125, 127.
occupy by means of conquest. In *Tortilla Flat* Danny passively inherits two houses which he does not particularly want, while in another comedy, *Cannery Row*, Mack and the boys intimidate Lee Chong into offering them the storehouse that becomes the Palace Flophouse and Grill. On this crucial symbolic level, both the Joad family's ownership of their house and their right to the life within, are suspect because, as Tom explains to Casy, his father stole the house from a farm after the original tenants moved away. "Grampa an' Pa and my brother Noah like to took the whole house, but she wouldn't come. They only got part of her. That's why she looks so funny at one end. They cut her in two an' drug her over with twelve head of horses and two mules. They was goin' back for the other half an' stick her together again, but before they got there Wink Manley come with his boys and stole the other half." It is significant that the house was stolen and also that it was moved. Except for the night in the grimy cabin near the peach orchards, all of the family's homes in the novel are mobile. Even their house in Oklahoma at one time moved across the land pulled by fourteen draft animals. Their truck is their home on the road. Their shelter at Weedpatch and along the highway is a tent. While picking cotton they live in a boxcar, still another home that suggests mobility and instability. The boxcar is divided into two sections with the Joads at one end and the Wainrights at the other. In a sense the two halves of the purloined Oklahoma house
have been united in temporary completeness. Speaking of the
house that was divided between the Joads and the Manleys, Tom
relates that Manley had said "his house is at stud, an' if
we'll bring our'n over an' breed 'em we'll maybe get a litter
of crap houses." The male and female elements of the division
are united when Al Joad who lives at one end of the boxcar
seduces, and later becomes engaged to, Agnes Wainright who
lives at the other end of the boxcar. Eventually the Joads
must flee this house in California because of flood as they
fled their house in Oklahoma because of drought. The
wanderings of these migrants in The Grapes of Wrath are not
contrasted with stable, stationary homes but, rather, are
echoed in the mobility of their "wandering" houses.27

In The American Adam, R. W. B. Lewis divides the
authors of the nineteenth century into three groups. He
first notes that Emerson saw "a split in culture between two
polarized parties: 'the party of the Past and the party of
the Future,' as he sometimes called them, or the parties 'of
Memory and Hope, of the Understanding and the Reason.' The
schism began, according to Emerson's retrospective meditation
of 1867, in about 1820." To Emerson's party of Hope and
party of Memory, Lewis adds a party of Irony which is
"characterized by a tragic optimism: by a sense of the
tragic collisions to which innocence was liable (something

27Ibid., pp. 463, 29.
unthinkable among the hopeful), and equally by an awareness of the heightened perception and humanity which suffering made possible (something unthinkable among the nostalgic)."\textsuperscript{28}

Steinbeck, writing in the succeeding century, does not fit exactly into Lewis's third category but in his novels, especially \textit{The Grapes of Wrath}, he does present an ironic view of the struggle between Emerson's party of Memory and party of Hope. Memory, aware of the mistakes and failures of the past, testifies to the impossibility of perfection, while hope, ignoring or transcending the same mistakes and failures of the past, proclaims the validity of perfection. The opposition between hope and memory is a condition of human existence. Even the most cynical, the most pessimistic of men needs a measure of hope to live from day to day. This dichotomy within the individual has been expanded and personified in \textit{The Grapes of Wrath}. At one extreme is the party of hope led by Casy and including in its membership the manager of the government camp at Weedpatch. At the other end of the range is the party of memory which numbers in its ranks Grampa Joad, Uncle John, and Muley Graves. The remaining characters are spread between these two poles. Near the center are Tom and Ma Joad. Until his metamorphosis in the later chapters, Tom is interested in neither the past nor the future, concentrating only on the here and now. Ma,

\textsuperscript{28}Lewis, \textit{The American Adam}, pp. 7-8.
too, represents the present, not because she tries to ignore the past and future like Tom, but because hope and memory are roughly equal in their influence upon her, producing a dissonant present.

Muley Graves and Grampa Joad live almost exclusively in the past, tied irrevocably to the Oklahoma land that symbolizes the few joys and many sorrows of the past. Muley does not move west with his family but remains to exist as a hunted animal in the cotton fields, haunting the deserted and decaying homes of his relatives and friends. Grampa at first displays some fascination with California but it is finally overwhelmed by his desire to stay in the stolen house on the land stolen from the Indians, land that has been robbed of its fertility, land that is completely cottoned out. "Ever' year I can remember," Tom explains, "we had a good crop comin' an' it never come." Grampa dies soon after being forcibly uprooted from the dusty soil and is buried in an unmarked grave along the way. Although Uncle John makes the journey to California, he is always obsessed with the sins of the past, carrying his cargo of chains wherever he goes, torturing himself with his failure to get medical help for his sick, pregnant wife. His constant refrain is the lament, "If on'y she didn't die that time--" When he moans this to Ma, she admonishes him, "Jus' live the day... Don't worry yaself." Ma is unsympathetic to indulgence in feelings of
guilt. She warns Rose of Sharon, "I knowed people built theirself up with sin till they figgered they was big mean shucks in the sight of the Lord."\(^{29}\)

In contrast to Uncle John, Casy has been able to forgive himself his actions in the past and has been able to free himself of the weight of the past. When Casy was an active preacher he had regularly become involved with girls attending his service. "I'd take one of them girls out in the grass, an' I'd lay with her. Done it ever' time." Casy had prayed for control of his lust but to no avail. "Come the next time, them an' me was full of sperit, I'd do it again. I figgered there wasn't no hope for me, an' I was a damned ol' hypocrite."

After Casy had retired from the ministry and gone into the wilderness to think, he solved the problem of guilt. "I says to myself, 'What's gnawin' you? Is it the screwin'? An' I says, 'No, it's the sin.'" He tells Tom of his search for an answer. "I says, 'Maybe it ain't sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' the hell out of ourselves for nothin'.' An' I thought how some sisters took to beatin' theirselves with a three-foot shag of bobwire. An' I thought how maybe they liked to hurt themselves, an' maybe I liked to hurt myself." He concludes, "There ain't no sin, and their ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do."

Casy has forgiven himself and transcended the belief in sin through the relativity of individual idealism, maintaining

\(^{29}\)The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 28, 469, 345.
that "a fella's sinned if he thinks he's sinned." Relieved of the past, Casy can devote his full energy to the future.

Casy and Tom are contrasted when Casy confides to his friend his hopes for the migrants.

"They's gonna come somepin outa all these folks goin' wes'-outa all their farms lef' lonely. They's gonna come a thing that's gonna change the whole country." Tom said, "I'm still layin' my dogs down one at a time."

"Yeah, but when a fence comes up at ya, ya gonna climb that fence."

"I climb fences when I got fences to climb," said Tom.

Casy sighed. "It's the bes' way. I gotta agree. But they's different kinda fences. They's folks like me that climbs fences that ain't even strang up yet--an' can't he'p it."

Tom feels no guilt about killing Herb Turnbull. After he has told Casy about the fight and the death of Herb, Casy asks him, "You ain't ashamed of nothin' then?" "No," Tom says, "I ain't." Later Al queries Tom about the killing, asking if Tom ever dreamed about the victim. "No," says Tom. "Well, didn't ya never think about it?" Al asks. Tom answers, "Sure. I was sorry 'cause he was dead." Al asks, "Ya didn't take no blame to yourself?" "No, I done my time, an' I done my own time." Tom believes one should think over the past, talk about the past, in order to minimize its effect. When Ma advises him not to think about his life in prison, he tells her, "Might's well think about it. . . . Try to shut it out, an' it'll whang back at me." Although Tom feels no guilt

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30 Ibid., pp. 22, 23, 24, 295.
about his past mistakes, he also has no hope for the future until the end of the novel. He tells his mother he will carry on with Casy's work. When she reminds him that Casy was killed, Tom says, "He didn't duck quick enough." Ma brings up an example from the past. "Tom, they'll drive you, an' cut you down like they done to young Floyd." Tom is unmoved. "They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin' all our people."

