John Steinbeck : His art and Ideas

Dr. Bhavna Gupta

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Dedicated to My Mother -in -Law

Smt. Shyama Gupta

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Foreword

Dr. (Mrs.) Bhavna Gupta is known to me for about 35 years. During all these years, I found her as genuine in her behavior as in her studies. She was a hardworking student at school as well as college level. The research articles published in journals and research papers presented in national and international seminars and conferences cover a wide range of studies and prove her a keen researcher.

Her personality and character reflect moral values and sophisticated manners of highly reputed and well-known *kaka hathrasi family* to which she has the privilege to belong.

Present book is the reflection of the author's original ideas and deep study of the subject which will enlighten the future scholars in their studies and research work.

I wish her a successful and bright future.

(Dr. Abha Sharma)
Associate Professor
Dept. of English
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Acknowledgement

First of all I would like to thank Dr. Vinod kumar Maheshwari, associate professor, Deptt. Of English, Agra College, Agra, who has been the guiding star all through this work.

I will forever be indebted to my husband Capt. R.K. Gupta, for constantly encouraging and coaxing me to complete this work. My childhood friend Dr. Abha Agrawal, associate professor, Deptt. Of English, Agra College, Agra has been the greatest inspiration in this Endeavour of mine. My family and my parents were always there to assist me and motivating me. I am extremely thankful to Dr.Manisha Shukla because without her constant support, I was unable to complete this book.

I seek blessings of the Almighty.

Hope this book will be of some help to the research scholars and learners.

Bhavna gupta.

I
Introduction

John Steinbeck, a 20th century novelist was one of the best known American novelists of the mid-20th century. He was born in Salinas, California on February 27, 1902 and grew up in the valley itself. He can be defined as the writer in the mode of twenties. He was the recipient of numerous awards including the Nobel Prize. He was perhaps the best author of his time. Being a conservative he valued old America. As a youth he worked as a ranch hand and fruit picker. All of his experiences and knowledge are shown in all his works. He frequently dealt with the topic of the homeless and the hopeless in the fast-changing America.

Steinbeck worked hard throughout his life. Nothing came to him very easily. He went through many trials in his lifetime. His experiences of life were not good. But they all helped him in his writings. He was able to write about real people and real experiences.

As John Steinbeck was developing as a writer, events were taking place in the United States of America. In October 1929 the U.S. stock market crashed, sparking the Great Depression. Banks collapsed. Businesses closed. By 1933, a quarter of the population was unemployed. Then environmental catastrophe struck as well. From 1930 to 1936, severe drought plagued the Great Plains of the American Midwest, which at the time was mostly farmland. The drought killed crops, and with no plants to

hold down the soil, the dry dirt swirled up into suffocating dust storms when the winds kicked in. The entire region became known as the Dust Bowl. Farmers' crops were destroyed, and with nothing to sell, many lost their homes and farms. They were forced to migrate in search of work. Men who had once been their own bosses were now forced to work for wages on other people's farms, often in exploitative conditions. During the World War II, Steinbeck was a war correspondent for the Herald Tribune in Europe. This is illustrated in his most successful novel titled *The Grapes of Wrath.*

The most remarkable thing about Steinbeck is that it accomplishes a beautiful fusion and synthesis of art and ideas in his novels. He uses the technique of interchapters, symbolism, imagery, allegory, etc. casting them all into beautiful artistic moulds to turn out a novel. The richness and variety of Steinbeck's fiction prevents any meaningful thematic grouping of his novels. This is the reason that most of Steinbeck's critics have preferred to discuss each novel individually. The themes which represent the idea of the novelist are man's fate and his art spans the gamut of human emotion from mirth to anguish, from child-birth to old age.

When he died in 1968 he left behind three of his masterpieces. *In Dubious Battle* (1936), a strike novel; *Of Mice and Men* (1937), dealing with life of the migratory labourers; *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), 'a kind of folk-epic'; three of the best comedies, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), narrating the life of the poisons', *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954), both dealing with the carefree life of the bums; two volumes of short stories, *The Long Valley* (1938) and *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932); two novels dealing with contemporary middle class society, *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961); two others dealing with the problems of evil or sin, *The Pearl* (1947) and *East of Eden* (1952); besides his early novels, *Cup of Gold* (1929), a historical romance, and *To a God Unknown* (1933), a myth; and minor creations like *The Red*

Pony (1937), and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* (1957). "A marvelous performance, indeed"; Edmund Wilson aptly remarks, "When his curtain goes up, he always puts on a different kind of show."[1*]

Going through the works of Steinbeck one finds that he has an amazing command over prose. It is rather difficult to put Steinbeck's prose style under any one particular head as he has employed different styles in his works. The style varies from novel to novel, yet we find it to be firmly wedded to the material of the novel. This is one of the achievements of Steinbeck. As Lisca says, "Steinbeck has demonstrated the variety of prose styles that he could weld into the very meaning of the novel."[1] Steinbeck's prose style has been already discussed, in relation to the theme of the particular novel, at appropriate places in the thesis. Some of the salient points of Steinbeck's prose style along with the language he employs for his different novels will be considered here.

The contrast between the prose styles of different novels can be well studied by taking into consideration to of his novels, namely, *Tortilla Flat* and *In Dubious Battle*. Not only the prose style different in these novels, but it reveals the author's grasp over the materials, as he employs a particular kind of prose style and also a particular language for each of these novels.

In *Tortilla Flat* Steinbeck has given to the characters an artificial language. The language and style in this novel helps to build a special atmosphere. In spite of the fact that the no world is an imaginary one, Steinbeck is able to induce a sort of suspension of disbelief and make us believe in that world by means of the style he employs here. In this connection, it is interesting to note what Mark Schorer says on prose style as an aspect of

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*1. Edmund Wilson, Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties (The Noonday Press New York, 1950), p.36

form: "As for the resources of language, these, somehow, we almost never think of as part of the technique of fiction-language as used to create a certain texture and tone which in themselves state and define them as and meanings."[2] This function of language is very important in *Tortilla Flat*, as it helps in the evolution of the theme of the novel.

On the other hand in *In Dubious Battle* Steinbeck employs a prose style which is quite distinct from *Tortilla Flat*. It is objective in the sense that it is harsh, keeping to particulars only and catalogue-like in its complete objectivity. It is employed in presenting every minute detail in the novel. It presents scenes of great violence with precision and scientific objectivity. This cold prose is even employed to describe more ordinary actions: "Jim stepped to the washstand in the corner and washed his hands and combed water through his hair with his fingers. Looking into the mirror fastened across the corner of the room above the washstand, he peered into his own gray eyes for a moment. From an inside pocket he took a comb fitted with a pocket clip and combed his straight brown hair, and parted it neatly on the side. He wore a dark suite and a gray flannel shirt, open at the throat."[3] The attention to detail, avoidance of authorial comment and moral judgment are characteristic of the naturalistic school of writing. We find examples of it in Steinbeck's work. The objectivity of this prose style is further strengthened by the novel's dramatic presentation of its materials. Steinbeck says that, "It (*In Dubious Battle*) is mostly done in dialogue thus permitting many varying opinions but keeping out any author's opinion….." A reader of this novel perceives the characters only as they speak or execute physical movements. This creates a sort of visual image in the mind of a reader without making the reader participate in the actual events in the novel. It is as if we become detached spectators of a framed scene. This effect is achieved through abstraction. This is the reason why the author is successful here in introducing scenes of violence in the novel without generating any sense of pity or horror in the reader. Actually the reader is under the spell

of the scientific precision of details and thus he is saved from the actual horror in the scene. Another distinctive feature of this novel is that, as in *Tortilla Flat*, here too, Steinbeck has given his characters a language of their own. Steinbeck has evolved a sort of workman's language as spoken by them generally. Again it helps to create an atmosphere as the novel deals mainly with the strike of common workers. Steinbeck is conscious of this as it is made clear from the various letters, he wrote to his agents in this connection. In one of the letters he says: "I've used only those expressions that are commonly used. I hope it won't be necessary to remove them. To try to reproduce the speech of these people and to clean it up, is to make it sound stiff, unnatural and emasculated. I think it is vulgar only in sense (JS-MO, Ca. Feb., 1935)."[4]

The scientific objectivity of style is further employed in detail in another of Steinbeck's novels, *The Wayward Bus*. Here, too, Steinbeck creates a sort of visual perception for his readers. Author's roving camera eye leaves no detail from its view: The lunch rooms, the bus, the passengers, the ladies' room – all are subjected to this treatment. Even the characters' physical actions are described so minutely that a visual picture is formed in the readers mind: "He (Juan) went into the bedroom. He slipped the shoulder straps of his overalls and let the pants fall down round his shoes. He had on shorts with narrow blue stripes. He peeled his blue Chambery shirt over his head and kicked off his moccasins and stepped out of the overalls, leaving shoes and socks and overalls in a pile on the floor."[5]

Steinbeck employs this sort of particular prose style in both of his novels – *In Dubious Battle* and *The Wayward Bus* for objective reasons. The reader's emotions of pity, sympathy and identification with the characters are not stirred in these works to the extent that they are in Steinbeck's other works.

What Steinbeck achieves, through this sort of prose style, is a kind of distance between the reader and the characters on one hand, and on the other between the reader and the events of his

novel. T.K. Whipple calls this aloofness "the middle distance". One enjoys the visual perception, yet remains aloof from the actual happening. Whereas in the Jody stories, for example, this effect of aloofness is created by a lyric prose which surrounds violence with a pastoral atmosphere, the prose of *In Dubious Battle* is object and delineates acts of violence with scientific precision. This happens in a boxing match where one gets engrossed in the methodical way of boxing and thus escapes the actual horror. This is the reason that in *In Dubious Battle* one does not feel the actual horror of the punching of the small boy by the strike leader Mac. Steinbeck describes the beating scene with a cold, harsh prose which of course does not soften the violence but neither does it exploit it. It seems emotion plays a vital role in generating sense of horror and pity. In *Pastures of Heaven*, Raymond is shown as being fond of hangings; but he is not a cruel man nor a sadist: "The hanging itself was not the important part, it was the sharp, keen air of the whole proceeding that impressed him….." But another character, Burt Munroe, has some other ideas regarding violence. He enjoys shivering at the horrible images of suffering which his mind readily conjures up. He conveys some of his distorted ideas to Raymond, who now develops an idea of horror for hangings. By employing objective prose style, concentrating on details Steinbeck is thus successful in creating a sort of distance which ensures that there is no emotional participation of his readers. He is thus able to show scenes of great violence in his works without generating any sense of horror. But this is not always so; whenever he wants to arouse the sympathy or pity of his readers, he takes care not to establish this distance between the characters and the readers. There is then actual emotional participation of the reader at such places. We may recall here the scene, In *In Dubious Battle*, where Mac exhibits the bleeding wounds of his fallen comrade and the oratory that follows it. The reader actually feels the participation in the actual proceedings, and a sense of hatred is generated for the tyrants. Thus it becomes clear that Steinbeck employs this technique of 'middle distance'

only for special purposes, and that he is successful in its employment.

Another distinctive feature of Steinbeck's prose style is its lyrical quality. This is the outcome of his personal attachment to rural California. We find in the descriptions of ordinary, everyday life, the novelist's romantic assertion of its beauty. Rural life may be elemental and primitive, yet it has its own charm and poetry. Steinbeck distinguishes himself from other American writers by his emotional participation in the lives of these rustics, and he portrays them with full sympathy. The nostalgia for the primitive impels him to write emotionally and this in turn imparts a sort of lyrical quality to this work. This is the reason why one critic considers Steinbeck "as a writer of ballads in prose of California folk life." This lyrical quality is most evident in the novels where he deals with California landscape as in *Pastures of Heaven* and the Jody stories. But it is most evident in *Of Mice and Men*. Actually *Of Mice and Men* is a lyrical story of two simple field workers of Salinas Valley in California, and their heart-aching hunger for a bit of land. In this novel Steinbeck's use of colloquial prose rhythms further heightens the lyrical effect of the style. He uses certain racy and colloquial words and sentences, and they are so artistically repeated that they sink into the readers mind as refrains in a song. Such examples as 'I like beans with ketchup', 'An' live off the fatta the lan', 'An' have rabbits', 'This ain't no good place. I wanna get out here', attain a sort of poetic significance as well as epic quality.

Not only does he describes the natives in poetic prose but presents the California landscape in a prose that is highly charged with imagery and poetry. He evolves a sort of 'mood prose', which like mood music, describes the setting and dictates the atmosphere, as for instance in this passage:

"The day was going fast now. Only the tops of the Babilan Mountains flamed with the light of the sun that had gone from the valley. A water snake slipped along on the pool, its head held

up like a little periscope. The reeds jerked slightly in the current. Far off toward the high-way a man shouted something and another man shouted back. The sycamore limbs rusted under a little wind that died immediately."[6]

An epic is related in an elevated style, like Milton's grand style in *Paradise Lost*. But, unlike the traditional poetic epics of the past, which can afford to sustain a particular style throughout the work, a prose epic normally has to rely upon a variety of styles to suit its various needs. It has to be appropriate to the speaker, the occasion and the dignity of its literary genre. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck has tried to blend different styles so as to make the whole look elevated, and at the same time, relevant to his contemporary material.

Referring to Steinbeck's masterful command of prose styles, Peter Lisca has noted that :

'In his novels after *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck had demonstrated the variety of prose styles that he could weld into the very meaning of a novel prose-style as different as those of *Tortilla Flat* and *In Dubious Battle*. In *The Grapes of Wrath* there is such a number of strategically employed prose styles that the novel almost amounts to a "tour de force".'[7]

The description of the drought conditions in the very opening lines of the novel gives evidence of a distinguished prose style:

'To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the grey country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. In the last part of May the sky grew pale and the clouds that had hung in high puffs for so long in the spring were dissipated. The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds

appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the grey country.'[8]

The gradual approach of drought conditions, the diminishing rains and the drying earth are described with panoramic vividness. 'The pervading structural rhythm of each sentence is echoed in the paragraph as a whole, a paragraph promising a story of epic sweep and dignity.'[9]

Steinbeck's style in such passages is greatly indebted to the Old Testament. Lisca has demonstrated this by arranging a similar passage from the novel according to phrases, in the manner of the Bates Bible:

The tractors had lights shining,/ For there is no day and night for a tractor,/And the disks turn the earth in the darkness/ And they glitter in the daylight. And when a horse stops work and goes into the barn/ There is a life and a vitality left,/ There is breathing and warmth,/ And the feet shift on the straw,/ And the jaws champ on the hay. And the ears and the eyes are alive. There is warmth of life in the barn,/ And the heat and smell of life. But when the motor of a tractor stops,/ It is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it/ Like the heat that leaves a corpse.[10]

In the words of Lisca, "Except for the terms of machinery, the passage might be one of the psalms."[11]

This elevated style is in evidence more characteristically in interchapters containing deeply philosophical passages. It lends them a dignity which their content alone could not possibly have provided. One example will suffice:

'Burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes a hot fire. Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from filching them out. Slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth.

There is a crime that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange.'[12]

The Biblical theme of humanism too gives an elevated tone to the style. There is evidence of this in casual utterances by various characters on various occasions, for example when Casy explains his notion of the Holy Spirit to Tom:

"I figgered about the Holy Spirit 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; may be that's the Holy Spirit—the human spirit – the whole shebang."[13]

or when he expresses his urge to go to the people:

"I gotta see them folks that are gone out on the road. I got a feelin' I got to see them. They gonna need help no preachin' can give 'em. Hope of Heaven when their lives ain't lived? Holy Spirit when their own spirit is downcast an' sad? They gonna need help. They got to live before they can afford to die."[14]

That rings very much like Jesus going over to the help of suffering humanity. Casy's last words are an echo of the last words of Jesus Christ. Tom too, talking to Ma about Jim Casy, reproduces the language of the Scripture:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lif' up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up:'[15]

Thus there is ample evidence of Steinbeck's use of elevated style in *The Grapes of Wrath* which leave a noticeable mark upon the overall epic manner of the novel.

But we find a change in the language and style in the later works of Steinbeck. In his earlier novels, this mastery of prose

style could be attributed to his keen sense of the idiom and rhythm of native speech, as those of the paisanos of *Tortilla Flat*, the migratory workers of *In Dubious Battle* or the native people of his California Valley, and his judgement in the choice of an appropriate narrative style, like the objective prose of *In Dubious Battle* and lyrical prose of *Of Mice and Men*. But in *East of Eden*, as in *Burning Bright*, Steinbeck is mostly interested in figurative language: "……. Tom got into a book, crawled and growled between the covers, tunneled like a mole among the thoughts, and come up with the book all over his face and hands." "Tom razed crazily through the hills like a lion in horrible pain." The book *East of Eden* abounds in such awkward expressions as "Oh, Strawberries don't taste as they used to be and the thighs of women have lost their clutch". "A bra was a strong fine breasted woman and ready and waiting to take her sacrament but waiting."