Tom's final statements are in the future tense, in the prophetic voice of Casy. "I'll be ever'where you look. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there... An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build--why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy." 31

On this thematic level of The Grapes of Wrath, the party of hope and the voice of prophecy has triumphed over the party of memory and the voice of doom. But on another level the past not only remains a powerful force but has the vigor to repeat itself in the ultimate nightmare when the Joads again flee their home because of the extremes of nature, fleeing water and mud instead of sun and dust. The Joads end where they began--in the cotton fields. Their status as pickers is lower than their original position as sharecroppers. The family is disintegrating. This tension between memory and hope in The Grapes of Wrath increases its dimensions and

31 Ibid., pp. 190-1, 26, 193, 404, 463.
contributes to its epic scale because the novel simultaneously extends deep into the past and far into the future. Memory, tyrannical or benevolent, has been the most common subject of important twentieth-century fiction. Steinbeck adds the voice of prophecy to the voice of memory. The Grapes of Wrath is his unique and dissonant mixture of Utopian literature and remembrances of things past.

Steinbeck utilizes not only personal and individual memory but also racial memory or myth which he maintains has a profound effect upon mankind. He writes in The Log from the Sea of Cortez: "The harvest of symbols in our minds seems to have been planted in the soft rich soil of our prehumanity." He believes in the truth of archetypes. Visiting a church in the town of Loreto on the Gulf of California, he peers through a wooden grille into a small chapel. "The Virgin Herself, Our Lady of Loreto, was in a glass case and surrounded by the lilies of the recently past Easter." He reflects that even though sophisticated standards might declare the statue vulgar, he nevertheless finds it lovely. "This is a very holy place, and to question it is to question a fact as established as the tide. How easily and quickly we slide into our race-patterns unless we keep intact the stiff-necked and blinded pattern of the recent intellectual training." He compares Our Lady of Loreto with a granite stone that divides the waves of the sea. "So has this plaster Lady a powerful effect on the deep black water of the human spirit. She may
disappear and her name be lost, as the Magna Mater, as Isis, have disappeared. But something very like her will take her place, and the longings which created her will find somewhere in the world a similar altar on which to put their force. No matter what her name is, Artemis, or Venus, or a girl behind a Woolworth counter vaguely remembered, she is as eternal as our species, and we will continue to manufacture her as long as we survive."

Steinbeck manufactures two additional examples of this archetype that extends back to the Magna Mater in *The Grapes of Wrath*—Ma Joad and her apprentice and successor, Rose of Sharon, whose expression is described in the last sentence of the book: "She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously."

As Ma and Rose of Sharon display attributes of the Magna Mater, so Jim Casy and Tom Joad mirror qualities of the eternal Savior. The recurrence of these types offer hope to all men. But there is a negative as well as a positive side to the mythic heritage. *The Grapes of Wrath* interweaves both strains.

Although mythic material is drawn from a wide variety of sources for enriching the novel, the strongest elements are from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is evoked with the Eden symbolism and the Exodus pattern along with numerous assorted allusions from other

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32 The Log from the Sea of Cortez, pp. 34, 175-6.
episodes. Many critical essays have been written about New Testament motifs in the novel, with critics identifying Casy with Christ and Tom with Paul, and also Casy with John the Baptist and Tom with Christ, as well as offering many other interpretations. There can be no argument, however, that Biblical backgrounds are pervasive. Steinbeck's technique is indeed complicated, defying easy and reductive explanations. One statement can be positively made about his use of myth and that is that he does not follow one vein of material exclusively at any one time, but plays one stratum against another, producing occasional harmony and more frequent dissonance.

Genesis tells of the impossibility of perfection because of the Fall of Man, while the New Testament offers a path that can lead toward eventual perfection. By superimposing one Testament upon the other, Steinbeck accentuates their conflicts, but also strengthens their common ground. In "New Testament and Mythology," Rudolf Bultmann states that the duty of theologians is to search for the essential meanings behind myths, ignoring the story in the pursuit of truth. Many attempts, conscious and otherwise, have been made to determine the least common denominator of the Old and New Testaments. In popular culture, for instance, Original Sin is often equated with sexual transgression while the Virgin Birth

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usually signifies only the absence of sex, resulting in the opinion that the central sin is sex. Intimations of this reasoning are certainly found in Steinbeck's works, especially obvious in the short story "The Snake." Theodor Reik endorses the theory that at the core of both Testaments is the crime of patricide. He postulates that a group of sons, a prehistoric tribe, once killed and ate the father-chief, and that this crime is reenacted in the eating of the fruit from the tree in the Garden of Eden and commemorated in the Sacrament.\[34\] This myth, minus the cannibalism, is the basis of *The Brothers Karamazov* in which one of the four sons kills the father. A variation of this story is also found in Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*. Here one of the four Wayne brothers kills the tree that contains the spirit of the dead father. *The Grapes of Wrath* includes the four symbolic sons among its characters, but Pa Joad is not slaughtered by them, merely neglected. Another theory is offered by David Bakan in *The Duality of Human Existence*. He asserts that the crime underlying both divisions of the Bible is infanticide, evident in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in the Old Testament, and in the Father's willingness to sacrifice the Son in the New. Bakan also notes that mass infanticide is committed at the time of the birth of Moses and at the time of the birth of Jesus. Bakan reinforces this interpretation with an example

from Greek mythology, maintaining that the central crime of the Oedipus legend is not patricide as illustrated in the killing of Laius by Oedipus but, rather, infanticide as shown in the willingness of Laius to expose the infant Oedipus. Without necessarily accepting Bakan's theory in full, one can accept the fact that one of the major ideas emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments is the wanton killing of children. Thus one of the many negative aspects of racial memory that opposes the hopeful presence of the Magna Mater in the persons of Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon, and of the Savior figure in Tom Joad and Jim Casy, is the crime of infanticide.

The circumstances surrounding the stillbirth of Rose of Sharon's child suggest the infancies of both Moses and Jesus. In an incident echoing the placing of the infant Moses in a basket on the river, Uncle John allows the dead body in the apple box to float upon the whirling waters of the flood. He recalls the spiritual "Go Down, Moses," when he says, "Go down an' tell 'em. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way." Linking the ideas of the Egyptian captivity and the death of the child is the description of the corpse as "a blue shriveled little mummy." Moses is set adrift in order that he be spared the death decreed for Jewish males born in Egypt; Rose of Sharon's baby is already dead as it floats down the current. Allusion is also

made in the novel to the infant Jesus. When Mrs. Sandry lectures Rose of Sharon about the evils of acting in plays, Rose of Sharon confesses, "Oncet in school we give a Chris' chile play--Christmus." Mrs. Sandry says, "Well--I ain't sayin' that's bad or good. They's folks thinks a Chris' chile is awright. But--well, I wouldn' care to come right out flat an' say so." When Ma learns that Ruthie has betrayed Tom's hiding place, she exclaims, "Oh! My dear sweet Lord Jesus asleep in a manger! What we goin' to do now?"36 This reference to the manger is underlined by the final scene of the novel which takes place in a barn. Here Rose of Sharon takes on the mysterious characteristics of the Magna Mater and the Mother Mary. There is no need to hide the child from Herod's henchmen, no need to flee in order to escape the slaughter of the innocents, because the baby is already dead.

The motif of infanticide is developed throughout The Grapes of Wrath, creating an undertow of menacing horror. As I noted above, the first expression of alarm that is projected in the narrative sections of the novel is Tom's dismay upon finding the Joad house deserted. "The front door hung open inward, and a low strong gate across the front door hung outward on leather hinges." When Tom sees that the low strong gate is open he knows that either the family is gone or...

his mother is dead. "If Ma was anywheres about, that gate'd be shut an' hooked. That's one thing she always done--seen that gate was shut. . . . Ever since the pig got in over to the Jacobs' an' et the baby. Milly Jacobs was jus' out in the barn. She comes in while the pig was still eatin' it. Well, Milly Jacobs was in a family way, an' she went ravin'. Never did get over it. Touched ever since." 37 The open gate is symbolic of the ineffectual barrier--the fence in East of Eden over which climb the "evil and ugly things" germinated in the dark pool of the unconscious; and the ruined wall of The Scarlet Letter that cannot hold back evil; and the broken levee of mud and sticks at the end of The Grapes of Wrath.