Even the characters in this novel speak a strange type of language which does not seem to be natural. At one place Samuel Hamilton, an Irish old man, says: "I'll tell you now, quiet. In a bitter night, a mustard night that was last night, a good thought came and the dark was sweetened when the day sat down. And this thought went from evening star to the late dipper on the edge of the first light – that our better spoke of. So I must invite myself." It seems every character in this novel is affected with this malady – especially the Chinese Lee, who has attended the University at Berkeley for several years, smokes opium, drinks wormwood, and loves to quote from "The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius in English translation."

Steinbeck's love for figurative language is further evident in his latest novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The book abounds in such figurative description as: "Her tweed skirt clung lovingly in against her thighs and tucked up under her proud fanny….." Ethan has more than thirty endearing names for Mary such as "lady bug", "flower feet", "pigeon flake", "holy quail", even "ablative absolute". Steinbeck has gone one more step in this novel by coining such exotic words as "yonic". Perhaps Mary

is correct when she says to Ethan" "you talk terrible when you are silly."

Technique of Interchapters :

In *Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck was faced with the problem of assimilation of the vast material that was with him. There were the adventures of the Joad family and there was also the Great Depression. Further, he had plenty of material for philosophizing on the general human condition. Hence he felt the need of a uniform structure which would enable him to present all this material. We can trace the parallel to this situation in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* where he, too, was faced with the problem of uniting the adventures of the Bezukhov, Rostov, and Balkonski families with the Napoleonic War. Percy Lubbock's comment on the structure of *War and Peace* is very significant: "I can discover no angle at which the two stories will appear to unite and merge in a single impression. Neither is subordinated to other, and there is nothing above them — to which they are both related. Nor are they placed together to illustrate a contrast; nothing results from their juxtaposition. Only from time to time, upon no apparent principle and without a world of warning one of them is dropped and the other resumed."[16] In the light of this statement, we have to see that how far Steinbeck succeeds in uniting different strains in his novel, and evolving an uniform picture.

It is rather difficult to carry two different strains simultaneously with complete harmony. But Steinbeck has made successful use of interchapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. There are in *The Grapes of Wrath* sixteen interchapters, making up a total of just under hundred pages – nearly one sixth of the book. In none of these chapters do the Joads, Wilsons, or Wainwrights appear.

The interchapters mainly amplify the actions of the Joad family. They actually put these actions on a large canvas. In this way the suffering, problems etc. of the Joads not remain personal but become those of the masses. To this purpose thirteen chapters

are largely devoted. For example, chapter five deals with the tussle between two general powers, the bank and the farmers, signify the conflict in which Joads are entangled. Similarly chapter eleven describes at length a decaying and deserted house which symbolizes all the abandoned houses in the dust bowl. Almost every aspect of Joad's adventure is enlarged in the interchapters and seen as part of the general human condition.

The remaining interchapters (19, 21 and 25) have the function of supplying historical information and background. For example, the development of land ownership and the consequent development of migrant labourers is traced in these chapters.

After going through these chapters one thing becomes certain that they are a part of a careful plan. There is a sort of inter-relationship between the material portions. The chapter dealing with migrant life on the highway appears interlinked with the narrative of Joads' actual journey.

We find that the interchapters are not only interlinked with the materials of the narrative portion but they are also finely woven in the material of the novel. The subject matter of interchapters is interwoven with that of narrative portion. The chapter about the banks, for example, comes immediately after Tom and Casy see the deserted Joad farmhouse and is itself followed by a narrative chapter particularizing many details of that chapter. The general dialogue between the banks and tenants in the interchapter is particularized by Muley in the narrative chapter: "Well, the guy that comes around talked nice as pie. 'You got to get off. It ain't my fault', 'well', I says, 'Whose fault is it? I'll go an' nut the fella'. 'It's the Shawnee Ian' an' Cattle Company. I jus' got orders'. 'Who's the Shawnee Lan' an' Cattle Company?' 'It ain't nobody. It's a company'."[17] The jalopy in the Joads' yard is like one of the similar thousands described in chapter seven. Chapter nine describes the farmers selling their household good dirt cheap. In the narrative portion we are shown Joads doing the exact thing; returning home empty handed, having sold everything for eighteen dollars – including the ten dollars they got for a team and wagon.

Thus we find that Steinbeck has been successful in the integration of his interchapters into a total structure and also in amplifying his material with the help of these interchapters.

Steinbeck again employs this technique in his novel *Cannery Row*. The book has a unifying plot in the attempt of Mac and the boys to give Doc a party, an attempt which ends in sheer disaster once, and is successful only with the noble help of Dora and the girls of Bear Flag Restaurant. But Steinbeck has fused into the narrative a large number of interchapters in the form of antecedents. In *The Grapes of Wrath* these interchapters were mainly intended for universalizing the story of Joads as well as serving the purpose of a chorus. But here it is difficult to pinpoint exactly as to which are the main chapters and which are the interchapters. This difficulty comes when the same characters are employed both in the main narrative as well as in the interchapter. But there are some interchapters which are easily distinguishable and are also related to the main narrative. Leaving these chapters, there are some six chapters which have very slight reference to the characters or narrative of the novel. Actually it becomes difficult to establish the relationship, as in these chapters there are stories which run on their own and their relation to main narrative seems obscure. One such story is the embalming and re-burial of Josh Billings. It is difficult to ascertain the exact purpose this story serves in relation to the main narrative. As Lisca has reported, one of such interchapters was not included by the publishers in the novel; "……., the publishers felt that one of the original interchapters had so little relationship to the rest of the book that they did not wish to include it. This chapter was later published separately as "The Time the Wolves Ate the Vice-Principal."[18] We will take here some of the interchapters that are closely related to the main narrative.

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck has extolled certain finer qualities of human beings through a particular group of people. He utilizes one of the interchapters to impart universal dimensions to the qualities which the select group represents. Steinbeck says:

"The Word is a symbol….. The Word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it, and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky reflecting seas….. Lee Chong is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be…..". The purpose of this comment, as well as "the virtues, the Graces, and the Beauties of the harried mangled craziness of Montery and the Cosmic Monterey," is to stress the fact that this is not a vague narrative about a group of unique specimens, but a strong conviction that these characters are not only confined to Monterey but represent in themselves certain universal qualities which the present day world needs very much.

In chapters 3 and 4, the note of tragedy is struck. Chapter 4 is an account of an old Chinaman who daily makes his mysterious way through the Row. Most people fear him, but one little boy makes fun of him and is rewarded with a vision that makes him whimper. The old man means different thing to different people, but by means of his utter detachment from the world around him, he symbolizes loneliness to young boys like the one who makes fun of him. The old man symbolizes the terrors of isolation to young persons, who rely on the social contacts of the world. It may not be a terror to the old persons who rely on their own internal resources. This is the reason why Doc in Cannery Row does not feel lonely as he is able to conquer it by his love for music and the love that is showered on him by the inhabitants of Cannery Row.

But these chapters are very significant in relation to the main narrative of the novel. Actually they are "essays in loneliness". Both concern people who have either the experience or the vision of being cut off from the world. William, the bouncer, in chapter 3, finally commits sucide because he felt that he was too lonely, though he realizes that it is silly. Actually his loneliness becomes too much for with him. Perhaps he thinks that his cut off life is useless. This terror is further explained in the next chapter by the vision that Andy experiences.

Another purpose these interchapters serve can be illustrated by the last one in the book, which attempts to sum up the ideal values of this select community. It is about a very healthy and attractive gopher, "in the prime of his life", who was quite content with life, as there was plenty of food and he was free from any enemies. It symbolizes the ideal world of our Cannery Row heroes. But the gopher is not content in his safe, ideal place, because no female gopher comes to live with him. Finally, "in a sweat of impatience", he risks his life. It symbolizes the fate of humanity which is destroying itself by his blind pursuit of material wealth.

Thus we see that Steinbeck has made somewhat restricted use of these interchapters in this novel. Steinbeck has occasionally made use of such parables in order to present his themes.

We find one such parable in *Tortilla Flat*. This concerns the story of the corporal and his son. When Jesus Maria rescues the young corporal and his baby son from the policeman and brings them to the paisanos' house, the corporal satisfied their curiosity by narrating his sad story. It so happened that while he was serving in the Mexican army, his wife was abducted by a captain. Now, he is bringing up his son to become a general in future. This he is doing according to a plan suggested by a certain "wise man". He had suggested that he should repeat constantly to the child, "you will become a general. You will wear epaulets and carry a golden sword." But, unfortunately, the baby dies soon after coming to at the paisanos' house. The paisanos feel sad because now the corporal's noble plan has been wrecked for ever, and the captain will never be punished for his misdeeds. But the corporal is shocked to hear this. "What is this?" he demanded. 'I have nothing to do with this captain. He is the captain." He explains his own plan. "Well, said the corporal, "my wife was so pretty, and she was not any puta, either. She was a good woman, and that captain took her. He had little epaulets, and a little sash, and his sword was only of a silver colour. Consider, said the corporal, and he epaulets and little sash could take my wife, imagine what a general

with a big sash and gold sword could take".[19] This serves as an allegory of the set-up of present day society which the paisanos have successfully tried to avoid.

Characterization :

It has been pointed but by critics that Steinbeck's fiction lacks "living" characters. It is true to some extent as there are very few characters in the whole realm of his fiction which have an individual identity. As Magny pointed out: "Steinbeck's characters seldom achieve true novelistic reality, it is precisely because they are so little individualized, so little individuals, and finally so little human."[19] With the exception of the first novel, *Cup of Gold*, Steinbeck seems mainly concerned with the material of the novel than the characters themselves. He uses them simply as part of the material of the novel. This is true of Mac and Jim in *In Dubious Battle*. They have been consciously depersonalized to blend effectively into the struggle of humanity for its rights. They don't draw any attention to themselves. Of course they have their individual identity as far as their role permits in that struggle. It can be said in praise of Steinbeck that his characters live for his fiction. It is interesting to note, as Lisca has pointed, that there is a notation in Steinbeck's writing on one of the sheets of manuscript of *In Dubious Battle* saying that he has "always had a feeling of the texture of a story rather than an idea of characters or theme or plot."[20]

The same is true of a host of other characters in the fiction of Steinbeck. Though the *Grapes of Wrath* is mainly concerned with the actions of the Joad family, yet to their actions a universal dimension is imparted. Further, by being raised to a symbolic level, a character is also reduced in respect of individuality. In this process the Joads shed their individuality and represent the whole migrant workers. In this sense they are real characters as there is regular development in them. They are in the beginning individuals but towards the end they represent a group. Ma Joads is the most convincing and memorable character in Steinbeck's work. But she, too, sheds off her original individuality when she

starts looking down upon the migrants as her own family and identifies herself completely with the cause.

Whenever there has been no need to de-personalize his characters, Steinbeck has tried to impart some reality to his characters. Though George and Lennie, in their hunger for a piece of land, represent the have-nots of the society, yet they are individual convincing characters in the novel. Steinbeck has drawn them finely and has imparted personal warmth to them. But this is not true of the characters of *The Moon is Down*. As Lisca suggests: "they are qualities masquerading as human beings." This is true of both the invaders and the invaded. They are heavily typed characters, so finely described that nothing is left for the reader to know at the end of the book. Steinbeck describes them as if he is setting them down for a play. These characters represent different types of humanity and their role ends there. We do not find any regular growth in these characters in the course of the novel. The same may be said of the passengers of his allegorical bus in *Wayward Bus*. These characters have been drawn from different spheres of the society, and they simply represent the qualities they are expected to represent. Each character is a type and does not change during the journey.

It is only is *East of Eden* that Steinbeck seems concerned with his characters primarily as individuals who exist and have importance apart from the materials of his novel. But here too, he is not able to give credibility to his characters. The reason is that they are neither types nor individuals. They are a sort of odd mixture of both. Samuel behaves as if he is a prophet and yet he is too much of an ordinary human being to be convincing as a prophet. Lese wavers between his scholarly pursuits and his attempts to represent himself as the stereotype of a Chinese servant. He fails to portray himself convincingly in either of the capacities. Cathy is a satanic character in the novel. She is not convincing as ordinary human being in her extreme satanic nature. Yet in her weaker moments, she is too much of a weakling to be

properly vicious. This wavering, as it were, is characteristic of all the major characters in the novel.

But one notices here that the minor characters are more convincing in this novel, the reason perhaps being that they have been drawn from the knowledge of the author through his actual association with such people in his childhood. He manages to infuse personal warmth into these portrayals.

One notices in Steinbeck's works that mainly it is a male world. No doubt there are women in Steinbeck's work, but their function is somewhat limited. It seems he has kept open only two fields for them; homemaking and prostitution. Mostly his women are married and engaged in house keeping. Juana in *The Pearl*, Rama and Elizabeth in *To a God Unknown*, Mordeen in *Burning Bright* and most of the women in *The Pastures of Heaven*. It is interesting to note that in Steinbeck's work there are examples of perfection in both the fields: there is Ma Joad and there is Dora.

We do not find romantic love in Steinbeck's work. It finds place only in his later work as in *Sweet Thursday*. On the other hand there are scores of examples of male comradeship. As M. Claude-Edoride Magny has observed, "One might say that for Steinbeck the normal, valid, durable couple can be formed only by two representatives of the male sex – and this without the least suggestion of homosexuality".[21] There are such very closely knit associations of Henry Morgan and Coeur de Gris in *Cup of Gold*; Mac and Jim *In Dubious Battle*; Junius Malthy and Jakob, Raymond Banks and the warden in the *Pastures of Heaven*; Danny and Pilon in *Tortilla Flat*, George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*; Tom and Casy in the *Grapes of Wrath*; Mack and boys in *Cannery Row*. This list is quite exhaustive and is traceable to recent works as Doc and Mack or the boys in *Sweet Thursday*; Pippin and his uncle in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* and Ethan and Danny in *Winter of Our Distontent*. Perhaps Steinbeck wishes to emphasize more on comradeship than love.

Symbolism:

Symbolism has an important place in Steinbeck's works. It supports his structures and evaluates his themes. It often creates a suggestive atmosphere.

Of Mice and Men has generally been viewed as an allegory, because we find a great deal of symbolism in it. Here, Steinbeck has tried to present a number of things not only explicitly but symbolically too. He has Lennie and George as protagonists who are both migrant farm labourers. But their significance is not confined merely to the portrayal of the problem of such labourers. Through them Steinbeck has tried to comment on the larger pattern involving the predicament of man in the universe.

According to Warren French:

'One does not need to justify a search for an allegory in *Of Mice and Men* since the author has spoken of the book as symbolic and microcosmic.'[22]

The novel concerns itself with the equation between mankind and the universe. It tries to explore the universe, i.e. the macrocosm, and represents it in the miniature form, *i.e*. the microcosm, in which the smallest unit comes down to be individual, *i.e*. the George and Lennie combine.

In other to transpose the individual unit to its microcosmic function, Steinbeck has made ample use of symbolism in the novel. At the lowest or individual level, what besets George and Lennie in the form of their migratory lives, and their lack of freedom and security, is their own fate. At a higher, *i.e*. the socio-economic level, it is the predicament of migrant labour, and at the highest level, they seem to represent man's predicament in the universe.

Therein lays the moral of the story, which is an important ingredient of allegory. Here, it reveals itself in the philosophizing that runs beneath the surface in the novel. It imports the lesson of life to man and teaches him how to accept his fate sportingly.

In Steinbeck's scheme of things, nature is the force through which the universe runs itself. It is omnipotent and omnipresent. Everything is created, controlled and ultimately destroyed by it. When man is placed against it, there is not much he can do except what it has set for him. Pessimistic though it may sound, yet, as Warren French has commented:

'It is an indifferent nature that makes men physically strong but mentally deficient.'[23]

He is obviously referring to Lennie and the irony implied in his situation. When one does not have power to think rationally and loses his bearings, his imagination goes berserk. He weaves up a world of his own—the world of dreams. According to French: 'dreaming is man's only defence against a world he never made.'[24]

Lennie too takes resort to dreaming. His dream is so powerful that it becomes his life. That is why he hardly bothers about the real world. To him to death of Curley's wife is just a 'bed' thing, like that of a mouse or a pup, but the possibility of not getting the rabbits is his greatest fear because that implies the destruction of his dream.

But even illusions are snatched away from man because, as French has put it:

'Man is at the mercy of forces he cannot control which ruthlessly but indifferently destroy the illustions he has manufactured.'[25]

Thus, Steinbeck's philosophy is a subtle fusion of Thomas Hardy's Immanent Will, which is an indifferent, blind and purposeless force acting against man, and, Shakespeare's 'fatal flaw' where, although we are made to feel the powerlessness and helplessness of man, his doom is brought about by some factor inherent in him only.

Sometimes the sense of inevitability becomes more pronounced, as in the allegory suggested by the title 'Of Mice and Men', which Steinbeck Borrowed from a poem by Burns.

The poem carries a deep note of inevitability:

'But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,/ In proving foresight may be vain:/ The best laid schemes o'mice and men/ Gang aft a-gley/ An' lea'e us nought but grief an'pain/ For promise'd joy.'[26]

Thus, be it mice or men, this is the way things are. However meticulously they make them, their plans are bound to come to naught. That corresponds with Steinbeck's non-theological thinking. According to Peter Lisca,

'In this light, the ending of the story is, like the ploughman's disrupting of the mouse's nest. Neither tragic nor brutal, but simply a part of the pattern of events.'[27]

Life thus has got to be taken not on the basis of the joys and sorrows, the hopes and disappointments it offers, but as 'simply a part of the pattern of events'.

By way of more apparent moralizing in the novel, we have mainly George's do's and don'ts for Lennie. They are more in the nature of directions than a moral in the real sense. If there is any character giving a real lesson, it is Crooks, a social outcast who tries to impress upon Lennie and Candy the futility of chasing their dream. Though he himself is taken away by it, which is just momentary. He ultimately abandons it as a 'joke'. Slim too does it very briefly by inviting George to a drink, thereby drawing him to maturity.

There is something of the Arthurian element too, which adds to the allegorical effect of the novel. Warren French has traced out the fundamental parallels between the two:

'The knightly loyalty (between George and Lennie), the pursuit of the vision (the dream of a piece of land), the creation of a bond (between George and Lennie, shared briefly by Candy and Crooks), and its destruction by an at least potentially adulterous relationship (between Lennie and Curley's wife), are there.'[28]

But the parallels are not obvious to a general reader because they are 'so concealed by the surface realism of the work.'[29]

However, there is one exception:

'The one obvious Arthurian hangover is George, who is not only remarkably loyal to his charge—the feeble minded Lennie—but also remarkably pure.'[30]

In *Cannery Row* characters and actions, events and phenomena, all are laden with symbolic significance. It provides a deeper insight into them. For instance, Mack and the boys might well be just ordinary 'bums' inhabiting any small town, but Steinbeck has turned them into 'the Virtues, the Beauties'. Their life-style, which to an ordinary eye would seem utterly insignificant in all respects, assumes a cosmic significance under Steinbeck's master touch. Doc too is like any other scientist running a biological laboratory and selling marine animals, but in Steinbeck's scheme of things, he is a representative of the elite class and pivotal to a convergence of the two classes. Taken together, they reveal a lot about the class relationships in contemporary American society.

The symbolism is stretched farther and Steinbeck has tried to represent the cosmic through the microcosmic. He has brought in the animal world of nature and through it the cosmic world. It is shown that the likes of Mack and others live a life of everyday existence like the marine creatures. They are concerned only with their present or 'is'. They are bothered about neither their past nor future, as the civilized society is. In this context symbolism of the tide pool is very significant. The pool is the miniature ocean, as Cannery Row is the miniature Monterey. The inhabitants in each case are at the lowest level individual creatures, but at a higher level, fitted into the larger scheme of cosmic existence. These references to the cosmic and the "is" theory take the novel up to greater philosophical and aesthetic heights.

This allegory of the cosmic Monterey and the tide pool has one inherent danger that, if stretched too far, it can be taken to imply that man is just like animals, through Steinbeck has taken care to avoid this pitfall. The contrast between man and animal has been made evident enough in the last two chapters. When Doc clears away the mess left after the party, he reads aloud to himself from "Black Marigolds.":

"Even now/I know that I have savored the hot taste of life."[31]

And as he reads, "white rats scampered and scrambled in their cages;" and rattlesnakes "lay still and stared into space with their dusty frowning eyes."[32] Thus man is proved different from, and better than animals. As suggested by the poem, he has a unique capacity to 'preserve and recreate his experience. He need not live a day-to-day existence like the animals. He can live on the strength of memories preserved in works of art.'[33] With this significance in mind, Warren French has called "Black Marigolds"—'a symbol of man's highest achievement.'

But that is not to suggest that *Cannery Row* is an escapist novel. Had it been so, it would have ended with the fireworks that end the party. But that does not happen. The last two chapters lift it above local colour stories and place it among works that make a profound comment on the unique but possibly triumphant loneliness of human condition.

The structure of *Cannery Row*, which is loose and episodic, provides adequate scope for allegory. The novel has a two-tier structure. There are main chapters, describing people and places, events and actions; and there are interchapters offering the author's commentary, like that in the chorus of a play. Although these interchaptes do not perform that purpose exclusively and include some action sequences too, they do add to the allegorical effect of the novel. As Warren French has printed out:

'The clue to the purpose of the interchapters may be found in chapter 2, the first of them, in which the author writes, "The

world is a symbol." "The word," he continues, as the comments on characters introduced in the first chapter, "sucks up Cannery Row, digests it, and spews it out…….Lee Chong is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and suspended by good…….' The purpose of this comment, as of the next one, in which Mack and the Palace Flophouse boys are described as "the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties……." — is to alert the reader to follow the story not merely as an arch narrative about a collection of eccentrics, but as an allegory: these characters are not just distinctive individuals in Monterey but symbols of "cosmic" tendencies as seen through Emerson's "transparent eyeball."[34]

French has gone to the extent of claiming that:

'Certainly, if any author has ever granted us licence to read his novel as an allegory and to search for symbolic interrelationships between short narratives, Steinbeck has here.'[35]

The Winter of Our Discontent has a contemporary urban setting, with characters one can easily find around and even identify oneself with. But it has been rightly pointed out by Harry Morries, 'Steinbeck has never been very far away from the allegorical method.'[36] In *The Winter of Our Discontent* too, there is a strong undercurrent of allegory.

The novel presents, on the surface, the story of Ethan and his family and their simple affairs, but, on a deeper level, it represents a cross-section of the modern middle-class society, with its new values and perverted morality. So much has been sought to be expressed through suggestiveness and symbolism that it has a significant effect on the mode of the novel, which is essentially allegorical.

The Hawleys in *The Winter of Our Discontent* are the prototypes of their class in the same manner as Kino and his family represented the pearl-divers' community in *The Pearl*. Both are powerfully drawn by materialistic desires, but their approaches differ. Kino being a simple nature, tries to achieve it through his

own labour and struggles to protect his right, whereas Ethan, a complex character in a complex society, tries it through devious and immoral means, infringing over the rights of others.

There is symbolism galore in the novel, embracing persons, actions, situations, objects, and even places.

Ethan is an individual caught between two powerful pulls, viz., the modern craze for money, and the old regard for values. He has in him a strange blending of the Pirate and the Puritan, and each draws him in contrary directions. The Captain, whom he invokes for advice, symbolizes the ruthless, practical, pirate strain in his make-up. Aunt Deborah, whom he often quotes, stands for the Puritan, moral strain. It is significant how he tries to strike a balance between the two. He admires the Pirate and his spirit, and likes to go to it again and again. Maybe it soothes his ego hurt by his humbled status. But he resists its influence on present actions. He tries to dissuade his son from adopting that everybody does it' line and laments: 'Well, piracy is out, but I guess the impulse lingers.'[37] He also resists the temptation to resort to it in his own actions.

His wife and children are the bonds of attachment that impel him to do what he would not otherwise have done. He resists them stoutly and long but cannot withstand their combined discontent and has ultimately to yield to it. Both he and Danny are victims of the money-rush. Both suffer major financial disasters. But Danny reacts differently, for, unlike Ethan, he is free from any sort of bonds. He symbolizes freedom uncontrolled and absolute. He proudly claims to Ethan, 'Why, I'm better off than you are.'[38] and rubs it in with 'And don't forget – I'm better off than you are. I'm not a clerk.'[39] Marullo, Mr. Baker, Joe Morphy and the drummer are instruments of enticement, all preaching to Ethan the glory of money, and each trying in his own way, to lure him into the net. They set Ethan thinking:

'Marullo was telling me the truth about business, business being the process of getting money. And Joey Morphy was telling it straight, and Mr. Baker and drummer.'[40]

The Place is Ethan's refuge, a withdrawal from the reality around and into himself to explore his own subconscious. He goes there when his mind is greatly agitated over something and he is in need of peace—to contemplate, or ease his tensions in the lap of nature. He wonders 'whether all men have a Place, or need a Place, or want one and have none.'[41] He has often perceived 'a look in eyes, a frenzied animal look as of need for a quiet, secret place where soul-shivers can abate, where a man is one and can take stock of it.'[42] In lighter moments, Ethan does it in the loneliness of is store, or even bathroom.

The talisman symbolizes the superstitious part of his being. In his own words:

'I presume that every family has a magic thing, a continuity thing that inflames and comforts and inspires from generation to generation. Ours was a—how shall I say? — a kind of mound of translucent stone, perhaps quartz or jadeite or even soapstone.'[43]

He believes that

'It was magic—good to see, to touch, to rub against your cheek or to caress with your fingers.'[44]

Margie's game of cards is yet another manifestation of superstition, but it does not appear to have any obvious impact on Ethan's mind. He is always skeptical and satirical about it. It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether Margie's own confidence about Ethan's 'windfall' springs from her faith in her cards or her deep understanding of mind, as she discloses towards the end. However, her predictions carry conviction with Mary who objects to Ethan's ridicule.

Margie's cards bear different symbols, some of them pretty gloomy, for example, 'a tower riven by lightning, a wheel of fortune, a man hanging by his feet from a gallows, called 'le

pendu,' and Death–"la mort," a skeleton with a scythe.[45] Ethan too notices that 'The last cared was the man hanged upside down, le pendu, but from where I sat across the table he was right side up.'[46] From his point of view, it would imply that what was inauspicious for others, may turn to be auspicious for him.

Ethan often lays the game of silly, which, on the surface, looks just an ordinary prank to look funny and pass time. Ethan himself says that 'Sometimes it's great fun to be silly, like children playing statues and dying of laughter.'[47] But it is, in fact, symbolic, as Ethan himself confesses, 'When I am troubled, I play a game of silly so that my dear will not catch trouble from me.'[48]

The Hawley house has a well-maintained attic. Ethan notes with satisfaction that, 'It is not a dark and spidery prison for the broken and the abandoned.'[49] That reflects a deep regard for the family's past which the attic symbolizes, and that becomes pronounced when viewed in contrast to their not so elegant present-no T.V., no car, as the children sometimes grumble. The Knight Templar hat and sword, and the talisman too are symbols of the past. It gives Ethan immense pleasure to see his offsprings handle them. As he watches Allen in the attic while the latter–

'Rested his forehead on the top of a book case and glared down at the books. His right hand was on the pommel of the Xnight Templar sword, pointing downward like a cane.'[50]

he cannot conceal his pleasure and says, 'You make a symbolic picture, my son. Call it "youth, War, and Learning."'[51]

Some other objects invested with symbolic significance include, the cat that Ethan considers superior to himself as it is nobody's servant, and the rabbit which stands for easy prey without resistance. Rabbit slaughter makes Ethan miserable in the stomach, but he feels that:

'Maybe it's only the first time that's miserable. It has to be faced.'[52]

Obviously, he is bracing himself for some drastic and merciless action, for he says:

'In business and in politics a man must carve and mual his way through men to get to be the King of the Mountain.[53]

'A mouse confused between the odour of trap wire and the aroma of cheese'[54] describes the dilemma in which Ethan finds himself. On the one hand, he cannot withstand the pressures and the temptation much longer, and, on the other, he is conscious of the risk involved, so that he cannot decide which way to go. The bull fight symbolizes a futile exercise on the part of the bull, which simply exhausts its energies and leaves itself confused and in low spirits. Ethan's exercise is just like that of the bull, and since he refuses the horse, i.e. Margie, to get his horns into, he is left confused and shattered. New Baytown is just like Ethan. Both have a rich past but a lean present.

The symbolism of light in the last scene is poetically significant and effective. Light symbolizes knowledge and wisdom. As Ethan lies half-submerged in sea-water during his final act of contemplated suicide—which, incidentally, does not come off—he ponders over the senselessness and futility of what he has done and is doing, and then the realization comes to him that:

"It's so much darker when the light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone."[55]

It is, indeed, the moment of enlightenment for hi, though he feels that his light is out, for he realizes that loss of moral values is a greater tragedy for those who cherish them than for those who never had them. Allen did not take his discomfiture to heart because he had no moral values. But Ethan is so disturbed by his fall that he almost kills himself. His realization comes as a ray of hope and comfort in the surrounding gloom, victory of the moral over the material, of life over death.

Though *The Winter of Our Discontent* is deeply rooted in contemporary realism, it evokes the unreal mood at many places,

which is in keeping with the allegorical mode. It is reflected in various situations, events and objects, including a hint of the supernatural.

Steinbeck's novels and stories often contain groves, willow thickets by a river, and caves which figure prominently in the narrative. There are, for example, the grove in *To a God Unknown*, the place by the river in the Junius Malt by story, the two caves and the willow thicket in the *Grapes of Wrath*, the cave under the bridge in *In Dubious Battle*, the caves in *The Wayward Bus*, the thicket and cave in *The Pearl*, and the special place by the sea for Ethan in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. For Steinbeck a hero, coming to a cave or thicket by the river symbolizes an escape from the material world. In the opening scene of *Of Mice and Men Lennie* twice mentions the possibility of hiding out in a cave, and George impresses on him that he must return to this thicket by the river whenever there is an emergency. As Lisca has suggested, sometimes as in the *Grapes of Wrath*, his retreat has a suggestion of return to the womb and rebirth.

Another such constantly recurring symbol in the work of Steinbeck is that of the moon. It is generally associated with the female sex, and is sometimes equated with fertility. In *Cup of Gold* it is equated with unattainable human ambitions. In his advice to Morgan, the old sage Merlin says:

"I think I understand", he said softly, "you are a little boy. You want the moon to drink from as a golden cup;—All the world's great have been little boys who wanted the moon; running and climbing, they sometimes caught a firefly. But if one grows to a man's mind thatmind must see that it cannot have the moon and would not want it if it could-and so, it catches no fireflies."

Later, "the golden cup", that the moon is to Morgan, becomes the town he plunders, Panama (which the Spaniards call the Cup of Gold) and particularly a legendary women in it. As French has suggested, the moon and the golden cup both together

represent the Grail, which is often used as a female sex symbol. Later, the moon is used as the setting for attempted seduction of Morgan. In *To a (God Unknown)* the moon is described as a female sex symbol) a golden moon is pierced by a sharp pine tree, which is withdrawn as the moon arises), and is then equated with fertility when it is used as a sign for rain in a time for drought. It again denotes fertility when a pregnant woman rides out to a mystic rock of fertility on a horse named Moonlight. It is interesting to note that Steinbeck uses us moon as a symbol of both fertility and sterility. One of the characters, who had been obsessed with nightmares of "a bright place that is dry and dead" where people come out of the holes and pull his arms and legs, commits suicide when he gets his first look through a telescope and finds that the moon is actually the barren place of his dreams.

In *Tortilla Flat* when Danny meets his mystical death the moon dripped with blood. In the short story "The Murder", in *The Long Valley*, the moon is associated with the shattering of an illusion. When the husband finds his wife in bed with her lover, his image of the moon is shattered; "Jim dipped his hand into the trough and stirred the moon of broken, swirling streams of light." In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the moon drives a pair of lovers into a passion of ecstasy. Later, Steinbeck explains in *Sea of Cortez* that the moon, next to the sea, is the strongest "racial;" or mystic memory in us, with the lunar rhythm so deeply rooted in our unconscious that "all physiological process might be shown to be influenced by the tides" (on moon).

Thus we find that the moon has a very special significance in Steinbeck, meaning different things in different contexts: woman, fertility, the unattainable, etc.

Among other important symbols in Steinbeck, the turtle, which occurs in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is quite significant. It is presented in the first interchapter (3). The turtle is symbolic and prophesies future events. The Joads are driven by the same indomitable life-force that drives the turtle, and in the same

direction southwest. As the turtle bravesm manyh hazards on its way, so the Joads endure the perils of their journey. Later the symbolic value of the turtle is further defined when Tom picks up the turtle and carries it with him. It is only when he is convinced that his family has left that he releases the turtle, which travels "south-west; as it had been from the first."

In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck uses certain Biblical symbols. The most significant symbolism is that of grapes. The novel's title, taken from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" ("He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored") is itself a reference in this direction. There is a reference to this effect in Deuteronomy: "Their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of serpents—(32:32). In one of the interchapters the meaning of the symbol is made clear: "In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, heavy for the vintage."