The inhuman treatment of the Okies is tantamount to infanticide because the children are the first to starve, because the children are the first to succumb to disease. The owner of an orchard uses children to hold the wages down. "The more fellas he can get, an' the hungrier, less he's gonna pay. An he'll get a fella with kids if he can. . . ." The ragged man returning from California describes the deaths of his children:

"I tried to tell you folks. . . . Somepin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me. But I can't tell you. I should of knew that. Nobody couldn't tell me, neither. I can't tell ya about them little fellas layin' in the tent with their bellies puffed out an' jus' skin on their bones, an' shiverin' an' whinin' like pups, an' me runnin' aroun' tryin' to get work--not for money,

37 Ibid., p. 43.
not for wages! ... Christ, jus' for a cup a flour an' a spoon a lard. An' then the coroner come. 'Them children died a heart failure,' he said. Put it on his paper. Shiverin', they was, an' their bellies stuck out like a pig bladder."

The economic system governing agriculture makes the hungry men realize "a fallow field is a sin and the unused land is a crime against thin children." When one migrant objects to using force to obtain land, another asks him, "Which'd you ruther for your kids, dead now or dead in two years with what they call malnutrition? Know what we et all week? Biled nettles an' fried dough!" A hungry worker describes the death of a child in the camp: "Well, that kid's been a-cryin' in his sleep an' a-rollin' in his sleep. Them folks thought he got worms. So they give him a blaster, an' he died. It was what they call black-tongue the kid had. Comes from not g'ttin' good things to eat." A migrant's prayer asks help for the children: "Our people are good people; our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor. Pray God some day a kid can eat." A young man at a camp explains to Tom how children are used as leverage in bargaining for wages: "S'pose they's a hundred men wants that job. S'pose them men got kids, an' them kids is hungry. S'pose a lousy dime'll buy a box of mush for them kids. S'pose a nickel'll buy at leas' somepin for them kids. An' you got a hundred men. Jus' offer 'em a nickel--why, they'll kill each other fightin' for that nickel." The young man
concludes, "A kid starves quick. Two-three days for a kid." 38

Ma Joad innocently disturbs the life in a camp when she allows a group of hungry children to clean out the stew pot with sticks and rusty pieces of tin. At the camp in Weedpatch, Jules is heartbroken as he watches his young daughter starve: "One day they give her a prize in this camp 'cause she's so pretty. Well, what's gonna happen to her? She's gettin' spindly. I ain't gonna stan' it. She's so purty." The situation is summarized in an interchapter: "The fields were fruitful and starving men moved on the roads. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic, and the pustules of pellagra swelled on their sides." In the Joad family the youngest child, Winfield, grows weaker and weaker. Many readers have noted the similarity of Casy's last words to those of Christ, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Casy's plea, however, incorporates a significant variation: "You fellas don' know what you're doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids." 39

The migrants in bondage in the fields of California resemble the Jews in bondage in Egypt. The mistreatment of the Okies results in the deaths of the children, born or unborn, depriving them of a new generation to strengthen their ranks and provide leadership. What makes the

39 Ibid., pp. 395, 313, 426.
undercurrent of infanticide in The Grapes of Wrath even more horrifying are the incidents of tragic childbirth in the Joad family, caused by neglect or ignorance on the part of the fathers. There is a hint that this is a personal as well as racial crime. Uncle John is haunted by the guilt he feels because he did not aid his pregnant wife. "Uncle John, he had a young wife. Married four months. She was in a family way, too, an' one night she gets a pain in her stomick, an' she says, 'You better go for a doctor.' Well, John, he's settin' there, an' he says, 'You just got stomichache. You et too much.'... Nex' noon she's outa her head, an' she dies at about four in the afternoon." Pa Joad feels remorse about the birth of his first child, Noah.

Pa thought he knew why Noah was strange, but Pa was ashamed, and never told. For on the night when Noah was born, Pa, frightened by the spreading thighs, alone in the house, and horrified at the screaming wretch his wife had become, went mad with apprehension. Using his hands, his strong fingers for forceps, he had pulled and twisted the baby. The midwife, arriving late, had found the baby's head pulled out of shape, its neck stretched, its body warped; and she had pushed the head back and molded the body with her hands. But Pa always remembered, and was ashamed. And he was kinder to Noah than to the others. In Noah's broad face, eyes too far apart, and long fragile jaw, Pa thought he saw the twisted, warped skull of the baby.40

And now in the next generation, Connie Rivers deserts his pregnant young wife, displaying no interest in her welfare or that of the child she carries. She has no husband at her

40 Ibid., pp. 73, 85.
side as she bears the blue little mummy. When the gate of the house if left open, evil and ugly things from the secret black pool crawl over the threshold.

The ending of *The Grapes of Wrath* is a dissonant mixture of birth and death, triumph and tragedy. Tom Joad is reborn in the womb of the cave, but the infant delivered from Rose of Sharon's womb is dead. A glorious victory for the Joads and a bitter defeat.

The final chord of the last chapter contains all the multilevels of duality orchestrated throughout the novel. As the flood waters move past the boxcar home, Pa sets a twig in the bank to check if the level is rising. This is a reversal of the significance of the olive leaf that the dove brought to Noah as a sign the Flood was receding. Ruthie longs for a box of Cracker Jack, recalling in the reader's mind the incident in which Ruthie betrayed the fact that Tom was hiding nearby as she fought with a friend because of a box of Cracker Jack. The men work together in the rain building a levee to hold back the water, while the women work together to prepare for the delivery of Rose of Sharon's baby. This is Casy's dream, all people working together, but here their efforts are in vain. The mud bank is destroyed by a cottonwood tree, suggesting Eden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Al tears apart the bed of the truck to get wood, reversing the building of the truck framework in Oklahoma. The dead baby is placed in an apple box, another allusion to Eden.
The men go outside and find that the sky is completely clouded. No symbolic star is visible this dark night. Uncle John takes the baby in the apple box, but instead of burying it in the land, he places the child of Connie Rivers on the stream so it will float to town and awaken the indifferent populace to the plight of the migrants. The family spends the night on the wooden platform in the boxcar. In the morning Ma assumes leadership of the family, insisting that they leave the boxcar and move to higher ground. This moment is filled with hope because Ma, in spite of the atmosphere of defeat, is able to look to the future, is still seeking the symbolic higher ground. Al stays behind with his girl friend, and Al is lost as everyone knew he would be lost—to a girl. Pa carries Rose of Sharon, Uncle John carries Ruthie, and Ma carries Winfield, holding the children above the dark waters. Alongside the road, Ruthie finds a "scraggly geranium gone wild," symbolic of the children who Ma fears are becoming wild animals. Through the driving rain they move toward the barn. They go inside. "A few rusty farm tools lay about, a disk plow and a broken cultivator, an iron wheel," reminders of the broken lives of the farmers from Oklahoma. With the iron wheel the novel has come full circle, for Tom, when he returned to the abandoned Joad home, went into the barn shed and came upon another still life of broken farm equipment that included "an iron wheel from a hayrake." At the

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Ibid., p. 42.
beginning of the novel, Tom and Casy traveled alone. Then they joined the other members of the family. Now Tom and Casy are gone, and the remaining Joads journey on and on. The wheel suggests the cycles of life, the cycles of nature, drought and flood, dust and mud. The wheel can represent the expanding circles of Emerson that are limitless. Or the wheel can represent the tightening and limiting circles of circumstances that are crushing the Joads like a python.