Steinbeck also uses grapes for symbols of plenty. As Grampa often says: "Gonna get me a whole bunch a graps off a bush, or what ever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin." Joshua and Oshea bring back from their first excursion into the rich land of Cannan a huge cluster ofGrapes, so huge that "they bare it between two on a staff." [56] (Numbers, 12: 23). This associates grapes with plenty.

In his recent novel, the *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Steinbeck makes use of a symbol which he has never used before. This symbol is a stone talisman: "a continuity thing that inflames and comforts and inspires from translucent stone". It carries different meanings for different persons and according to needs: "Once I supposed it was breast, to one as a boy it became yonic, inflamed and aching. Perhaps later it evolved to brain or even enigma….." For Ethan's daughter "it was mother, lover, and child in her hands." But its role in the context of the novel's materials is never clear. Towards the end its discovery, in Ethan's pocket, saves him from attempted suicide. Perhaps he does not want to destroy this symbol of continuity along with him.

Apart from these symbols, Steinbeck employs settling itself in his novels to create a suggestive atmosphere. There are numerous examples of this in his fiction. We may consider this example from *the Pearl*:

"The uncertain airs that magnifies some things and blotted out others hang over the whole gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted, so that sea and land had the sharp clarities and the vagueness of a dream…… Part of the far shore disappeared into a shimmer that looked like water. There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there."

We can say, as the examples above suggest, that symbolism in Steinbeck forms a significant part of his technique. He employs it both for the evolution of his theme as well as for creating an allegorical effect. It may also be noted that these symbols are generally integrated very appropriately with the rest of the material in the novels.

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6. *Of Mice and Man,* p. 12.
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9. Peter Lisca, *The Wide World* of *John Steinbeck*, p. 161.
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27. Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 140
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II

The Great Depression And Economic Conditions

During the 1930's America was experiencing the Great Depression. The slump in the economy combined with the unprecedented drought had driven thousands from their small farms, and they were forced to accept petty jobs on low wages. Thus it was a blow not only below their belts, also on their sense of pride. Widespread suffering had reduced the farmer, who was the proud tiller of his own land, to a hum on the road. No writer could keep aloof from the social disasters and the political issues of the Great Depression, and Steinbeck was no exception. He identified himself completely with the crisis of the times, and emerged as a strong advocate of the underprivileged. Watt groups the novels of Steinbeck, written during this period, under the title 'Angry Thirties'. But we find that there is no clear manifestation of this anger in Steinbeck's works of this period. They are rather "the short and simple annals of poor." In these works Steinbeck aims for better adjustment for his have-note in existing system of society. We may find this anger in other works of social protest, which has started in America as early as towards the close of the Nineteenth century. Markham's "The Man with the Hoe" is the best example of it. In this poem Markham decries the exploitation of the common worker and a actually demands an end to this injustice when he says :

"Make right the immemorial infamies, perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes."

Steinbeck, too, raises his voice against the exploitation of the worker and he had full sympathy for their struggle for survival. But he does not put forward any remedy for this evil. At the most, he wishes for better adjustment.

In order to gain first hand knowledge, Steinbeck actually worked with the migrants and moved with them in search of new work. During this period he wrote to Lawrence Clark Powell, "I have to write this sitting in a ditch. I'm out working-may go south to pick a little cotton. Migrants are going south now and I'll probably go along."[1] This personal experience enabled Steinbeck to impart a realistic touch to his writings. In all the three books, *In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Man*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*, he has tried to fight the battle on the side of the underprivileged. In these books Steinbeck has tried to present an honest picture of the miseries of these people and their struggle to survive. Steinbeck's greatest achievement lies in the fact that he has given a voice to the materials of the depression and made us aware of the everlasting problems of have-nots. It will be unfruitful to search for any remedy in these books as Steinbeck's purpose was not to philosophize on the cause of the poverty, but to make us conscious of this burning problem. The picture of an author that emerges out, of these books, is of a 'poet of the dispossessed', as Moore calls him.

In Dubious Battle was regarded with great caution by Steinbeck's Publishers, Covici-Friede, who 'expressed concern that Steinbeck should risk his reputation and reading audience by following the popular *Tortilla Flat* with a strike novel."[2] They tried to point out that "in spite of recent agitations, none of the strike novels of the last two or three years had succeeded,"[3] and suggested revision. But Steinbeck stood by is work and answered, "We've gone through too damn much trying to keep the work honest and in a state of improvement to let it slip now in consideration of a little popularity."[4] He clarified that "Myths form

quickly, and I want no tag of humorist on me, nor any other kind."[5] Ultimately, the book came out as Steinbeck desired.

It was Steinbeck's first major attempt to deal with strike material.[6]

The material for *In Dubious Battle* came from different sources, the first and foremost being Steinbeck's observation of his own surroundings. Salinas, the seat of Steinbeck's home unity of Monterey was quite often the scene of labour grations and strikes. Freeman Champney describes one of such strikes which seems to confirm the authenticity of the one presented by Steinbeck in *In Dubious Battle* :

'In 1936 a strike by lettuce packing shed workers was crushed at cost of around a quarter of a million dollars. Civil liberties, local government, and normal judicial processes were all suspended during the strike and Salinas was governed by a general staff directed by the Associated Farmers and the big lettuce growers and shippers. The local police were bossed by a reserve army officer imported for the job, and at the height of the strike all male residents of Salinas between 18 and 45 were mobilized under penalty of arrest, were deputized and armed. Beatings, tear gas attacks, wholesale arrests, threats to lynch San Francisco newspapermen if they didn't leave the town, and machine guns and barbed wires, all figured in the month-long struggle which finally broke the strike and destroyed the union.'[7]

On the basis of an analysis of Steinbeck's sources of *In Dubious Battle*, Lisca has concluded that 'Steinbeck has almost invariably written directly about things which he has either experienced himself or of which he has had a firsthand account.'[8]

Steinbeck's own experience as a ranch had gave him intimate knowledge about labour conditions. A number of communist organizers provided him with inside information about the functioning of labour organizations.

In Dubious Battle presents the story of Jim Nolan, a youth who joins a labour organization of the radicals. As part of his

apprenticeship, he goes out with Mac, a party functionary, to organize a strike of fruit-pickers in Torgas Valley. As the orchard, Mac and Jim help Lisa, London's daughter, with her child-birth, and win London's confidence. Dan's accident provides them with an excuse to strike work. Mac and Jim mobilize support from other ranches. Dakin emerges as their leader with London, Burke and many others besides Mac and Jim, as important functionaries. They are pushed out of the orchard and find shelter on Anderson's land. Camps are laid and Doc arrives to supervise the sanitation and medical services. The owners call more labourers from outside to break the strike. The strikers plan to dissuade them on their arrival, but then Joy, another activist, is killed. His body is used to arouse the passions of the strikers. He is given a ceremonial burial. The strikers picket the ranches to stop all apple-picking. Jim receives a gun-shot through his shoulder during a picket. The owners' attacks keep mounting in a well-organised manner. All is beaten and his shop is burnt. Anderson's entire apple crop is burnt, and Doc disappears. The strikers' supplies are disrupted, and ultimately, they are served orders to vacate Andersons' land. The strike is almost finished, and Jim is killed in a ambush. Mac makes use of this opportunity and makes a passionate speech to boost the low morale of the strikers. He feels like Milton's Satan that though the field be lost, all is not lost, for hatred and desire for revenge will remain.

The central theme of the novel is the class conflict between the exploiters and the exploited, the haves and the have-nots. Their conflict is reflected through an endeavour to organize the crop labourers to go on a strike to press their demand for a better deal. The scene is set in the Torgas Valley. Mac explains to Jim in the beginning :

"Torgas is a little valley, and it's mostly apple orchards. Most of it's owned by a few men. Of course there's some little places, but there's not very many of them. Now when the apples are ripe the crop tramps come and pick them. And from there they go on over the ridge and south, and pick the

cotton……..Now these few guys that own most of the Torgas Valley waited until most of the cotton tramps were already there. They spent most of their money getting there, of course. They always do. And then the owners announce their price cut. Suppose the tramps are mad, what can they do? They have got to work picking applies to get out even."[9]

The most obvious thing that strikes us about the conflict between the workers and the owners is that it is an obviously unequal battle. The term 'dubious' in the title provides a hint to that effect. It implies two things—the vast inequality of the adversaries, and the dubious methods, often unethical and immoral, employed by both, to further their respective causes.

The owners' class in *In Dubious Battle*, like its counterpart in Steinbeck's later work *The Grapes of Wrath*, is a powerful lot. It is well entrenched in its territory and well equipped to manage its affairs and crush opposition. The owners have formally organized themselves into a Grower's Association to look after the interests of their community. The agitators are aware of their power. Before they start for the Valley, Mac informs Jim : "It's going to be no picnic. I hear the Growers' Association is pretty well organized." Its members are loyally bound to the organization and dissenters, like Anderson, are mercilessly penalized.

The owners have behind them all the power money confers. They have arms and armed bands. Their orchards are well protected by their checkers and other security staff, and if these prove insufficient, as in the case of the present strike, they get prompt assistance from deputy sheriffs. For instance, at the first signs of labour unrest, the orchard superintendent visits London, obviously to intimidate him, and 'On either side of him stood a man wearing a deputy sheriff's badge, and in each of his hands were shot-guns.'[10]

There is a so-called citizen's committee too. Some of its members intercept Mac and Jim even before the strike starts and warn them : "This isn't the law: this is a citizen's committee. If

you think you God-demand reds can come in here and raise hell, you're crazy. You get out of here in your tin can or you'll go out in a box. Get it?"[11] The vigilantes keep a close watch on the striking workers and their helpers. They beat Al and burn his box-car, and burn Anderson's apple crop. They are believed to be behind all violent acts like Joy's murder, Doc's disappearance, and finally, Jim's murder.

The administration is wholly on the owners' side. In addition to the deputies, they can boast of the favour of the judiciary too. When the leaders of the strike refuse to oblige the orchard superintendent, he tells London :

"You know as well as I do what the vagrancy laws are. You know vagrancy's anything the judge doesn't want you to do. And if you 'don't' know it, the judge here's named Hunter."[12]

In emergency, they can have any ordinance passed curtailing the civil liberties of the agitators. While going towards the town to dissuade the strike-breakers from cooperating with the owners, Mac remarks, "They say, 'you got a right to strike, but you can't picket', an' they know a strike won't work without picketin'."[13]

Towards the end, on a complaint from Anderson, the country Sheriff promptly visits the camp and tells London : "You have all night tonight to get out. If you head straight for the country line, nobody'll bother you. But if this camp is here at daylight tomorrow, we're going through it."[14]

The rich owners naturally command the media too. Newspapers carry not only tendentious reports about the strike but also false propaganda against the strikes. For instance, Dick used to collect money from sympathizers and send supplies for the strikers. But a false news item about official supply to the strikers causes the sympathizers to doubt the integrity of Dick and others like him, and seriously hampers the strikers' source of supplies. The fire at Anderson's farm, too, is blamed on the strikers. Every single incident of violence by them is blown out

beyond all proportion and presented as a serious menace to the public. After Sam sets Hunter's house on fire and makes his escape, the newspaper headlines shriek : 'STRIKERS BURN HOUSES—KILL MEN'.[15]

The owners' approach is very methodical. They first try to forestall the strike through talks and even bid to buy out the leaders. For example, the orchard superintendent tempts London in a lowered voice :

"I'll tell you what I am prepared to offer. You get the men back to work and you'll get a steady job here as assistant superintendent at five dollars a day."[16]

But when that does not succeed, he sticks out a threat :

"Then we kick you off this place in half an hour. Then we blacklist the whole damn bunch of you. You can't go any place; you can't get a job any place……We'll see you can't get a job this side of hell. What's more, we'll jug you pals here, and see they get the limit."[17]

And the threat is carried out. As for their work, they call additional labour force from the city and within no time a train-ful of them arrive.

They are determined on getting rid of the strikers if they cannot be browbeaten. They resort to occasional violence too and their prime targets are the leaders. Mac and Jim are frequently cornered, Joy is shot dead the moment he steps down the train, Dakin is thoroughly beaten and his truck destroyed, Doc is snatched away from the scene, and ultimately Jim is brutally killed.

The owners systematically try to gnaw at the roots of the workers' unity by planting their stooges in the camp to create confusion and panic. They spread rumours, especially about the leaders to discredit them. For example,

"This strike's screwy. Somebody's making money out of it. When it gets tough, somebody'll sell out and leave the rest of us to take it on the chin."[18]

Incited by such rumours, Burke is so angry that he bursts out publicly against London. Pointing out his accusing finger, he shouts :

"Look at 'im. That's the guy that's spoiled ever' thing. What the hell's he done? Set in his tent an' it canned peaches while we got wet and lived on garbage a pig wouldn't touch."[19]

The owners also try flattery where they feel it can deliver the goods. Bolter, the new President of the Fruit Growers' Association, makes a fresh bid to impress London and others by singing praises of the American workers :

"Give American working men something reasonable to listen to; and they'll listen."[20]

He tries to pamper their ego by telling them that—

"The American nation has become great because everybody pitched in and helped. American labour is the best labour in the world, and the highest paid."[21]

Pitched against the organized might of the owners, in the unequal battle, is the labour class. It comprises the huge mass of exploited humanity. It has a very genuine cause to join in battle. Workers are being mercilessly exploited. Their wages are drastically cut at the last moment when they have nowhere to go. They have spent all their money to reach the orchards and will have to work even to get away.

The fruit-tramps in the Torgas Valley, like their counter-parts everywhere, are an utterly disorganized lot. They arrive in the valley from different directions and have nothing in common except their poverty and want. That makes them concern themselves with their work only, irrespective of the wage cut. They work at apple orchards and when that is over, move on to cotton-picking. They are sore at heart but can hardly organize themselves to stand up against the owners' injustice and accept their fate as it comes. The party, represented by Mac and Jim, takes it upon itself to organize them into some semblance of a

community that can raise its voice to demand a fair deal. Mac tells Jim about their task in the valley :

"Down the Torgas Valley. There're thousands of acres of apples ready to pick down there. Be damn near two thousand fruit camps. Well, the Grower's Association announced a pay cut to the pickers. They'll be sore as hell. If we can get a good ruckus going down there, we might be able to spread it over to the cotton fields in Tandale. And then we would have something. That'd be a fuss."[22]

But the 'fuss' assumes proportions which the workers can hardly bear. Poverty weakens resistance. The spectre of starvation makes one bow down to any extent. The trampa have no money even to leave that place. This fact is borne in mind by Mac while organizing the strike. Before having them uprooted from the orchard, he makes elaborate arrangements for their shelter and food. Camps are set up on Anderson's vacant field under the able supervision of Doc. They are according to perfect sanitary specifications so that the health authorities may make no fuss. Also, the party sees to it that the strikers get their food at the cap itself. Supplies come from the city through contributions and the food is cooked collectively at the camp, in order to give a sense of security to the tramps and boost their morale.

The leaders try to motivate the workers in all possible ways but the hopelessness of their situation stares them in the face. Mac too admits that when he says, "What we got to fight with? Rocks, sticks. Even Indians had bows an' arrows."[23] When London in his desperation tries to persuade them to knock down the barricades, one of the men says : "We got nothing to fight with, mister. We can't fight guns an' gas with our han's. Give us guns, an' we'll fight."[24]

Their resolve is sometimes weakened by their gullibility, which first makes them join the battle under the impression that they can easily win. But quick results do not come, and problems start mounting, their minds fall easy victims to further gullibility.

They are easily influenced by the reports of gloomy prospects of their strike and treacherous activities of their leaders, circulated by the owners.

The main weapons the leaders have at their disposal are aroused passions and public sympathy, and Mac employs them with professional perfection. Human blood and lives are used as sacrificial offerings. Dan's accident and the broken ladder are used to spark off the strike. After the incident, Mac cannot conceal his pleasure and tells Jim, "The old huzzard was worth something after all….." ….."We can use him now."[25] Joy's murder is used, against all protests, to the best advantage of the strike. Mac says, "He's done the first real useful thing in his life. Poor Joy. He's done it. He'd be so glad."[26] Again, when they are on the verge of being thrown off Anderson's place, and London suggests they put an end to the whole show, Mac still holds on and says : "If they kill some of us the news'll get around even if the papers don't print it. Other guys'll get sore."[27] But, ironically enough, when Jim, of whom Mac had grown so fond, is killed, and he carries the body to the small platform, he is visibly shaken : 'Mac shivered. He moved his jaws to speak, and seemed to break the frozen jaws loose. His voice was high and monotonous.[28] In the midst of that high tension drama, "This guy didn't want nothing for himself—"[29] he began. His knuckles were white, where he grasped the rail. "Comrades : He didn't want nothing for himself."[30]

Despite the heroic efforts of Mac and Jim along well known party lines, their strike is bound to fail, it cannot match the strength and guiles of their enemy. In the long run, their resistance begins to waver. It does not seem to possess enough depth and capacity to sustain itself for long. That gives the leaders some really anxious moments. For instance, while going to dissuade the strike-breakers, Mac says nervously, "This bunch of bums isn't keyed up. I hope to Christ something happens to make them mad before long. This's going to fizzle out if something don't happen."[31] Again, Chapter ten opens with the observation :

"An apathy had fallen on the men."[32] The leaders are also apprehensive that "They'll start fighting each other if we don't move'em. They'll begin to get mean, pretty soon."[33]

Thus the workers force has nothing but numbers on its side, and just clubs and stones to fight with, and it has to fight not only an almighty enemy but also want, hunger, disunity and cowardice within its own ranks.

Yet it fights out the battle in which no holds are barred and the end of which is, as even Mac admits, a foregone conclusion, "I guess we're going to lose this strike….."[34] But Mac is satisfied with it. For him the battle is not the end, it is the beginning of a process intended to arouse among the exploited enough hatred for their exploiters and a consciousness of their own power if they begin to work together. It is, in his view, "a revolution against hunger and cold."[35] It does not matter if the battle is lost. All is not lost. "The unconquerable will, and study of revenge, immortal hate and courage never to submit or yield"[36] remain.

Their battle acquires an ideological colouring because the Luciferian role of inciting the exploited horde to rebel against the authority is assigned to the radical or communist movement represented here by Mac, Jim, Joy and Dick and a host of sympathizers. They give us the red point of view, their doctrine of class war, their great cause, their ways and their ends. Steinbeck portrays them with admirable objectivity, and emphasizes not only their heartless and ruthless approach, but also their dedication and willingness to make even the supreme sacrifice for the cause. But he gives the other view-point too, which is not that of the exploiters, but of sane humane objectivity presented by Doc Burton. He likes to look at the thing as a whole, without putting the label of 'good' or 'bad' on it. In biological term, he views the strike as an infection :

"Mac, these strike are like the infection. Something has got into the men; a little fever had started and the lymphatic glands are shooting in reinforcements."[37]

Also, his theory of group organism gives him a broader perspective of the strikers' behaviour. He believes that :

"A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you."[38]

and again :

"When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we re-capture the 'Holy Land'; or he says, 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy'; or he says, "We will wipeout social injustice with communism.' But the group doesn't care about the Holy Land, or Democracy, or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and uses these words simply to reassure the brains of individual men."[39]

The *In Dubious Battle* is a perfect study of the plenomen of labour strike and economic disparity. Steinbeck has presented, in vivid detail, the antagonists, their comparative strength and weaknesses, their strategies, means and prospects in as objective a manner as possible. It is because of his amazing sense of objectivity that despite his theme of class conflict, Steinbeck does not seem to be the Devil's advocate.

By the time Steinbeck began writing *The Grapes of Wrath* he was firmly established as an American novelist and was very popular among the reading public of America. The days of the Great Depression were not yet over. Coupled with that, natural calamities like drought had played havoc with the working class-mainly the farm labourers. There was a spurt of strikes. In the 1930's a number of strike novels appeared, Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) being one of them, and among the most successful ones.

The Grapes of Wrath appeared in 1939. It was, in the words of Peter Lisca, "a phenomenon on the scale of a national event."[40] It attracted wide critical acclaim. Soon after its publication it sold at the rate of 2500 copies a day and in a matter of two months reached the top of the best-seller's list, to remain there throughout the year. Its circulation exceeded even that of *Gone with the Wind*. It brought Steinbeck the Pulitzer prize and got him elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

The story in *The Grapes of Wrath* revolves around the Joad family which includes Grampa and Granma, Pa and Ma, Uncle John, Noah, Tom, Rose of Sharon and Connie, Al, Ruthie and Winfield. It is a tenant farmers' family evicted from their land and house. They are made to believe through pamphlets that there are plenty of jobs in California. So, after disposing off their movable property, they set off for California, along with Jim Casy, an ex-preacher.

Their journey in an old Hudson is long and eventful. As they get nearer to California it becomes increasingly obvious to them that they have stepped into a trap set by the growers to get cheap man-power. They are part of a mass exodus from the dust bowl Oklahoma to California. Both Grampa and Granma die on the way.

Camping in Hooverville near Bakersfield, they see the misery and hunger of the migrant workers and the cruelty of the deputy sheriffs. Connie deserts them and Jim Casy is arrested in an effort to save a migrant from the police. Next, they stay in a federal government camp for farm workers, where there is everything one needs except work. They again set out the join work picking peaches at Hooper ranch. But there too, conditions are no better. Tom discovers Casy leading a group of strikers outside the ranch. Casy is killed by a man and Tom kills the killer. That makes it necessary for the Joads to leave the ranch anyhow. Then they get some work on the cotton fields. But it is soon over and they live without work for three months. Then winter rains arrive and the whole area is flooded. Rose of Sharon gives birth

to a stillborn baby. The floods force the Joads to take shelter in a barn where they find a starving man, and makes Rose of Sharon feed the dying man from her breast. The novel ends at this point.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the main theme is "the predicament of the proletariat who is born with a curse to face economic exploitation." The proletariat, generally speaking, consists of 'the whole body of unskilled workers of wage-earners.' But there Steinbeck is chiefly concerned with the plight of the migrant farm labourers. We have already seen how closely Steinbeck had observed the migrants and how deeply he felt for them. We know that—

'Before writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck drove to Oklahoma and joined a band of migrant workers, lived with them in Hooverville, and worked with them when they got the California.'[41]

Steinbeck himself confirmed this in a letter to Lawrance Clark Powell:

'I have to write this sitting in a ditch. I'm out working—may go South to pick a little cotton. Migrants are going south and I may go along.'[42]

What he experienced there disturbed him so much that he wrote in a newspaper article :

'California……is gradually building up a human structure which will certainly change the State, and may, if handled with the inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agricultural economics.'[43]

Steinbeck's migrants lived near Salislaw in Oklahoma. Paul McCarthy has described them as follows :

'Most farmers in that area and surrounding ones are share-croppers, that is, small farmers who have owned the land at one time but lost it and must rent the land and share crop proceeds with the landlords, banks or other lending agency. In poor years,

the farmer has to borrow heavily in order to make payments. When that cannot be done, the land is sold or rented to someone else.[44]

In order to give a concrete identity to his migrants, Steinbeck created the Joads—a family complete with Grampa, Granma, Ma, Pa, Uncle John, Tom, Rose of Sharon, Al, Ruthie and Winfield, joined during the journey by Jim Casy, an ex-preacher and some others. The Joads symbolize the whole migrant community and reflect its sufferings, determination, hopes, disappointment, anger, and humanity The family suffers considerable erosion, but whatever remains of it is, despite its plight, dignified and humane.

Steinbeck's workers are placed against the gloomiest background. America was trying to emerge from the crippling blows of the Depression. On the one hand, increased mechanization of agriculture was rendering large sections of farm labourers useless, as the truck driver tells Tom in the very beginning :

'Croppers going fast now, "he said, "one cat' takes and shoves ten families out. Cat's all over hell now. Tear in and shove the croppers out."[45]

On the other hand, there is a severe drought and a bad harvest :

'The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.'[46]

With the workers growing more and more helpless, big financial institutions tightened their grip. Croppers were, consequently, getting evicted from their lands and more and more of their land was going into the 'monster's' hands.

The Joads are evicted, like so many others, from their land. A bewildered Tom Joad just back from prison finds things completely changed:

'It ain't the same, "he said. "Looka that house. Somepin's happened. They ain't no body there."[47]

And by the time Tom finds his folk at Uncle John's places, he has got a clear picture of things around. He finds his people all set to leave for the west, in response to the pink handbills promising them plenty of jobs and better conditions. Better prospects ease out, for the moment, the gloom from their minds, though they are too good to be true. For instance, Ma is not quite sure :

"Tom, I hope things is all right in California." He turned and loked at her, "What makes you think they ain't?" he asked.

"Well—nothing. Seems too nice kinds….."[48]

But the very next moment she remembers the pink handbills and brightens up :

"I seen the han'bills fellas pass out, an'how much work they is, an' high wages an'all; an' I seen in the paper how they want folks to come on' pick grapes an' oranges an' peaches. That would be nice work, Tom, picking peaches……."[49]

She does not know that the pink handbills are part of the vicious circle of exploitation, intended to complete the process of their uprooting started so systematically by banks and financial organizations.

California is a far-off place. Going there requires about two weeks' travel and means considerable expense. The farm workers are already a starving people. They have to arrange money somehow by disposing off their movable property. Here again, exploitation reaps the harvest. People rush in from outside to buy the junk at their own prices, and the workers are helpless :

"They say there's fellas comin 'in jus' to buy up the stuff us fellas got to sell when we get out. They say these new fellas is clearning up. But there ain't nothin' we can do about it……."[50]

They know that they are being robbed but they are helpless :

'Well take it—all junk—and give me five dollars.'[51]

But their heart aches, and it cries out :

'You are not buying only junk, you're buying junked lives. And more—you'll see—you're buying bitterness. Buying a plow to plow your children under, buying the arms and spirits that might have saved you.'[52]

The Joads too, after disposing off their things are—

'….. tired and angry sad, for they had got eighteen dollars for every movable thing from the farm : the horses, the wagon, the implements, and all the furniture from the house. Eighteen dollars.'[53]

The leave—taking from their land is an extremely painful experience. The nearer the moment of separation approaches, the more restless they become, Steinbeck has depicted their attachment and restlessness through Muley Graves andGrampa Joad. Muley declared :

'….. I tell ya, men, I'm stayin'. They ain't getting rid a me. If they throw me off, I'll come back,'[54]

He would rather see his family break up than leave his land :

'My wife an 'kids an' her brother all took an' went to California. They wasn't nothin't to eat. They wasn't as mad as me so they went. Thjey wasn't nothing to eat.'[55]

The preacher stirred nervously :

'You should of went too. You shouldn't of broke up the fambly.' 'I couldn't, said Muley Graves 'Somepin jus' wouldn't let me.'[56]

And Grampa, the grand old man, too, speaks in the same vein :

"…….Me—I'm stayin'…….This here's my country. I b'long here. In 'I don't give a goddamn if they's organs an 'grapes crowdin' a fella outa bed even. I ain't goin'. This country ain't no good, but it's my country. No, you all go ahead. I'll jus' stay right here where I b'long."[57]

Ultimately, he has to be doped and physically lifted over to the truck in his sleep. But, as it turns out later, the stubborn native does not survive the journey and dies on the way. After his death, Casy observes :

"Grampa an 'the old place, they was jus' the same thing."[58]

and philosophically adds :

"An' Grampa didn't die tonight. He died the minute you took 'im off the place."[59]

Though not so intensely, the other Joads too feel the heart-break at parting from their land for good. Just before departure—

'They stood about, reluctant to make the first active move to go. They were afraid now that the time had come - afraid in the same way Grampa was afraid.'[60]

But they have to leave, and as they take Highway 66 for California, they joint the vast ocean of 'migrants'. With loss of their land, they lose their agrarian way of life, their identity and their social status. With all that gone, "They soon discover," as . J. Birje Patil rightly points out—"that their homelessness and poverty has changed them into social pariahs-he 'Okies', as the migrants are called."[61] That hurts their pride and they express their resentment in no uncertain terms. For instance, Tom sternly rebukes the petrol pump attendant for doubting their ability to pay their way and taking them for beggars :

"We're payin' our way," he said fiercely. "You got no call to give us a goin'-over. We ain't asked you for nothin.'[62]

They are migrants now and have to go on and on with no hope of settling down. They have lost their stability. They are displaced persons. As Casy bewails :

"I been walkin' aroun' in the country. Ever' – body's askin' that. What we comin' to? Seems to me we don't never come to nothin'. Always goin' and goin'.'[63]

The journey of the Joads and other migrants is a tale of sorrow and suffering. They travel with very little money and the barest necessities at their disposal. But their determination keeps them going. Their's is a strange world – on wheels during the day, and in roadside camps by night. As they draw closer to California, they start getting discouraging news about the conditions awaiting them in California. The Joads come across a father and a son by the river :

Pa asked politely, "Goin' west?"

"Nope, we come from there. Goin'back home. We can't make no living out there."

"Where's home?" Tom asked.

"Panhandle, come from near Pampa."

Pa asked, "Can you make a living there?"

"Nope. But at leas' we can starve to death with folks we know. Won't have a bunch of fellas that hates us to starve with."[64]

This brief conversation gives in a nutshell a complete picture of the grim future awaiting the migrants in California. They are forewarned against hatred :

'They guna look at you an' theirfaces says, "I don't like you, you son-of-a-bitch."'[65]

and against suppression :

"Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside, an' they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's face how they hate you."[66]

and against the humiliation of being called 'Okies' :

"Well, Okie use'ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum."[67]

The picture becomes obvious when the Joads get to California and stay at Hooverville. They need work desperately but that is the rarest commodity there. They are made aware of the grim situation by Floyd Knowles who tells Tom :

"Look, I been scourin' aroun' for three weeks all over hell, an' I ain't had a bit a work, not a single han'-holt."[68]

And again,

"You ain't gonna settle down 'cause they ain't no work to settle ya. An' your belly ain't gonna let ya settle down. Now - that's straight."[69]

That reveals the hopelessness of the situation in which the migrants are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Exploitation at Hoovervilla comes in the form of a contractor, who arrives there after traveling a considerably long distance, to hire them for work in Tulare Country. But he wants to recruit them on his own conditions, that is, to his best advantage, and arrogantly refuses to answer any questions regarding the number of workers required and their wages. There is an angry exchange between him and Floyd :

Floyd said angrily, "You didn't say how many men, an' didn' say what you'd pay."

"Goddam it, I don't know yet."

"If you don' know, you got no right to hire men."

"I got a right to run my business my own way. If you men want to sit here on your ass, O.K., I'm out getting men for Tulare Country. Going to need a lot of men."[70]

Floyd refuses to fall in and proceeds to expose the racket to the newly arrived migrants :

"Twicet now I've fell for that. Maybe he needs a thousan' men. He'll get five thousan' there, an he'll pay fifteen cents an

hour. An' you poor bastards'll have to take it 'cause you'll be hungry. 'F he wants to hire men, let him hire 'em an' write out an' say that he's gonna pay."[71]

But the exploiters are resourceful enough to deal with such situations. They have full and active support of the deputy sheriffs who quell any resistance in no time. Anyone who dares raise his voice, like Floyd, is singled out for 'talking red' and 'agitating trouble.' The deputy sheriffs are very prompt to book him on some trumped-up charge, and a general threat is floated to put terror in the hearts of the masses. If this does not work and things seem to slip away beyond their grip, the camp is, as it later turns out, burnt down during the night. The inmates flee into the brush and later, when things cool down, they come back and have to build up their shacks again.

The government camp at Weedpatch is intended to highlight, by contrast, the sad plight of the bulk of migrants. It is free from exploitation and suppression. Its affairs are managed by the migrants themselves. Things run so smoothly and nicely because there are no deputy sheriffs to bully them. Tom is incredulous when the watchman tells him this :

"You mean to say ain't no cops?"

"No, sir, No cop can come in without a warrant."[72]

Tom is excited by the prospect :

"Ma's gonna like this place. She ain't been treated decent for a long time."[73]

And Ma surely does. The congenial atmosphere of the camp and the dignity and respect offered to her by the manager make her exclaim with joy:

"Praise God, we come home to our own people."[74]

That stands in sharp contrast to her past humiliations the scars of which she still carries in her memory. She recalls :

"We was farm people till the debt. And then—them people. They done somepin to us. Ever' time they come seemed like they

was a – whippin' me—all of us. An'in Needles, that police. He done somepin to me, made me feel mean. Made me feel ashamed. An' now I ain't ashamed. These folks is our folks – is our folks."[75]

But what is good for the migrants is a cause of concern to the big owners, and the government camp is no exception. A sympathetic Thomas leaks out the Association's worry :

"Those folks in the camp the getting used to being treated like humans. When they go back to the squatter's camp they'll be hard to handle."[76]

And in order to pierce the inviolability of the camp, the Farmers' Association hatches a plot to create trouble at the dance so that deputy sheriffs may have an excuse to enter it. Thomas lets but this plot to Timothy—

"Well, the Association don't like the government camps. Can't get a deputy in there. The people make their own laws, I hear, and you can't arrest a man without a warrant. Now if there was a big fight and maybe shooting, a bunch of deputies could go in and clean out the camp."[77]

This timely warning cautions the camp dwellers who manage to counter the effort to sabotage their peace. They keep a strict vigil, isolate the miscreants at the dance, and turn them out.

However, the government camp appears to be just a relief camp. It provides the migrants some time to recoup their energy and recapture their breath in order to continue their search for work. They can stay there only as long as their money lasts and before long they have to move on, as the Joads do.