They find a man and his son in the barn. The boy tells the Joads that his father is starving, that he has not eaten in six days, that he needs soup or milk. The father has not eaten because he wanted to give what food there was to his son. Ma looks deep into Rose of Sharon's eyes. The girl says, "Yes." Ma leads Ruthie, Winfield, Pa, Uncle John, and the man's son into the tool shed. Rose of Sharon lies down beside the stranger. "Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. 'You got to,' she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hands moved his head and supported it. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously."42 The Grapes of Wrath, like most of Steinbeck's works, ends with one symbolic act that compresses many levels of meaning. Rose of Sharon's giving milk to the starving man has shocked legions of readers over the

42 Ibid., pp. 501-2.
years, but no attempt has been made to explain the reasons for the violent reactions to the scene. The action itself is surprising and unusual, but this in itself does not account for its stunning effect. To explain the scene's drama, I believe one must analyze its multilevels of dual meanings.

On the thematic surface stratum, Rose of Sharon suggests the validity of perfection. This whining, selfish girl has blossomed into a generous, compassionate woman who resembles Ma Joad, the Magna Mater, the superhuman goddess. The setting in the barn recalls the Mother in the stable in Bethlehem. In Casy's transcendental language, Rose of Sharon has put aside her petty individuality and become at one with the oversoul. At the other extreme, however, the scene also intimates the impossibility of perfection for it contains many echoes of incidents on the journey west and the crime and punishment of sex. Rose of Sharon is wrapped in a blanket as she was when she and Connie made love beside the dead body of Granma. Then Rose of Sharon was damp with perspiration and now she is damp with rain. Rose of Sharon and the starving man repeat the same combination of sensuality and possible death.

There is also a hint of incest in this passage as in some others in the book. When Tom tells Casy and Muley about killing Herb Turnbull, he adds, "I never had nothing against Herb. He was a nice fella. Come a-bullin' after my sister
Rosasharn when he was a little fella." Both "Turnbull" "a-bullin'" suggest the heifers in the jokes that were bred in order that they could supply milk. Rose of Sharon's baby is dead. The "baby" that is alive is the full-grown Tom who emerged so graphically from the womb of the cave in need of the milk of human kindness. Overtones of infanticide myths in which jealous fathers destroy their sons also color this scene when the son goes into the tool shed and the father takes the "mother's" breast. If this is a holy family in the barn, it is a bizarre holy family indeed.

The great final chord of The Grapes of Wrath, concluding simultaneously a triumphant march and a tragic dirge, recapitulates the many layers of conflict that make the novel a throbbing and shimmering work of art. On the end papers of the original edition are reproduced the words and music of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," Julia Ward Howe's poem set, rather ironically, to an "Old Plantation Melody." Steinbeck chose her phrase "the grapes of wrath" as the title of his work because he liked the contrast between the softness of "grapes" and the harshness of "wrath." The title is also appropriate because his epic novel dramatizes another Civil War between two factions within the Republic as well as the civil war between two forces within every man.

\[43\text{Ibid.}, p. 57.\]
CHAPTER VIII

CANNERY ROW: THE COMIC TREATMENT OF DUALITY

Cannery Row is the second of John Steinbeck's three coastal comedies. As in Tortilla Flat and Sweet Thursday, most of its scenes take place in or about or overlooking Monterey in California. Although the Pacific is viewed briefly in other of his novels, and especially dramatically in Cup of Gold and To a God Unknown, only the three coastal comedies are set wholly on the western shore. Steinbeck utilizes humor in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row not only to entertain his readers, but also to camouflage and make palatable some of his most bitter conclusions concerning man's destiny, judgments he attempted to reverse in Sweet Thursday and the other novels of the revisionist cycle that begins with The Wayward Bus of 1947. In the fiction of his early and middle periods, however, the Pacific Ocean is linked symbolically with death and the setting sun upon Steinbeck's landscape, and linked historically with the bleak finale to the hopeful American march across the continent in search of perfection on earth.

Because of the tendency of Steinbeck's multilevel fiction to engulf and absorb criticism rather than to resist
or support it, some of the most perceptive and stimulating comments upon his work have been made in disparagement of his art. This contradiction is particularly strong in Edmund Wilson's observation that the characterizations of the migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath* are defective: "... in spite of Mr. Steinbeck's efforts to make them figure as heroic human symbols, one cannot help feeling that these Okies ... do not exist for him quite seriously as people. It is as if human sentiments and speeches had been assigned to a flock of lemmings on their way to throw themselves into the sea."¹

The Joads and their fellow migrants, in many respects, do resemble lemmings rushing to the sea, but we must not ignore one crucial point: the Joads never reach the sea. Mack and Doc of *Cannery Row* do.

Antonia Seixas has recorded Steinbeck's reaction to the critical reception of this novel. After recalling that "reviewers chortled over the humor, quaintness, and charm" of *Cannery Row*, she writes: "A single critic, Malcom Cowley, puzzled by an underlying sense of violence in the book, read it again more carefully and concluded that if *Cannery Row* was a cream-puff, it was a 'very poisoned cream-puff.' If Cowley had read it yet again, said Steinbeck, he would have found how very poisoned it was."² Steinbeck's later critics

generally have taken the novel seriously, and the days of any unrelieved chortling appear to be over. Although recent analyses do take into account the conflicting forces within Cannery Row, I believe we must take Steinbeck's advice and read it yet again to understand how virulent indeed is the venom of negation that ultimately transforms this novel, at times so rowdily happy and uproariously funny, into the poisoned cream puff that it is.

The coastal comedies are closely related to each other in many features in addition to their setting. All three are constructed about an ironic quest in which a group of shabby knights endeavor to help a spiritual leader who resembles a king or god. In the preface to Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck calls attention to the importance of Arthurian romance to the framework of that novel. The same pattern is made explicit in Sweet Thursday when Hazel arrives at the masquerade dressed as a knight and announces to the assembled guests that he protects damsels. This design also informs Cannery Row in which Mack and the boys from the Palace Flophouse and Grill attempt to do "something nice" for Doc. The three novels follow a definite line of development. Tortilla Flat centers upon the activities of paisanos, and Steinbeck frequently uses characters of Indian or Latin descent in his initial experiments with a new idea before adapting it to people who are Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. This progression of races in his works has its basis, perhaps,
in the changes of ownership of lands in the Southwest where Americans from the East followed the Spaniards who followed the Indians. Thus Cannery Row presents a situation similar in many ways to that of Tortilla Flat, but now with Anglo-Saxon Americans in the places of the American paisanos. Sweet Thursday is the reworking of Cannery Row material within the revisionist cycle. In this last version, the quest attains its objective when Hazel succeeds in aiding and saving Doc by breaking his arm with a softball bat so that Doc needs Suzy to drive his car.

This allegorical journey through life is the common structure of Steinbeck's novels, but even in the midst of the most disillusioning of journeys there is a contrasting happy interlude in which natural enemies are temporarily at peace. Because Cannery Row is a comic novel, it focuses on this allegro portion of the allegorical journey, although important short journeys are made, always to or along a body of water. On the great frogging expedition, Mack leads his cronies to the river and then to the pond. Doc makes trips along the Pacific coast in search of specimens for his biological laboratory. At the fulcrum of this balanced novel is Doc's visit to the shore near La Jolla where he finds the body of the beautiful girl in the surf.

In addition to the design of the quest, Cannery Row contains the other essential elements of Steinbeck's "serious" novels, and we find in it, most important of all, the thematic
conflict between the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection. In the first paragraph Steinbeck presents the two views that clash dissonantly throughout the book. He says of Cannery Row, "Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,' by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, 'Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,' and he would have meant the same thing." 3

The thematic conflict is reflected on a second level in the duality of characterizations. Lee Chong, for instance, "is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good—an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugal force of abacus and cash register—Lee Chong suspended, spinning, whirling among groceries and ghosts." Man is portrayed as existing between the extremes of selfish animality and selfless sainthood. Individuals are compared with wolves, tigers, bulls, jackals, cats, rabbits, and other assorted animals. The second-to-last chapter is the story of the gopher who must leave his comfortable and safe burrow to go into the poisoned garden. But man is also likened to "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men." Doc's 'face is half Christ and half satyr and his face tells

the truth." Frankie wants to give Doc the clock with St. George and the dragon on top because the Saint "wore a pointed beard and he looked a little like Doc." Gay is called "the little mechanic of God, the St. Francis of all things that turn and twist and explode, the St. Francis of coils and armatures and gears." Even Dora Flood and her whores have their moments as angels of mercy.