Leaving Weedpatch, the Joads arrive, along with many other migrants, at Hooper's Ranch to pick peaches. That draws them to the climax of the tale of exploitation. Soon afterwards they some to know that they have been brought in to break a workers' strike. On the first day they are allured by five cents a box, but once the owners know that they have succeeded in breaking the strike, their wages are reduced to two and a half

cents a box the very next day. Not only that, the workers are made to pay about twenty-five per cent more for whatever they buy at the ranch store.

The tale of exploitation does not end here, and what follows is worse. Casy, the ex-preacher tries to organize the workers and lead the strike, for which he is brutally liquidated by one of the toughs hired by the farmers. Then they announce a further reduction in wages.

The wheels of exploitation thus roll on, crushing the workers. They have to work even if they are half-paid and half-fed, for there is no other way to escape starvation. They are trapped in the net of the big farmers. As the last straw on the camel's back, winter rains come too early and cotton picking comes to an abrupt end, leaving the destitute workers to face starvation and death. Their plight, and the predicament of the proletariat in general, has thus been summed up by Tom before he leaves his family to take up the workers' cause :

"I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinlin' about our people livin' like pigs an' the good, rich lan' layin' fallow, or may be one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan' good farmers is starvin'."[78]

During a marine expedition to the Californian Gulf with and Ricketts, Steinbeck hit upon a gem of an idea in the form of fable. He stored it with him, intending to culture it at some convenient moment. That moment arrived after the publication of *Tannery Row* (1945). The gem was duly cultured, the fable seticulously worked upon and loaded with ample ideological and philosophical substance. The happy outcome was *The Pearl* (1948), sparkling gem of a short novel.

The Pearl is an extended short story. In English there is no word for the narrative longer than a short story but not so long as a novel; such a story is akin to the French 'nouvelle' for the German 'novella'. Peter Lisca described *The Pearl* as a novelette which while still in progress was called 'The Pearl of La Paz'."[79]

It is a beautiful example, according to Richard 'Connor, of "how a novelist can take a few shreds of fact or legend, allow them to growin his imagination and turn into a full-pledged story or novel".[80]

The original legend, as described by Steinbeck himself in his *Sea of Cortez,* was as follows :

An Indian boy by accident found a pearl of great size, an unbelievable pearl. He know its value was so great that he need never work again….. In his great pearl lay salvation, for he could in advance purchase masses sufficient to pop him out of Purgatory like a squeezed water-melon seed. He took his pearl to a broker and was offered so little that he grew angry, for he knew he was cheated.

Then he carried his pearl to another broker and was offered the same amount. After a few more visits he came to know that the brokers were only the many hands of one hand and he could not sell his pearl for more. He took it to the beach and hid it under a stone. And that night he was clubbed into unconsciousness and his clothing was searched.

The next night he slept at the house of a friend and he and his friend were injured. Then he went inland to lose his pursuers and he was waylaid and tortured. But he was very angry now and he knew what he must do. Hurt as he was, he crept back into La Paz in the night and he skulked like a hunted fox to the beach and took out his pearl from under the stone. Then he cursed it and threw it as far as he could into the channel. He was a free man again, with his soul in danger and his food and shelter insecure. And he laughed a great deal about it.'[81]

The legend looked quite well as a parable with a moral to teach, that the finder of the pearl could be "free" only when he was rid of it. But that was not all Steinbeck wanted it to do. He saw greater possibilities in it. He nurtured it for four years before he consciously began to develop it. He desired to make it look more concrete and realistic, more life-like.

With this end in view, he made certain important changes in the original fable. He developed it by providing it with elements of fiction, viz., a well-knit plot, characters from identifiable contemporary life, and situations which give rise to action. Thus, in his version of the legend, as noted by Richard O'Connor, the finder of the pearl is not a boy but a grown man, Kino, with a wife and a son. Kino makes up his mind to find "the greatest pearl in the world" after the town's doctor refuses to treat his son for a scorpion bite because Kino is too poor to pay the doctor's fee. When he finds "the pearl of the world," he intends to use the money it should bring to educate his son. "My son will read and open books, and my son will write and will know writing. And my son will make numbers, and these things will make us free because he will know – he will know and through him we will know."[82]

However, the pearl brings Kino and his family nothing but death and tragedy. As in the legend, Kino can't find a broker who will pay an honest price for his find. He is attacked by men who try to steal it, and his wife wants him to get rid of it. "This thing is evil," she pleads with him. "It will destroy us. Throw it away Kino……."[83] His brother warns him that in refusing to sell the pearl at the broker's price he has defied "the whole structure, the whole way of life."[84] But Kino replies that the pearl "has become my soul."[85]

Kino, his wife and his son then flee into the desert but they are chased for the pearl everywhere they go. His son Coyotito dies during the journey, and Kino and his wife return to their village. They walk through it to the shore, where Kino hands the pearl to his wife. She gives it back to him and he hurls it into the sea.

Thus, with major changes in the original, and after providing the story with a fabric concrete enough to sustain the weight of the novel form, Steinbeck got his book ready for publication. It was serialized in December, 1945 in the "Woman's

Home Companion" with the title "The Pearl of the World", and brought out as a novel in 1947.

Exploitation is a major theme in *The Pearl*, and not a new one for Steinbeck. In *In Dubious Battle*, it was exploitation of the workers by the orchard owners; in the *Grapes of Wrath*, it was exploitation of farm labourers (who once were farm owners) by banks and orchard owners. In *The Pearl*, it is on a smaller canvas. As a result, its details have got magnified and have emerged clearer.

Exploitation is a universal phenomenon. Everywhere we find the powerful exploiting the weak. This tendency is not peculiar to homo sapiens alone. Even in nature, 'might is right'. Steinbeck has thrown many meaningful hints to that effect throughout the story. For instance :

'The ants were busy on the ground, the big black ones with shiny bodies, and little dusty quick ants. Kino watched with the detachment of a God while a dusty ant frantically tried to escape the sand trap an ant lion had dug for him.'[86]

Whereas animals depend only on their 'muscle' power to overpower their prey, man has at his disposal other power too, *e.g.*, political power, economic power, etc. In *The Pearl* Steinbeck has chosen to depict mainly the 'economic' exploitation of man by man. The pearl buyers have organized themselves into a sort of syndicate, thereby eliminating competition between them. The sellers who dive deep for their pearls have no alternative but to accept whatever they are offered. Their awareness of the fact that they have 'always been cheated' is of no avail.

Steinbeck has added another dimension by relating this theme of exploitation to colonial tendencies in America. On the one hand there are the settlers of Spanish colonial descent – prosperous and politically dominant, living in towns in style. On the other, there are the natives – the aboriginal village folk living a down to earth life. In *The Pearl* Steinbeck has demonstrated the exploitation of the latter by the former. There are, as

representatives of the colonial class, the doctor, the pearl buyers, and the priest. We can include in our list the hunters too, who represent the 'muscle' of the system. These together constitute the network of exploitation.

The doctor is a perfect example of the life-style of the colonialists. His dressing gown of "red watered silk" has come from Paris – the supreme center of civilization. He had once, for a short time, been a part of the great world and his whole subsequent life has memory and longing for France.

He likes to work for money only and is irked when Kino arrives at his door-step with his son after the scorpion bite. His attitude towards the natives is reflected in his first response :

'Have I nothing better to do than cure insect bite for little Indians?'[87]

His contempt becomes were pronounced in his next utterance :

'I am a doctor, not a veterinary."[88]

The only thing that can make him interested in a patient is money, for he grumbles :

'No, they never have any money, I, I alone in the world am supposed to work for nothing……..and I am tired of it. See if he has any money.'[89]

Then, there is priest, the godly gentleman supposed to be the shepherd of the whole flock. However, he exhibits characteristic aloofness towards Kino and his likes until the news of the pearl reaches him and reminds him of 'certain repairs necessary to the church,' and he starts 'wondering about the worth of the Pearl.'[90] Then he visits Kino's humble hutment to remind the poor native that he was 'named after a great man—and a great Father of the Church,' who had 'tamed the desert and sweetened the minds of thy people…….'[91]

In this theme of exploitation, the most prominent role is played by the pearl buyers, 'about whom it was supposed that

they were individuals acting alone, bidding against one another for the pearls the fisherman brought in. And once it had been so,' but in order to exert maximum exploitation of the pearl divers, now' there was only one pearl buyer with many hands.[92] According to Steinbeck, 'a pearl buyer was a pearl buyer and the best and happiest buyer was he who bought for the lowest price,'[93] who cheated the pearl-divers most.

The natives are pathetically aware of their plight. They know that a wide gulf separates them from the colonialists. They are so conscious of their pathetic status that they cannot think of calling a doctor when one is most needed. When Juana talks about one, it causes quite a flutter among the neighbours :

'Juana wants a doctor : A wonderful thing, a memorable thing to want the doctor. To get him would be a remarkable thing. The doctor never came to the cluster of the brush houses.'[94]

and they are confident that :

'He would not come,' the people in the yard said.

'He would not come,' the people in the door said, and the thought got into Kino.

'The doctor would not come' Kino said to Juana.[95]

He knows that :

'…….the doctor was not of his people. The doctor was of a race which for nearly four hundred years had beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's and frightened it too, so that the indigene came humbly to the door. And as always when he came near to one of his race, Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time.'[96] Within Kino's heart, this feeling was more intense and, 'He thought he could kill the doctor's race spoke to all of Kino's race as though they were simple animals.'

'And in four hundred years Kino's people had learned only one defence – a slight slitting of the eyes and a slight tightening of the lips and a retirement. Nothing could break down this wall, and they could remain whole within the wall.'[97]

Kino dared to show more spirit. Forced by his circumstances, he went beyond a 'slight slitting of the eyes, and a slight tightening of the lips.'[98] He refused to be cheated by the pearl buyers, declaring :

'My pearl is not for sale here. I will go, perhaps even to the capital.'[99]

Kino's action evoked a mixed response from his people. One section was of the opinion that : 'perhaps it would have been better if Kino took the one thousand five hundred pesos. That is a great deal of money, more than he has ever seen. May be Kino is being a pig-headed fool.'[100]

The other section, was of the view that :

'Kino is a brave man, and a fierce man; he is right. From his courage we may all profit.'[101]

Juan Tomas, Kino's brother, sums up the characteristic native attitude of massive resignation to their predicament when he says :

'We do know that we are cheated from birth to the over charge on our coffins. But we survive. You have defied not the pearl-buyers, but the whole structure, the way of life, and I am afraid for you.'[102]

Religion too is a part of that structure of exploitation. The priest, like the doctor and the pearl buyers, is more interested in the great pearl than in Kino. It is the pearl that rouses him to a realization of his obligation towards the poor 'children'. He promptly visits Kino's hut to remind him of his duty and to make him thank Him for the 'treasure', and pray for His 'guidance in the future.'

This, it seems, is the only type of exploitation which the natives accept willingly. Thus, as the priest approaches Kino's hut, the news spreads 'from mouth to mouth.' They are filled with awe :

'The men uncovered their heads and stepped back from the door, and the women gathered their shawls about their faces and cast down their eyes. Kino and Juan Tomas, his brother, stood up.'[103]

Kino too, has great faith in religion. Even when he hears a faint music of evil, of the enemy, he cannot connect it with the present. Rather he looks at his neighbours to see who might have brought this song in. However, the priest's departure leaves him confused. Though he does not betray any change in his attitude towards religion, 'the evil song was all along in Kino's ears, and he was glancing about suspiciously'.

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III
Faith In Human Values

Humanism permeates through Steinbeck's work everywhere. He has been known as a man possessing a deep human warmth and a rare grace of easy affability. There is no dearth of authentic evidence that few individuals, more so with a world of glory at their command, have displayed greater sympathy and affection for the ordinary men and women, living almost an anonymous existence, than Steinbeck. Steinbeck had implicit faith in the fundamental human values – sacrifice. Throughout his plays these values are consistently present. They are always there, and basically the same. His outlook regarding human values was positive. A careful reading of the main body of Steinbeck's work reveals clearly that he believed in a meaningful universe – universe which was not readily apprehensible, but nonetheless real. Man is the center of this universe. Thus we are certain to find humanism and idealism basically rooted in all his work.

Steinbeck was dissatisfied with the actual world as he saw it, and he aspired to change it according to this cherished ideas. He aspired both in life and in his novels to better the condition of mankind so that humanity may come to love and understand itself. He was another Prometheus. Robert Bennett aptly remarks : "…..every generation has its own Prometheus. Sometimes he turns out to be 'she' with plenty of spunk; more often he is an ordinary

man in your own home town. No doubt you recall Prometheus. He wasn't merely a classic myth, you know. Not at all. He was a great man who saw the need of art, warmth, cookery and security and brought these gifts to men in spite of all the gods of Olympus, especially Zeus. But for all his trouble he was seized as a radical and put in chains. Later he was delivered and ever since then has been known as one of the Immortals. Thus originated one of the earliest dramatic situations….. deux.ex machina'.

"The story hasn't changed much in four thousand years. Since Prometheus the First, many have challenged the established order of gods, governments and more often man himself to bring new and necessary benefits to society. Many have called attention to gross blunders in economics, medicine, science, religion and political economy while setting out to remedy the evils and thereby adding fresh truths by their endeavours. Of such men is John Steinbeck".[1]

The theme in *In Dubious Battle* is that of humanism. It emerges more as a tone than theme. It stands stoutly between, the two clashing tones, *i.e.*, the capitalistic one of the owners, and the communistic one of the strikers, offering, as it were, the third, and the only desirable course which, if adopted by both the adversaries, can usher in social justice without any turmoil or bloodshed. The other two approaches are tainted with hatred and conflict, this one alone is based on love and cooperation.

Humanism in the novel stands out in sharp contrast against the background of the two dominant phenomena. The first is that of dehumanization of the strike leaders, a basic requirement in their situation and strategy. Mac is already dehumanized as the novel opens. Jim proves to be his able disciple and amazes even his mentor by his swift dehumanization. Mac admits :

"You're getting beyond me, Jim. I'm getting scared of you. I've seen guys like you before. I'm scared of 'em. Jesus, Jim, I can see you changing everyday."[2]

The second phenomenon concerns the inhumanity of the owners, an essential requisite for exploitation of the workers. There are instances galore, throughout the novel, of their inhuman approach and actions. Taken together, the two phenomena lie at the roots of almost all the acts of ruthlessness and inhumanity in the novel.

Humanism in *In Dubious Battle* is mainly represented by Doc Burton. He belongs to the profession the basic spirit of which is humanism. He translates the spirit into action by going out of his way to help people without any consideration of 'isms', or the good or bad of them. Mac says :

"You're not a Party man, but you work with us all the time; you never get anything. I don't know whether you believe in what we're doing or not, you never say, you just work. I've been out with you before, and I'm not sure you believe in the cause at all."[3]

When Mac tries to grill him on the issue of social justice, Doc simply says :

"I don't believe in the cause, but I believe in men."

—— I guess, I believe they're men, and not animals."[4]

He modestly attributes his acts of humanism to a natural urge in himself. He is drawn to anyone who needs his help, in the same way as a painter feels the urge to paint on seeing a canvas.

Both the sides in the strike lack this spirit. They are forces and groups where the individual does not matter. Doc pinpoints this through his concept of group organism. He feels that humanism is an attribute of an individual and not a group. He believes the group men "to be a new individual, not at all like single men."[5] An individual has feelings, a group does not. A group, on the other hand, has some cause. For example, the owners' group has its financial interests to further, and for achieving this, they are prepared to go to any limit. The wage cut itself is quite inhuman, but what they do to crush the strike is

nothing short of barbarism. They arrange murders, kidnappings, beatings, and arson, etc. Even their own folks, who, like Anderson, dare dissent, are not spared.

Doc offers a plausible solution to the problem, through humanism. He himself sets an example by embracing the suffering part of humanity and caring for them. The first and foremost requirement of Doc's solution is the need to discard violence as a means to achieve one's end. He tries to convince Jim that "the end is never very different in its nature from the means,"[6] and tells him, "You can only build a violent thing with violence."[7] His approach is basically Gandhian.

The infusion of a little humanism in both the adversaries could perhaps do the trick. But Steinbeck has emphasized that it is conspicuous by its absence in both. The owners expend their wrath on the poor striking workers and quickly find their substitutes, thereby rendering them penniless and face to face with starvation. The party too uses them cold-bloodedly, as bait, to prompt the owners to commit excesses so that they may gain public sympathy. Individual sufferings do not matter much to either side. Doc disappears and Mac and others simply notice it but do nothing to look for him. After Anderson's losses, Mac says :

"You see a guy hurt, or somebody like Anderson smashed, or you see a cop ride down a Jew girl, an' you think, what the hell's the use of it. An' then you think of the millions starving, and it's all right again. It's worth it."[8]

and Jim concurs :

"I'm sorry for Anderson, but what the hell. If I can give up my whole life, he ought to be able to give up a barn."[9]

Both sides resort to drastic overdoses of complicated but infructuous remedies for the malady for which a simple dose of humanism would have been enough.

Mac frequently makes use of a spurious kind of humanism as a gimmick to further his cause. He helps Lisa with her delivery to establish report with London and other workers, shows sympathy for Dan only when he finds him useful for the strike, and shows fondness for Anderson's dogs to obtain permission to use his land for the camp.

But the roots of humanism lie in every heart. They might be suppressed under certain conditions but do not cease to exist. Even in the midst of utter dehumanization, Mac and Jim betray glimpses of human weakness and warm feelings. Referring to Mac's shrewd use of Joy's body for attracting public sympathy, Peter Lisca says that under his 'tough exterior, we sense a humane individuality which insists on asserting itself more and more as the strike progresses.'[10] For instance, after brutally battering the high school boy, Mac feels so revolted by his act that he collapses when it is over. Lisca again points out that, 'On a few occasions this individuality is so strong that he acts on impulse and in passion, losing all efficiency as a party leader.'[11] Thus, Mac advises A1 to renounce communism and make up with his father, and towards the end, when the strike faces an inevitable collapse, he wants Jim to escape. He Tells him :

"I 'want' you to go, Jim. You cannot fight with that arm. You'd be no damn good here. You couldn't help at all."[12]

Jim's response to this confirms Lisca's observation :

'Jim's face was rigid. "I won't go," he said. "I might be of some use here. You protect me all the time, Mac. And sometimes I get the feeling you're not protecting me for the party, but for yourself."[13]

The theme of humanism plays a very important role in the novel. It offers a fresh approach towards the complicated problem, an altogether different one from those of the two antagonists in the strike. Steinbeck effectively demonstrates how, as group men, they utterly lack in this commodity, while their only hope lies in it. It is a human problem and can be solved

neither through inhuman repressive measures (by the owners), nor through dehumanized agitating tactics of the workers, but only through humanism on the part of both.

The theme of humanism also belies the charge of communist propaganda leveled so often by critics against the novel. As Warren French points out :

'Steinbeck's novel is not, like much other American writing from the 1930's—either an allout attack on the capitalist system or a denunciation of the Reds. It is rather an attack on any fiercely held partisan abstraction that denies and destroys the dignity of individual human being.'[14]

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, right through the thick pall of gloom caused by the economic depression in America, and amidst the grim tales of the suffering migrants, there emerge redeeming patches of brightness that make the stings less biting. Through all the turmoil, there is something that remains intact right till the end. It is the humanity of the people, incorporated as a significant theme in the novel.

The reasons why humanity becomes such a significant idea in the overall thematic composition of the novel is that it stands out in sharp contrast to the inhumanity of some people towards many others.

Adversity and destitution are apt to make a man selfish and self-centred. If a man has very little to eat he will naturally try to eat up all to the exclusion of others; if jobs are scare, a worker will try, in the struggle for survival to grab one for himself before the others; and for the same reason, a starving man will try desperately to snatch food from others. But Steinbeck's people stop short of that. They display utmost restraint even in the face of the darkest odds. There is a sublime quality about them, which becomes apparent when one sees how people's hearts go out to others in their misery and in their moment of need, how they try to share their misfortunes and lessen their pain, and hw they strive together in the spirit of cooperation to alleviate their misery.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck has depicted the theme by presenting innumerable instances of deeds of kindness and generosity and a concern for others. Bonds of humanity grow and flourish among complete strangers mainly from the migrant class, and sometimes, from non-migrants too.

As the story in *The Grapes of Wrath* revolves around the Joads, instances of humanity too move along with them. It is indeed surprising as well as heartening to note how quickly such bonds are formed among complete strangers. Maybe it is because they are birds of the same feather. On Highway 66, the Joads come across the Wilsons and at the introduction itself, Ivy Wilson says : "Well, we are proud to meet you folks."[15] Soon afterwards, Sairy Wilson notices Grampa's illness and offers hospitality : "How'd you like a come in our tent?"[16] and "You kin lay down on our mattress an' rest."[17] Ultimately, Grampa breathes his last in the Wilson's tent in their quilt. While preparing for the burial, Ma tells Mrs. Wilson, "We'll drop him in your quilt. We'll make it up to you. We got a quilt for you." '[18] Sairy Wilson is politely indignant: "You shouln' talk like that. We're proud to help."[19]

At Hooverville, Al helps Floyd with his car engine and, in gratitutde, Floyd tips him about some work up north. He shows his concern for the Joads and wants to save them from unnecessarily burning their petrol looking for work. Later, when he picks up a row with the contractor and the deputy sheriff, Tom and Casy, who are barely acquainted with him come to his rescue, and attack the deputy to save him. Casy owns the whole responsibility and gets himself arrested in order to save both Floyd and Tom. He asks a reluctant Al to 'get out' :

"If you mess in this your whole fambly, all your folks gonna get in trouble. I don' care about you. But your ma and your Pa, they'll get in trouble. Mayble they'll send Tom back to McAlester."[20]

The government camp at Weedpatch embodies human values at their brightest. It provides solace to the bruised and

tormented spirits of the migrants. It restores to them their human dignity which was insulted and injured throughout their long journey and at Hooverville. On the very first morning Tom is offered breakfast by an unknown family and later they also ask him to join them in their job : "Lookie," he said. "We're laying some pipe. 'F you want to walk over with us, maybe we could get you on."[21]

The camp manager too is the very personification of kindness. He drinks coffee with Ma and treate her with utmost regard. Ma is moved beyond words. He also shows compassion for Mrs. Sandy, a puritanical character, who always talks in terms of sins and sinners. She harries Rose of Sharon to such an extent that Ma has to pick up a stick to hit her. The kindly manager intervenes and pleads with Ma, "Try not to hit her.

She isn't well. She just isn't well."[22]

Mr. Thomas, the manager to the company where Tom gets work with Timothy and his father, is not a migrant, but he displays remarkable concern for migrants. He feels uncomfortable and unhappy at effecting a wage cut. He tries even to argue with the Farmers' Association : "I've got good men. They're worth thirty."[23] But his plea is curtly brushed aside. Mr. Thomas then proceeds to show his sympathy for the workers by passing on to Timothy the vital secret that, "There's going to be a fight in the camp Saturday night. And there is going to be deputies to go in."[24]

At Hooper's ranch too, we find a non-migrant moved by humanity and doing a good turn to a needy migrant. It is the man at the company's store. He is an agent of exploitation, selling everything at high prices, and even ridiculing the poor migrants. But Ma's handling sobers him down, and he becomes more respectful to her. Later on, when Ma plends urgently for ten cents worth of sugar on credit, he 'took ten cents from his pocket and rang it up in the cash register.[25] This small but generous gesture makes Ma exclaim: "If you're in trouble or hurt or need-go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones."[26]

At cotton picking when the Joads are trapped amidst heavy rains and flood waters, and Rose of Sharon gets her labour pains, Mrs. Wainwright comes to assist Ma in the delivery. Ma is overwhelmed :

"You been frien'ly," she said. "We thank you." Mrs. Wainwright smiled. "No need to thank. Every'body's in the same wagon. S'pose we was down. "Yes", Ma said, "we would." "Or anybody."[27]

The most remarkable example comes in the last lines, when Rose of Sharon suckles a starving man in the barn to save him from death by starvation. The episode caused a mighty uproar, and the act was denounced as highly 'immoral'. But the principles of morality are set by the society, they are generalized do's and don't's which hold good in normal times. For emergencies, like the one just mentioned, what is to be done is decided on the spur of the moment, considering the need. The aim here is to save a life by providing sustenance to it, and in the circumstances, there can be no other source for it than Rose of Sharon. By doing what she has done, she has in fact elevated herself above the moral code of the society and glorified the divine code of humanity.

While discussing the theme of 'humanism' in *The Grapes of Wrath*, one name that deserves special mention is that of Jim Casy, the ex-preacher. He discovers for himself the contradiction involved in a preacher's life – a constant tug-of-wear in the mind between holiness and earthly desires. The former he strives to achieve but the latter invariably draw him away from it. Every time he succumbs to them, he is disturbed with ideas about sin. He thinks and thinks till he finds himself saying aloud, "The hell with it. There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do."[28] He tells Tom, "I says, 'what's this call, this sperit?' an' I says, 'It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust, sometimes.'"[29] He even disowns Jesus for the love of the people : "An' I says, 'Don't you love Jesus?' Well, I thought an' thought, an' finally I says, 'No, I don't know nobody name' Jesus. I know

a bunch of stories, but I only love people.'"[30] His musings lead him into the belief that 'Maybe all men got one big soul ever 'body's a part of.'[31] This realization him quit as a preacher and embrace humanity at large. He has not turned atheist, but has assumed to himself the role of Jesus Christ. He has stopped preaching, but wishes to emulate Jesus in practice. He is determined to go to the people to understand them and educate them, to support them and fight and even die for them. That is why he joins the Joads on their journey:

"I'll go anyways, "he said. "Somepin's happening. I went up an' I looked, an' the houses is all empty, an' the lan' is empty, an' this whole country is empty. I can't stay here no more. I got to go where the folks is goin'. I'll work in the fiel's, an' maybe I'll be happy."[32]

Soon after reaching California, he demonstrates his readiness to suffer for others, by getting himself arrested to save Tom and Floyd. When he reappears outside Hooper's ranch, it is in the role of a strike leader educating and leading the migrants to fight for justice. His love for the people is revealed by the fact that he leads the strike in full knowledge of its consequences for himself. His humanitarianism remains with him till his very last breath, for he tries to preach it even to his tormentors: "You fellas don't know what you're doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids."[33] And his last words are an echo of Jesus Christ's at the time of his crucifixion, "You don' know what you're a-doin'",[34] thereby forgiving even his killers.

Casy is obviously the central figure of the novel, who delivers its message and also provides its title: which is picked from the lines:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.[35-A]

He is not a radical or red, but a redeemer, an image of Jesus in the modern setting, loving the poor, helping them, fighting

to secure them justice, and finally dying for them, for, 'In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born, across the sea, Wth a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me: As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.'[35-B]

The theme of humanism performs two redeeming acts in the novel. In the first place, it deals with the migrants as human beings rather than as an organized labour force that can fight for its rights. That saves the novel from the charge of being "communist propaganda." Secondly, it saves *The Grapes of Wrath* from ending on a pessimistic and tragical note. As the novel ends, one does not have the feeling that everything is lost for the migrants, but believes that there is still hope—kindled by the life-saving act of Rose of Sharon. The novel *Cannery Row* is set in Cannery Row, a stretch of Monterey waterfront occupied by fish canneries. The story moves around a group of bums-Mack and his company, which includes Hughie, Eddie, Jones, Gay and Hazel, Doc, the owner of the Western Biological, occupies a prominent place in the story and serves as the nucleus around which Mack and others revolve, generating the main action of the novel.

The novel opens with a detailed description of Lee Chong's grocery which is the main business center of the Row. Lee Chong acquires an old storage shed from Horace Abbeville as repayment of his debts. Mack talks Lee into renting that shed to him for five dollars and moves into it along with his friends. Then comes the description of Dora's Bear Flag Restaurant–'the stern and stately whore-house' of the Row, followed by that of Doc's Western Biological that collects and sells marine animals and products. It becomes the nerve center of the main action in the story. Doc is so popular and loved by all that everyone in Cannery Row feels that he 'ought to do something for him.'[36] Mack and the boys come up with specific ideas about what to do for him and agree upon a party to Doc. They arrange the funds by catching and selling frogs. Unfortunately, Doc fails to be present at the party arranged in his laboratory. Things go out of hand and

the party ends in a disaster by the time Doc is back. Utter humiliation overtakes Mack and the company and they maintain a low profile until Dora's a advice to throw another party which brings them back to life and action. This time it is to be a birthday party and the whole of Cannery Row is in it. It turns out to be a big success with mirth at its wildest. The novel ends with Doc clearing up the mess left behind by the party.

Analysing the elements of fiction in *Cannery Row*, Joseph Fontenrose has rightly observed that 'Superficially, the book resembles *Tortilla Flat*.'[37]

The resemblance, according to him, is merely superficial and not deep-rooted, as suggested by Woodburn C. Ross who wrote that:

"*Cannery Row* is merely a repetition of *Tortilla Flat* in everything except tone.'[38]

Both the novels have a 'thin thread of plot'[38-A], So thin in fact, that a casual reader is likely to miss it. In *Tortilla Flat* it was the Pirate's candlestick, in *Cannery Row* it is the party for Doc. Protagonists in both– Danny and his friends in the former and Mack and his company in the latter, are 'a tight little group with its own moral standards.'[39] Although the range of characters in *Cannery Row* is made wider with the inclusion of other inhabitants of the Row, they are 'a group made up not so much of social outcasts as of individuals who have retreated from society.'[40] Referring to the aesthetic level, Peter Lisca has pointed out' that:

'In both novels the structure and mores of this little group serve as commentaries on the structure and mores of that society which they have abandoned.'[41]

But *Cannery Row* is not *Tortilla Flat* retold. There was a long gap of ten years between the two novels during which Steinbeck produced many masterpieces besides a number of minor novels. His experiences as a novelist as later as a war correspondent had considerably matured his philosophy and sharpened his craftsmanship. *Cannery Row* bears an unmistakable

testimony to that. The most obvious difference between the two novels is that of tone. *Tortilla Flat* was written in the mock-epic tone. *Cannery Row*, though maintaining the comic vein, is, as pointed out by Stanley Alexander, 'obviously more thoughtful and much less a kind of literary joking. Its sentiments, one feels, are somehow deeper and more admirable.'[42] The novel acquires at some places a "mock-cosmic" tone.

Steinbeck's attitude towards his protagonists, or their 'glorification', in the two novels is also significantly different. Peter Lisca has brought out this difference when he says:

'Although Steinbeck had not considered the paisanos "quaint, dispossessed or under doggish," neither he considered them models of human conduct. They were people who merge successfully with their habitat. Ten years later, in *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck's detatched, amused, tongue-in-cheek acceptance of such a group changes to an active championing of their way of life:'[43]

he called Mack and the boys—

'….. the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey…..'[44]

Which inevitably brought on Steinbeck the charge of sentimental glorification of bums.

Stanley Alexander has drawn a comparison from the stylistic point of view and said:

'Differences are owing to a superior conception of style and its appropriateness to content.'[45]

Throughout *Cannery Row* there runs a soothing stream mutual benevolence born out of humanism which provides another significant theme to it. It demonstrates the convergence of different types of people living at the Row. There are : Lee Chong, the trader; sack and his friends – the bums; Doc, a scientist; and Dora and her girls – the whores. They display at one level or another

he the spirit of mutual benevolence among themselves and are helpful to each other and the society at large.

It starts right from chapter I with the description of Lee Chong, the 'round faced and courteous' Chinese trader. He was the main businessman of the Row, but unlike Torelli of *Tortilla Flat*, he was not avaricious.' Despite the fact that over the years, everyone in Cannery Row owed him money, he never pressed his clients. His method for realizing his debts was that, 'when the bill became too large, Lee cut off credit.'[46] And that worked, because 'Rather than walk into the town up the hill, the client usually paid or tried to.'[47] The extent of his forbearance can be learnt from the fact that 'Maybe his wealth was entirely in unpaid bills.'[48]

The incident of Horace' suicide after handing over his house to Lee Chong also reveals Lee's benign spirit, for after the tragedy,

'Lee Chong stood behind the cigar counter and his nice brown eyes were turned inward on a calm and eternal Chinese sorrow. Her knew he could not have helped it, but he wished he might have known and perhaps tried to help. It was deeply a part of Lee's kindness and the understanding that man's right to kill himself is inviolable, but sometimes a friend can make it unnecessary.'[49]

In humanitarian grounds,

'Lee had already underwritten the funeral and sent a wash-basket of groceries to the stricken families.'[50]

The next illustration of mutual benevolence comes from he most unexpected person– Dora, 'the madam' and owner of ear Flag Restaurant.

the has –

'….. through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind.'[51]

though Dora is 'stern and stately' and a strict disciplinarian, the is very kind at heart. For example:

'Of her girls, some are fairly inactive, due to age and infirmities, but Dora never puts them aside, although, as she says, some of them don't turn three tricks a month, but they go right on eating three meals a day.'[52]

Quite often, philanthropy is forced on Dora too, for–

'…..being illegal Dora must be especially philanthropic. Everyone puts the bite on her. If the police give a dance for their pension fund and everyone gives a dollar, Dora has to give fifty dollars. When the chamber of commerce improved its gardens, the merchants each gave five dollars, but Dora was asked for and gave a hundred. With everyone else it is the same, Red Cross, Community Chest, Boy Scouts, Dora's unsung, unpublicized, shameless dirty wages of sin lead the list of donations.'[53]

At the time of emergencies, her 'responsibility' increases manifold. During the depression.