In respect to the symbolic landscape, the foremost distinction of Cannery Row is its setting along the Pacific shore. In Steinbeck's western novels, many climactic scenes, particularly those containing deaths, take place near streams that run eventually into the Pacific—in To a God Unknown, in Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath—but Cannery Row is laid at the very edge of the ocean associated with the setting sun and the death of the day.

As the allegorical journey assumes an altered form in Cannery Row, so also are the symbolic cave and the ruined house modified as befits a comic novel. Mack and his friends come very close to burning down the residence of the officer who entertains them after the frog hunt. "Later when the curtains caught fire and were put out with the little towels, the captain told the boys not to mind it. He felt it was an honor to have them burn his house clear down, if they wanted to." Disaster is narrowly and merrily avoided in this

\[4\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 8, 16, 108, 39.}\]
humorous episode, and the kind captain's house does not meet the fate of the Whiteside home in *The Pastures of Heaven*, the diner of Anderson Junior and the barn of Anderson Senior in *In Dubious Battle*, and Danny's two houses in *Tortilla Flat*, all of which become charred ruins. After the first of the two parties in *Cannery Row*, Doc's laboratory is a shambles: "The front door hung sideways by one hinge. The floor was littered with broken glass. Phonograph records, some broke, some only nicked, were strewn about. . . . Someone trying to climb the bookcases had pulled out a whole section of books and spilled them in broken-backed confusion on the floor."\(^5\) But the laboratory is not permanently ruined and Doc succeeds in restoring order.

The symbolism of the cave that opposes the house is found in the retreat to which Frankie retires when he is distraught. "Doc walked quietly down the stairs and into the cellar. Frankie was in the excelsior box burrowed down clear to the bottom, with the pile of excelsior on top of him. Doc could hear him whimpering there." This scene near the beginning of the novel is balanced by its opposite near the end. When Doc is upset because he has no choice but to agree to Frankie's confinement in an institution, he too flees to a cavern. "Doc ran out and got in his car and went collecting in the caves below Pt. Lobos."\(^6\) The motif of the

house is superimposed upon that of the cave with comic effect in the discarded boiler that serves as a home for the Malloys who must crawl through the entrance on their hands and knees.

Steinbeck's dual themes of the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection are elaborated upon in *Cannery Row* with allusions to the classic nineteenth-century record of an effort to put Emerson's theories into practice, Henry Thoreau's *Walden*, and to the classic twentieth-century depiction of guilty man and hostile nature, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Steinbeck interweaves major and minor chords from these two masterpieces into *Cannery Row*, not because he is imitative or derivative or unimaginative, but because he is a traditionalist as defined by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," displaying in his novels "the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but its presence; the historical sense compels man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."\(^7\) In the variations upon his dual themes in *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck has composed a dissonant symphony,

rich in overtones of classical statements of the themes, yet uniquely and completely his own.

The impact of Eliot's poem upon modern literature may be general or specific in its nature. The term "waste land" is commonly used to epitomize the state of spiritual ennui and moral shoddiness that Eliot evokes so effectively. The influence, on the other hand, can be attributed directly to the particular vision of The Waste Land. In Steinbeck criticism, Donna Gerstenberger has pointed out parallels found in The Waste Land and in The Winter of Our Discontent, and Agnes McNeill Donohue has demonstrated Steinbeck's debt to Eliot with comparisons of passages from the poem and from The Grapes of Wrath. The influence upon Cannery Row is likewise specific. The scene of the greater part of the novel is literally a land of waste. "Cannery Row is the gathered and the scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses." Moving across this setting are Mack and the boys, seedy and comic knights from the Palace Flophouse and Grill who want to do "something nice" for Doc, their


9 Cannery Row, p. 1.
spiritual leader who lives down at the water's edge.

An obstacle to full appreciation of Cannery Row is the tendency to identify Doc completely with Steinbeck's close friend Ed Ricketts who, like Doc, operated a biological laboratory in Monterey. Peter Lisca notes that "almost every detail about Doc has its parallel in the actual life and personality of Ed Ricketts."\(^\text{10}\) While this is evidently true, the converse is certainly not true. Doc is a fictional representation composed of only some of the qualities found in a much more complicated human being. In his biographical sketch "About Ed Ricketts," Steinbeck acknowledges that he can offer only his own impressions of the man and that accounts of other observers will differ from his. He adds, "I have not put down Ed's relations with his wives or with his three children. There isn't time, and besides I did not know much about these things."\(^\text{11}\) By omitting wives and children from the portrait of the scientist in Cannery Row, Steinbeck creates a character significantly different from Ed Ricketts. It is Doc's barrenness that Mack and the boys would like to cure.

Although the efforts of the gang from the Palace Flophouse to help their barren leader are frustrated, the miniature missions to alleviate the sufferings of animals do

\(^{10}\) Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 213.

\(^{11}\) The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. lxiv.
accomplish their objective. Mack removes the tick that has been causing the infection of the dog belonging to the captain. Doc's advice when Darling has distemper is responsible for the recovery of the Flophouse mascot. Mack's elaborate preparations for asking Doc the date of his birthday are also reminiscent of quest literature. Because Doc is justifiably suspicious of Mack's motives, he cautiously withholds the truth and gives the date as October 27 instead of December 18. This is Doc's third important lie. The other two are about his reasons for taking the hiking trip and for ordering the beer milk shake. The series of three questions and responses is a common ritual in folklore and legend where three correct answers often produce magical results. But Doc replies to the three queries with falsehoods.

Doc's sexual encounters with the nameless women who visit him in the laboratory resemble the ritualized harlotry of The Waste Land. In the Palace Flophouse the boys discuss Doc:

"I been wondering for a long time," Mack continued, "what we could do for him--something nice. Something he'd like."
"He'd like a dame," said Hughie.
"He's got three four dames," said Jones. "You can always tell--when he pulls them front curtains closed and when he plays that kind of church music on the phonograph."
Mack said reprovingly to Hughie, "Just because he doesn't run no dames naked through the streets in the daytime, you think Doc's celebrate."
"What's celebrate?" Eddie asked.
"That's when you can't get no dame," said Mack. 12
"I thought it was a kind of party," said Jones.

Plainsong and Gregorian music are associated with Doc's shadowy female callers. The idea of the party for Doc is born in this confusion between "celebrate" and "celibate."

Crucial to Cannery Row is the "Death by Water" motif of The Waste Land. Doc, we learn, "has one great fear—that of getting his head wet, so that summer or winter he ordinarily wears a rain hat. He will wade in a tide pool up to the chest without feeling damp, but a drop of rain water on his head makes him panicky." The negative undertow of the novel reaches its greatest momentum when Doc finds the dead girl while he is hunting for octopi near La Jolla:

Between two weeded rocks on the barrier Doc saw a flash of white under water and then the floating weed covered it. He climbed to the place over the slippery rocks, held himself firmly, and gently reached down and parted the brown algae. Then he grew rigid. A girl's face looked up at him, a pretty, pale girl with dark hair. The eyes were open and clear and the face was firm and the hair washed gently about her head. The body was out of sight, caught in the crevice. The lips were slightly parted and the teeth showed and on the face was only comfort and rest. 13

This episode is the emotional equivalent in Cannery Row to the fourth section, "Death by Water," of The Waste Land.

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

12 Cannery Row, p. 26. 13 Ibid., pp. 16-7, 68.
Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall
as you. 14

Although the corpse of the girl Doc finds wedged between the
rocks of the outer barrier is still beautiful, like Belladonna,
the Lady of the Rocks, who is mentioned with the Phoenician
sailor in the fortune told by Madame Sosostris in the first
section of The Waste Land, there can be no doubt what will
happen to the corpse if it is not recovered immediately. When
Doc tells the stranger on the beach about the body, the man
says, "Give you a shock, did it? Is it--bad? Rotten or eat up?"
Describing the tide pools elsewhere, Steinbeck writes
that at "the bottoms lie the incredible refuse of the sea,
shells broken and chipped and bits of skeleton, claws, the
whole sea bottom a fantastic cemetery on which the living
scamper and scramble." 15

In opposition to the doomed quest in the waste land
is the theme of transcendence which takes two distinct forms
in the parallel endeavors of the contrasting characters Mack
and Doc. Mack attains a degree of mock transcendence which
is comic and also temporary because he does not truly rise
above society's limitations but merely reverses society's
expectations. Much of the satire in Cannery Row springs from

14 T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays (New York:

15 Cannery Row, pp. 69, 67.
this other-side-of-the-looking-glass reversal of the normal, the routine, and the anticipated. On the great safari in search of that least vicious of wild beasts, the frog, the boys find that the borrowed truck is unable to climb hills in its faulty low gear, so they must drive in reverse gear, traveling backward up the slopes. At the pond Mack's cunning rivals that of Ulysses. The mighty hunters take the frogs by surprise when they reverse the usual method of catching frogs. Instead of approaching the quarry from the land, Mack leads his warriors into the water, driving the frogs ahead of them. The frogs then must reverse their instinctive means of escaping danger and must jump from water to land instead of from land to water. Another of Mack's acts of reversing standard procedure is his preparation for the party for Doc. The guest of honor does not attend the party because he has not been invited. The prostitutes of the Bear Flag Restaurant are the female counterparts of Mack and his friends because they too regularly reverse routine patterns. They wear fancy formal gowns when they begin their working nights, but they don simple street dresses when they go to parties. The girls converse with their clients within the privacy of bedrooms, but they do not address the same men if they meet them on the street. The efforts of Mack and the boys, and of Dora and the girls, are self-defeating because, since they live by reversing society's norms, they are basically as dependent upon those standards as are the docile conformists who follow
the rules faithfully. The residents of the Palace Flophouse and the Bear Flag Restaurant must learn what they should not do before determining what they will do.

Mack tried to lead a conventional life and he failed. Then he tried to lead an unconventional life and he failed again. He reviews his past when he explains to Doc how the laboratory and its contents were wrecked at the first party:

"It don't do no good to say I'm sorry. I been sorry all my life. This ain't no new thing. It's always like this." He swallowed deeply from his glass. "I had a wife," Mack said. "Same thing. Ever' thing I done turned sour. She couldn't stand it any more. If I done a good thing it got poisoned up some way. If I give her a present there was something wrong with it. She only got hurt from me. She couldn't stand it no more. Same thing ever' place 'til I just got to clowning. I don't do nothin' but clown no more. Try to make the boys laugh."\(^{16}\)

Mack succeeds in making the boys laugh, and he succeeds in making the reader laugh, but his attempts to transcend by strolling through the looking glass do not succeed, and Mack gradually becomes less important to the story. When the final party is given for Doc, Dora Flood is actually the originator of the idea, and it is Doc himself who makes most of the preparations, surreptitiously giving a surprise birthday party for himself on a day that is not his birthday.

Doc essays a far more creative form of transcendence than Mack, and it is his approach that strongly resembles Thoreau's. Doc's starting premise is the same as that of

\(^{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 82.$
Thoreau who writes in Walden, "By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent." And Doc agrees with Thoreau's statement, "Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous." Doc does not try to turn the world inside out as Mack does but instead, like Thoreau, he strives to maintain himself independently at a minimum level of economic activity within society. The goal shared by Thoreau and Doc is "Simplify, simplify." Both men are passionate naturalists observing and extolling the complicated workings of nature at their doorsteps, and each makes his home at the edge of a body of water about which his life is ordered. Doc tries earnestly to lead an inspired, simple life, but some of the humor of Cannery Row results from Steinbeck's burlesque of the traditional mode of transcendence through purity of mind and body. Where Thoreau sings the praises of clear, pure water, Doc rhapsodizes over the delights of beer and whiskey. Although both Thoreau and Doc have their Sanskrit scriptures, Thoreau's is the Bhagavad Gita and Doc's is the poem "Black Marigolds." Thoreau is steadfastly devoted to chastity, and Doc is just as steadfastly devoted to concupiscence. If Thoreau has two chairs in his cabin for company, Doc has a bed.

17 Henry David Thoreau, The Writings of Henry David Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 1, 211, 151, 144.
In his essay *Nature*, a cornerstone of his idealism, Ralph Waldo Emerson posits a symbolic theory of language:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

Steinbeck presents in *Cannery Row* a theory closely related to Emerson's: "The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into fantastic patterns. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken on the shimmer of the green world." Beauty thus exists despite the object of contemplation. Again his attitude is similar to the ideas of Thoreau: "Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours even in a poor-house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the alms-house as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snows melt before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace." Doc sees nature as a reflection of his spirit and his reverence, an outlook that Mack and the boys can never comprehend. One day when Hazel is assisting Doc

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collect starfish they come upon hundreds of black stink bugs. Hazel asks Doc why the bugs stick their tails up into the air, and Doc replies, "I think they're praying." 21

As in The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck makes use of interchapters to achieve dramatic counterpoint in Cannery Row. Many of the main chapters present the thesis of the possibility of Doc's attaining transcendence, but many of the interchapters dramatize the impossibility of transcendence, and they thus slowly and relentlessly erode the foundations of the hope for perfection. An examination of some of these interchapters will illustrate their negative and discordant effect. Chapter 4 tells the story of the lonely old Chinaman who, like Doc, perhaps once heard a different drummer. "Some people thought he was God and very old people thought he was Death and children thought he was a very funny old Chinaman, as children always think anything old and strange is funny. But the children did not taunt him or shout at him as they should for he carried a little cloud of fear about with him." Chapter 10 introduces Frankie, and the tragedy of his relationship with Doc is foreshadowed when he spills the drink on Doc's guest and flees to his cave in the box in the basement. Other chapters project the futility of man's attempting to rise above the limitations of his animal body. Chapter 12 tells of the boy and dog who find the intestines of the

21 Cannery Row, p. 23.
humorist Josh Billings after he has been embalmed. Henri the painter, in Chapter 22, keeps losing his female companions because he has no toilet aboard the ship that is his home. Chapter 19 contains the account of the "flag-pole skater" who lives and skates on the tiny platform atop the steel pole in front of Homan's Department Store. Richard comes one night to the base of the flagpole to ask the skater a question:

He cupped his hand and called huskily, "Hey!" There was no answer. "Hey!" he called louder and looked around to see if the cops had come out of their place beside the bank. Down from the sky came a surly reply: "What do you want?"

Richard cupped his hands again. "How--how do you--go to the toilet?"

"I've got a can up here," said the voice. 22

Thoreau finds life in his pond: "Walden was dead and is alive again." 23 But Doc finds death in the Pacific Ocean, the body of the beautiful girl wedged between the rocks. Although the girl is dead, Darling, the Flophouse dog, recovers from her illness and lives. Her recovery marks the beginning of a period of rebirth and resurrection that is like the final pages of Walden except that Steinbeck's tone is that of the mock heroic:

At last a crack had developed in the wall of evil. There were evidences of it everywhere. The purse-seiner was hauled back into the water and floated. Word came down to Dora that it was all right to open up the Bear Flag. Earl Wakefield caught a sculpin with

22 Ibid., pp. 14, 71.

23 Thoreau, The Writings, I, 480.
two heads and sold it to the museum for eight dollars. The wall of evil and of waiting was broken. It broke away in chunks. The curtains were drawn at the laboratory that night and Gregorian music played until two o'clock and then the music stopped and no one came out. Some force wrought with Lee Chong's heart and all in an Oriental moment he forgave Mack and the boys and wrote off the frog debt which had been a monetary headache from the beginning. . . . Lee's visit coincided with the first destructive healthy impulse Darling had since her illness.24

It is ironic in this time of birth and rebirth that the focal point is the dog upon which all the boys of the Palace Flophouse lavish their attention. The situation recalls that in *Of Mice and Men* in which Lennie and Candy and Slim expend all their affection upon animals.

In the second half of *Cannery Row* one of the themes proclaims awakening and rebirth with allusions to fertility and progeny that suggests the springtime of the year and the springtime of life that glow in the last sections of *Walden*. But Doc's "birthday" party is in October, not the spring, and a clashing theme, augmented with references to the deaths of children, hints that this is indeed the autumn of the year and the autumn of Doc's life. Chapter 21 opens with a view of the white rats in the laboratory: "In the corner of a separate cage a mother rat lay over her litter of blind naked children and let them suckle and the mother stared about nervously and fiercely." In Chapter 22 Henri has his hallucination about the mutilation of a child:

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24 *Cannery Row*, p. 93.
He let his eye wander cautiously up and across the cabin and there on the other side sat a devilish young man, a dark handsome young man. . . . And beside him sat a golden-haired little boy, hardly more than a baby. The man looked down at the baby and the baby looked back and laughed delightedly as though something wonderful were about to happen. . . . From his upper left vest pocket he took an old-fashioned straight-edged razor. He opened it and indicated the child with a gesture of his head. He put a hand among the curls and the baby laughed gleefully and then the man tilted the chin and cut the baby's throat and the baby went right on laughing. But Henri was howling with terror. It took him a long time to realize that neither the man nor the baby was there.

In Chapter 24 Mary Talbot gives a "pregnancy party." In Chapter 26 young Joey tells his companion Willard how Joey's father killed himself by swallowing rat poison. The boys also discuss Doc:

Joey said, "You know, this guy in here got babies in bottles."
"What kind of babies?" Willard asked.
"Regular babies, only before they're borned."
"I don't believe it," said Willard.
"Well, it's true. The Sprague kid seen them and he says they ain't no bigger than this and they got little hands and feet and eyes."25

In Chapter 28 Frankie breaks the window of the jewelry store to steal a gift for Doc, a black onyx clock weighing fifty pounds. Frankie is caught, and Doc must agree with the police chief who insists Frankie must be committed to an institution before he reaches puberty. Thus Doc loses his substitute son whose last words are "I love you."

The penultimate chapter is the story of the gopher that establishes himself in a comfortable and secure burrow.

25Ibid., pp. 79, 85, 102.
in Cannery Row. His life is idyllic in his cave except for the fact that his whistles bring him no female to bear the family he desires. With profound regret the gopher at last decides he must move to the dangerous flower gardens where he will be threatened constantly by poison bait and cats, but where he will find a mate and raise his children. Warren French maintains that the gopher is introduced as a foil to Doc and that "the chapter be misread if it is taken as the same kind of 'beast fable' as the allegory of the land turtle (Chapter 3) in The Grapes of Wrath, which it superficially resembles. . . . The gopher chapter, the thirty-first, is not an allegorical comment on man like the turtle episode in the earlier novel; the gopher here is a gopher; and the point of the chapter is that the creature who lives merely by physical sensations must sacrifice security to the satisfaction of its physical desire."26 French offers a decidedly transcendental interpretation of the gopher story, but I believe the ending of Cannery Row is ambiguous and that an equally strong, or even stronger, case can be made for an antitranscendental reading of the chapter. Steinbeck's repeated use of animal tales to foreshadow or comment upon the actions of human beings makes it unlikely that this gopher is merely a gopher any more than the turtle in The Grapes of Wrath is merely a turtle. The fable can also mean that the gopher must forget

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26 French, John Steinbeck, p. 134.
his efforts to transcend his elemental gopher-ness, he must forsake his lovely Walden of a cave, and he must go out into the awful, poisoned world to live and die. The allegorical gopher suggests that, although Doc's attempts to transcend his condition have met with fleeting moments of triumph, the way of the saint is sterile, even the way of a saint who is "concupiscent as a rabbit and gentle as hell." Doc has remained too long in the doldrums of Cannery Row. Time is running out as Frankie had tried to tell him with the gift of a clock, and as the entire community has tried to tell him with the autumnal birthday party.

The dead girl in the ocean is recalled before the final party when Doc plays Pavane to a Dead Princess on his repaired phonograph, and during the festivities when he reads from "Black Marigolds," a translation of a Sanskrit poem about "my lost girl." The next morning Doc plays the Gregorian music once again and recites more lines from "Black Marigolds." This concluding chapter is as ambiguous as the preceding one. Perhaps, as French claims, Doc "has learned with the assistance of art to triumph over his immediate surroundings." It is also possible that the Gregorian songs are mementos of the Age of Faith like the lines from Dante in The Waste Land, and that the stanzas from "Black Marigolds"...
Marigolds" resemble the scraps of Sanskrit in *The Waste Land*, and that Doc can only say, along with the speaker at the end of *The Waste Land*, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins."

The Pacific Ocean symbolizes death on Steinbeck's landscape. When Henry Morgan in *Cup of Gold* reaches the Pacific and captures the city of Panama, a part of him dies as he confronts and fails to win the mysterious woman called Santa Roja. When Joseph and Thomas Wayne cross the ridge and visit the Pacific shore for the first time in *To a God Unknown*, they meet the old man who nightly sacrifices a pig or rabbit or bird as the sun disappears into the sea. The narrator says in *East of Eden*, "I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I cannot say, unless it could be the morning came from the peaks of the Gabilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias. It may be that the birth and death of day has some part in my feelings about the two ranges of mountains."29

*Cannery Row* is Steinbeck's first novel in which Anglo-Saxon Americans from the East dwell at the shore of the sea. His next book, *The Pearl*, is about death from the depths of the sea, the magnificent pearl that destroys everything until it is returned to the waters from which it came. After *Cannery Row* and *The Pearl*, Steinbeck began to weld more

29East of Eden, p. 1.
optimistic endings on his material. *Sweet Thursday*, for example, is in many ways a retelling of *Cannery Row*, but now the boys from the Palace Flophouse succeed in doing "something nice" for Doc: they find him a wife, Suzy, the reformed prostitute, who attends the masquerade costumed as Snow White because she had not really been dead, like the girl on the reef, but only asleep morally. And Hazel, the son figure of *Sweet Thursday*, is not sacrificed like Frankie of *Cannery Row*, but is saved. There is even talk of his becoming president.

The Chinese influence in Steinbeck's later novels is almost superhuman, for China is the region literally beyond the Pacific Ocean and symbolically beyond death. The invisible power in *Sweet Thursday* is Lee Chong who has returned to his homeland; the controlling power of *East of Eden* is Lee, the Chinese servant-scholar; and the saving power in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is the Chinese talisman from the curio cabinet of the Hawley home.

But there is no such positive saving grace in *Cannery Row*, only the dissonance of the dual themes of the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection as they twist and interweave through the final chord. Doc recites three more stanzas from "Black Marigolds." "He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand." Whether these are tears of joy or sadness we do not know. "And the white rats scampered and scrambled in their cages. And behind the glass the rattlesnakes lay still and stared into space with their dusty
frowning eyes." Perhaps this picture signifies the order Doc has successfully imposed upon his environment with everything in its rightful place. Or perhaps it means that the rats can be active and safe only within their artificially limited areas of unnatural security, like the gopher in his Cannery Row burrow, and like Doc in his Cannery Row laboratory, and like Thoreau at, to use his pun, "Walled-in Pond." Outside are the snakes and the poison and death. Doc can hear the waves of the insistent Pacific beating under the piles. Again the stanzas from "Black Marigolds" recall the dead body in the sea with "the salt of the whispers of my girl" and "wanton as water." The last words he recites are, "I have had full in my eyes from off my girl / The whitest pouring of eternal light," and they evoke the first glimpse of the corpse, "a flash of white under water." When he found the body its "lips were slightly parted and the teeth showed and on the face was only comfort and rest." 30 The last line of The Waste Land is "Shantih shantih shantih," and Eliot explains in his notes that the Sanskrit word may be translated as "the Peace which passeth understanding." Pacific means peaceful or peace-making, and perhaps the "comfort and rest" on the face of the beautiful dead girl suggests that in Cannery Row the only lasting peace that man can attain is the peace which passeth all understanding and is death.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

An understanding of the important similarities in Steinbeck's assorted novels in various modes is necessary to appreciate his technique. When one comprehends that the epics and short stories, the comedies and tragedies, the objective and subjective novels, all contain common ideas and subject matter, one is able to discern the true versatility of his work, the almost endless variations upon themes. A knowledge of the pervasive duality in his themes, journey patterns, characterizations, symbols, and mythic sources, is essential in explaining why Steinbeck's finest novels are those of his middle period. In these he found, to use Eliot's popular phrase, his perfect objective correlative--the wanderings of the migrant, the vagrant, and the fugitive. These people, the dispossessed and the unattached, are at the mercy of the alternating winds of opposing themes. The path of the saint and the trail of the animal lie before them. They may move naturally on the symbolic landscape from cave to house and from house to cave.

The novels of John Steinbeck's major phase are painfully honest explorations of the conflicting themes of the
validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection.
The novels of this period are never slanted in order to achieve
a cheap and easy victory for either side of the eternal argu-
ment. Their final pages, consequently, are saturated with
ambiguity and irony. In Tortilla Flat, is Danny killed by an
opponent worthy of Danny, does he commit suicide, or does he
fall into the gulch when going to relieve himself? In In
Dubious Battle, has Mac failed in his training of Jim who lies
dead at his feet or has he succeeded all too well? In Of Mice
and Men, does George, as he shoots Lennie at the base of his
skull, fail in his role as his brother's keeper or does he
triumph? In The Grapes of Wrath, are the Joads moving slowly
forward towards ultimate victory as Casy prophesied or are
they slipping slowly backwards in defeat? In Cannery Row,
does Doc find hopeful joy or bitter sadness? Although pessi-
\text{ism probably outweighs optimism in the grand final chords of}
these novels, their great strength results from the vigor of
the clash between opposing forces.

After Cannery Row comes The Pearl in which pessimism
overwhelms hope of any kind. Steinbeck touches the nadir of
despair. The pull of good is so weak and the force of
depravity is so strong that man's suffering is almost unbear-
able. Kino and Juana are nearly catatonic as they return to
their village and throw the pearl back into the gulf. In the
revisionist cycle that follows—The Wayward Bus, Burning
Bright, East of Eden and Sweet Thursday—Steinbeck tries
earnestly to affix happy endings onto his material, but this
thematic manipulation is not consistent with his continued use
of unresolved duality on the other levels of his fiction. In
these revisionist works, he does succeed in saving the son or
apprentice figure from death, although often with strange
complications. In *Burning Bright*, Joe Saul accepts Mordeen's
child by Victor as his son, but Mordeen and Friend Ed kill the
natural father. Since Victor is Joe Saul's apprentice, the
apprentice is sacrificed as the son is saved. Harmony does
not come easily, or logically to an author who views life as
a dissonant symphony.

At this period in his life and career, Steinbeck is
trying to overcome the pessimism that seems his natural bent.
He writes in *Journal of a Novel*:

Monday, Monday--the gateway of the week. I can
remember Monday in Salinas. How I hated it! My will
toward death was very great when I was growing up. I
remember the screened window of my room looking out
on the grey fog and beyond that a grey school and a
grey week--and I hated having to pass the gateway
into the week. It is not so now. I look forward to
Mondays. The death wish is not so strong as it used
to be and maybe some time it will disappear entirely.
Or maybe this is too much to hope for.

He returns to the same subject a few days later:

I have no will to die but I can remember no time from
earliest childhood until this morning when I would
not have preferred never to have existed. No moment
of joy or excitement or sharp pain or sorrow has ever
made me want to be alive if the opposite were possible.
You see it is no longing for death but a kind of hunger
never to have lived. The few times I have stated this
I have been attacked with everything from straight
disbelief to a kind of hatred as though I were a
traitor to life. And perhaps I am. But my feeling is not based on thought whatever. It lies far below the lighted levels of thought, somewhere in the blackness from which impulses arise. ¹

Steinbeck's philosophy, sincere and painful, in his novels of the 1930's and early 1940's is an excellent philosophy to die by, but a difficult one to live by and raise children by. The births of his sons in 1944 and 1946 coincide with his efforts to revise his approach and to eliminate the sacrifice of the son/apprentice figure.

Steinbeck's last two novels mark a change in course and are expressions of disillusionment. The Short Reign of Pippin IV is an inconsequential fantasy, but The Winter of Our Discontent is a serious and fascinating work, a good example of a type of novel common in the 1950's and 1960's centered upon the misadventures of a confused and defeated anti-hero. With his last book, Steinbeck returned to many of the techniques which had proved valuable in his novels of the thirties, but the tension is weak. Just as the impossibility of perfection and the vision of evil were absent from Sweet Thursday of the fifties, so the possibility of transcendence is missing in The Winter of Our Discontent. Comparing Ethan Hawley with the principal characters of the novels of Steinbeck's major phase throws his earlier achievements into bold relief. In Jim Nolan and George Milton and Tom Joad, he created legitimate American heroes, no mean accomplishment in

the century of the anti-hero.

Steinbeck's later novels lack the strong, natural power of his earlier works. He has often and regularly been accused of being a primitivist, a charge I find inexplicable because he is, in reality, anti-primitive. He certainly does create memorable primitive characters like Lennie who combine great physical strength with a great capacity for love. And the reader, like Doc, cannot soon forget Frankie's last words to his benefactor before being taken away to be confined in an institution. "I love you," Frankie said. But Steinbeck never fails to conclude that this great primitive force cannot continue unchecked in spite of its positive values. Tularecito must be committed to an asylum, Lennie must be destroyed, Frankie must be put away. After the loss of their primitive companions, Franklin Gomez, George, and Doc continue on their ways through life, sadder and weaker, but under control. These primitive individuals represent, on another level of meaning, the primitive power in every human being which must be either controlled or destroyed in the best interest of the total personality and the community. The sacrifice is great but the sacrifice is necessary in order to live. Perhaps Steinbeck's early primitive creative power that he could not control as he wished to control it, that led him into black depressing truths, had to be destroyed that he might live.
Steinbeck produced no later works comparable to those of his major phase that have been discussed in detail in this study. He writes in *The Pastures of Heaven* that "most lives extend in a curve. There is a rise of ambition, a rounded peak of maturity, a gentle downward slope of disillusionment and last a flattened grade of waiting for death."^2^ Most artistic careers also extend in curves. The Verdis and the Yeatses who attain creative heights in old age are the magnificent exceptions. Steinbeck followed the routine pattern resembling that of many novelists from Henry Fielding to Ernest Hemingway. It is true, unfortunately, that Steinbeck's poorer novels are worse than the weaker compositions of most good novelists. He definitely lacked the critical facility needed for judging his own work. In the wide range of quality within his works, he resembles Thomas Hardy who wrote some of the finest poetry of his time as well as some of the worst. Just as Hardy's bad verse does not detract from our appreciation of "Neutral Tones" and "The Darkling Thrush," so *Burning Bright* and *Sweet Thursday* should not influence our evaluation of *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* or hinder our appreciation of these masterpieces.

When Steinbeck's writing is bad, it is very, very bad, but when it is good it is excellent, as I have attempted to prove in this study of his fiction. His better novels are

subtly but powerfully energized by the tensions between his clashing themes concerning the nature of man, the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection. The dual themes represent opposing strains in American literature, the Puritan insistence upon the natural depravity of man and the Emersonian assurance of the possibility of transcendence. This fundamental duality is reflected on all levels of his fiction and is evident in the pairs of contrasting male characters, the polarity of characterizations, the opposing sets of symbols, the dichotomy of house and cave upon the symbolic landscape, and the confused goals of the quests undertaken by the characters. In his finest novels, this multilevel duality results in the dissonance that echoes the mixed American heritage and in the ambiguity that haunts men torn between two violently conflicting views of mankind. In his finest novels, this multilevel duality results in symphonic development that enriches his writing and in depth of perception that heightens its effectiveness. In his finest novels, this multilevel duality results in great art.
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The dissertation submitted by Raymond Griffith has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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