'Dora paid grocery bills right and left for two years and very nearly went broke in the process.'[54]

And when there is the influenza epidemic, she asks Doc–

'Is there anything I can do?'[55]

and on Doc's advice, arranges her girls 'to go in shifts to sit with the families, and they carried pots of soup when they went.'[56]

Again, it is Dora who suggests to a demoralized Mack to give Doc a party 'he does get to.'[57] and also gets a beautiful quilt prepared for him as his birthday present.

Doc is the main exponent of the theme of mutual benevolence in the novel. He practices it either directly by himself doing generous deeds, or indirectly by enthusing others. According to the author's description:

'….. his face is half Christ and half satyr and his face tells the truth.'[58]

Although he belongs to a different class, he has merged himself into the life of *Cannery Row*:

'Over a period of years Doc dug himself into Cannery Row to an extent not even he suspected. He became the fountain of philosophy and science and art.'[59]

His rapport with the people below his status is so complete that:

'Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon and his sympathy had no warp. He could talk to children, telling them profound things so that they understood.'[60]

His influence on them is so profound that:

'Everyone who knew him was indebted to him. And everyone who thought of him thought next: I really must do something nice for Doc.'[61]

Doc is very considerate of other people's welfare. For instance, while collecting marine animals with Hazel, he somehow finds out that Hazel has concealed some undersized abalones, which is illegal. He tells him:

'Look Hazel, I know you've got six or seven undersized abalones in the bottom of your sack. If we get stopped by a game warden, yor're going to say they're mind, on my permit– aren't you?'[62]

Mack too refers to an incident which shows Doc's concern for the people:

'When I cut myself he put on a new bandage every day. A hell of a nice fella.'[63]

When he comes to know of Frankie's miserable plinght,

'Doc clipped Frankie's hair and got rid of the lice. At Lee Chong's he got him a new pair of overalls and a striped sweater and Frankie became his slave.'[64] 'He wanted to work in the laboratory. He swept out everyday…….'[65]

Is benevolence is at its brightest during the influenza epidemic. Despite the fact that Doc had no right to practice medicine,

'It was not his fault that everyone in the Row came to him for medical advice.'[66]

and he was–

'running from shanty to shanty taking temperatures, giving physics, borrowing and delivering blankets, and even taking food from house to house where mothers looked at him with inflamed eyes from their beds, and thanked him and put the full responsibility for their children's recovery on him,'[67]

during those days we are told, Doc didn't get much sleep.

When the first party gets out of hand, and Doc returns to find a big mess in his laboratory, he is momentarily put off and his,

'small hard fist whipped out and splashed against Mack's mouth.'[68]

Out when Mack explains the whole incident, he cools down and, when Mack offers–

'Doc…….I and the boys will clean up here, and we'll pay for the stuff that's broke.'[69]

he is in full command of his senses and says–

'No…….I'll clean it up. I know where everything goes.'[70]

As to the compensation offer, his response is :

'No, you won't, Mack…….You'll think about it and it'll worry you for quite a long time, but you won't pay for it.'[71]

When Doc comes to know about the second party, he too begins making his own preparations. Taking his lesson from the first, he carries his best records, alongwith 'every bit of equipment that was breakable' into the safety of the back room. Then like a

good host, because the party, though sponsored by others, was to be held at his place,

'He knew how it would be-his guests would be hungry and they wouldn't bring anything to eat. ….. Doc ordered fifteen pounds of steak, ten pounds of tomatoes, twelve heads of lettuces, six loaves of bread, a big jar of peanut butter, and one of strawberry jam, five gallons of wine, and four quarts of a good, substantial, but not distinguished whisky.'[72]

The second party reflects Doc's popularity in the Row. It is the benign influence of his humanitarian quality that makes him so respectable and lovable to all. His party enthuses everyone in the Row-from Mack and the boys to Dora and the girls, including Lee Chong, Mr. And Mrs. Gay and others. People arrive in singles, coupes and droves with their presents, and participate whole-heartedly. Thus, Doc contributes the maximum to the theme of mutual benevolence in *Cannery Row*.

Mack and the boys – the group that forms the other protagonist – too contribute to this theme in their own small way. On the surface they do not seem folks who could be of any service to anyone, but Doc' benevolence brings them out of their limited circle. Their greatest act is coming up with the idea of giving a party to Doc. They organize it first unsuccessfully and then successfully. It is in fact their expression of appreciation of Doc's greatness, and as it turns out, the whole Row shares their feelings. It is interesting to see how the boys plan their party, and more so, the manner in which they arrange money for it. Most characteristically, they find a via media for not having to compromise their reputation and still make some money by catching frogs for Doc for persuading Chong to buy them.

Through Mack, Steinbeck has successfully demonstrated how a little helpfulness, a little understanding and tact can work wonders for man. To take one instance, on their frog-catching mission by the river Carmel, Mack and the boys are challenged

by the captain on whose property they were camping for the night. The captain rudely tells them–

'The land's posted. No fishing, hunting, fires, camping. Now you just pack up and put that fire out and get off this land.'[73]

But when, after admitting their mistake, Mack tells him most politely that they would immediately leave, and adds a few words of praise and sympathy for the captain's bitch:

'By God, that's a fine–looking' bitch,' he said enthusiastically. 'She look like Nola that win the field trials in Virginia last year. She a Virginia dog, Captain?'[74]

and offer to help with the tick on her shoulder:

'Tell you what I'll do, Captain, I'll look after her myself. Epsom salt'll do the trick. That's the best thing.'[75]

the captain is totally transformed. He says:

'You know, I've got a pond up by the house that's so full of frogs I can't sleep nights. Why don't you lookup there? They bellow all night. I'd be glad to get rid of them.'[76]

In addition he generously entertains them in his house and offers them his best wine.

The above account is merely illustrative of the theme of humanism in *Cannery Row* which pervades the narrative. It is the most prominent theme in the novel and has been developed accordingly. It not only binds the inhabitants of Cannery Row into one larger bond of humanity but also provides the novel its 'thin thread of plot' in the form of Doc's party. It is the theme which gives the novel its organic framework by effecting a synthesis of all other themes.

Throughout his career Steinbeck aspired to better the condition of mankind and he portrayed a sympathetic picture of the lowly strata of society so that humanity may come to love and understand it and thus make it possible for his aspirations to take a practical shape. Fontenrose aptly remarks, "At one time Steinbeck said that all his work was meant to help people

understand one another. He has wanted to enlist our sympathy for men of all degrees, for the wise and feeble-minded, for beggars and kings alike. His most persistent theme has been the superiority of simple human virtues and pleasures to the accumulation of riches and property, of kindness and justice to meanness and greed, of life-asserting action to life-denying. In several ways he has asserted that all life is holy, every creature valuable. Herein lies his sentimentality, but also his strength."[77] Steinbeck has great faith in the dignity of man and he hopes that man is able to attain that dignity. Although his heroes are defeated in the end, they are never broken. Steinbeck seems to say that defeat is a part of life, that is the way of the world. He has much to console or sustain us. The final picture is that of courage, of self-realization. Even in defeat his heroes do not lose their dignity and soul. The pearl which Kino wanted for his child's education, for fulfilling his physical needs, for gaining status in society, was thrown into the sea again, since with the death of Coyotito the pearl no longer had any significance to him. After having "his boat smashed, his baby dead, and the pearl cast into the sea", he returned to the world with all the courage and fortitude. Jim Nolan in *In Dubious Battle* dies in the end, but dies manfully with the hope of keeping the flame of revolution burning. Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* had to leave the strikers, but he hoped wherever there would be suppression, he would be present. In fact, the novel itself celebrates the victory of life over death, of love over hate, of courage over malignant forces of nature. Cruelty, torture, beatings, shootings do not crush the human spirit altogether. On the contrary, they add to the anger against injustice and the determination to root it out. Steinbeck's final picture is almost always that of uplifting of humanity. His aim is to kindle in the bosom of his readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liaberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor greed, nor capitalism can ever wholly extinguish from mankind. Although he has not given any definite plans of social amelioration, the message is clear enough : if we want to uplift

human society it should be based on love and understanding, not on greed and meanness. Gray writes, "Without assuming the responsibility of a reformer he wished to influence the temper of the time simply by urging acceptance of sane attitudes in matters of economic opportunity and attitudes favoring equality in the administration of justice."[78]

Steinbeck believed in human brotherhood and universal understanding and that is why, as Woodburn Ross says, his affinities are with Hume, Rousseau, Comte and such other social reformers and thinkers.[79]

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32. *Ibid*, p. 82.

33. *Ibid*, p. 344.

34. *Ibid.*

35-A. From "Battle of the American Republic" (by Julia Ward Howe)

35-B. *Ibid.*

36. John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*, Penguin Books (all subsequent references to the text will be from this edition), p. 99.

37. Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck*, p. 10.

38. Woodburn C. Ross, *John Steinbeck* : *Earth and Stars*, reprinted in Steinbeck and His Critics, ed. E.W. Tedlock Jr. & C.V. Wicker, (Albuquerque, 1957), p. 177.

38-A. Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid*, p. 199.

42. Stanley Alexander, *Cannery Row : Steinbeck's Pastoral Poem*.
43. Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 200.
44. *Cannery Row*, p. 99.
45. Stanley Alexander, *Cannery Row : Steinbeck's Pastoral Poem*.
46. *Ibid,* p. 93.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid,* p. 96.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid,* p. 100.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid,* p. 101.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid,* p. 156.
56. *Ibid,* p. 157.
57. *Ibid,* p. 193.
58. *Ibid,* p. 108.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid*.
61. *Ibid*.
62. *Ibid,* p. 113.
63. *Ibid,* p. 118.
64. *Ibid,* p. 120.
65. *Ibid*.
66. *Ibid,* p. 156.
67. *Ibid*.

68. *Ibid*, p. 178.
69. *Ibid*.
70. *Ibid*.
71. *Ibid*.
72. *Ibid*, p. 207.
73. *Ibid*.
74. *Ibid*, p. 146.
75. *Ibid*, p. 147.
76. *Ibid*.
77. *John Steinbeck : An Introduction And Interpretation*, p. 141.
78. James Gray, *John Steinbeck* (University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, 1971), p. 32.
79. "John Steinbeck : Earth and Stars" in Tedlock's *Steinbeck and His Critics*, p. 178.

IV
Themes Of Loneliness In His Novels

It is reported that Steinbeck had written three novels before *Cup of Gold*. It is rather unfortunate that they are not available. Apart from satisfying a curious biographer, as watt has suggested, they might have been valuable to a student of Steinbeck. They might have provided an insight into the mind of an ambitious young writer in search of a career. However that may be, *Cup of Gold*, published in 1929, is Steinbeck's first available novel and the only one of its kind, as it uses a historical setting for its plot, and a "literary style."

The first impression one gathers after going through this novel, is that it is too perfect as if it had been written as a film script. Even the author is of the same view. Peter Lisca has pointed out that, "He believed *Cup of Gold* would be the only book of his that could be filmed (JS-MO 4/15/36)"[1]. The plot seems to be drawn to perfection. There is a restless young boy who dreams that one day he will be a great man. Piracy on the high seas lures him from the comforts of his home. But soon he discovers that nothing in this world is so easy. He is betrayed by his companion and sold to a far off island as a slave; yet his wild spirit is not subdued. This keeps his dream alive. By his skill and imagination he raises himself high in the eyes of his masters and becomes almost his adopted son.

When his term expires, he makes use of his experience to organize a select band of pirates. By his daring and imagination, he soon becomes the most feared buccaneer on the high seas. His greatest triumph is his capture of the city of Panama and the legendary woman known to all as la Santa Roja. When he thinks that he has had enough of buccaneering, he decides to retire gracefully from the profession, and, again, his stars help him. He is forgiven by the king, and is knighted for his efforts against the enemy, Spain, and is appointed governor of Jamaica. So Sir Henry Morgan, ex-buccaneer, lives out his life gracefully and with honour except that sometimes his conscience worries him.

What is important in his novel is not the story but the idea inherent in it. When one parts the thin veil of adventure and romance that envelops this novel, one discovers that it is meant to portray the wishes and dreams of a young boy. The boy's ambition to become great portrays, in a way, the wishes and dreams of a young writer, just embarking on his career. The author here is certainly not "advocating the free life of adventures"[2], as Maxwell Geismar chooses to call it. But it is rather a story of *man's isolation and his changing relation to life*. It deals with the problem of alienation. We will find that Steinbeck will tackle this problem on a large scale in the novel *Grapes of Wrath*. But, whereas the Joads were able to discover an answer for this problem by sacrificing their own petty interests for the love of others, Henry Morgan could not shake off his egocentric selfish interests; hence he was gradually isolated from his fellow beings.

From the beginning young Henry Morgan is not content within the narrow boundaries of his native Welsh Valley. His wild ambitions spirit urges him to move onward. The boy often dreams of greatness. As his father prophesied about him.

"I say to you without pleasure, that his son of ours will be a great man, because well – because he is not very intelligent. He can see only see desire at a time. I said he tested his dreams; he will murder every dream with the implacable arrows of his will. This boy will win to every goal of his aiming; for he can realize

no thought, no reason, but his own. And I am sorry for his coming greatness."[3]

The reason for being sorry is further clarified in the prophecy of the old sage, Merlin:

"You are a little boy. You want the moon to drink from as a golden cup; and so, it is very likely that you will become a great man if only you remain a little child. All the world's great man if only you remain a little boys who wanted the moon; running and climbing they sometimes caught a firefly. But if one grows to a man's mind, the mind must see that it cannot have the moon and would not want it if it would and so, it catches no fireflies".[4]

These two prophecies contain in themselves the gist of the theme of this novel. History Morgan certainly became great as was predicted, but at the cost of becoming an isolated, disillusioned man. He tried to realize his dream of greatness by means of violence which generated hatred for him, and thus he became isolated from his fellow beings.

As the story progresses, we find that Morgan is gradually cut off from his fellows; as he drives forward to his goal ruthlessly over friends and enemies alike. He is alienated from the vast ocean of humanity because he dreams only of personal power. In his pursuit of greatness, Morgan becomes a lonely man, as is clear from his own statement :

"Can you not imagine that I may need a friend ? Can you not think of me as a lonely man ?" [5]

There comes also a drastic change in his relation to life. So long as he remained a child, his dreams were sustained by his imagination. But when as a man he tried to visualize them, they withered away one by one. Elizabeth was for him in childhood the pure sweetheart but, in his pursuit of his dreams, she merges as an ideal with the sensual Ysobel, who is a married woman and rides horses like a man. At last when he is united with his Elizabeth, she is a quite different person, a very ordinary woman, conscious only of social life. These changes signify the failure

and frustration of Henry Morgan who chose the path of violence to construct his childhood dream world. But the greatest shock comes to him after his conquest of the city of Panama. Here he is made to face the hard realities of life. He realizes how the difference between the dream and the reality. The feebled ideal beauty turns out to be a sensual woman, the mystical Grail to be a golden cup :

"Henry Morgan lifted a golden cup from the heap of loot. It was a lovely slender chalice with long curved handles and a rim of silver. Around its outer edge four grotesque lambs chased each other, and inside on the bottom a naked girl lifted her arms in sensual ecstasy".[6]

The cup symbolizes the contrast between dream and reality. The interior is the dream world where man can weave any patterns he wishes but the reality is that eh chases them in vain.

And at last, Henry Morgan, the reformed buccaneer, now Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, faces realities on his death-bed. His past deeds rise round him imaged in faceless, misshapen children crying "Why did you do me ?" and "Why did you think me ?'. He now realizes that in this vast universe there is no place for his ego "I", who is the creator of his dream world, and this dream world vanishes with "I". "I am not moving. I am fixed. I am the center of all things and cannot move. I am as heavy as the universe. Perhaps I am the universe".[7] This is the ultimate truth for Henry Morgan who in his egoistic selfishness tried to build a separate world of his own but in the end he had to realize that "I" cannot be separated from the universe. It comes out of the universe and again merges into it. But before the final union Morgan has a vision of his childhood sweetheart Elizabeth. As he used to lover her, this vision comes to him as a reward for the only noble deed of his life. This love triumphs over all his sins. Hence: "they turned toward the form and cowered, and at length fell on their knees before it and raised trembling arms in gestures of supplication".[8] In this first novel of his, Steinbeck has emphasized the triumph

of love over violence. We will find that Steinbeck will again and again emphasize the needof love to cement the bands of humanity.

In Dubious Battle (1936) marks the beginning of Steinbeck's deep involvement in the contemporary social chaos following the Great Depression in America. It was Steinbeck's first full-fledged attempt at presenting the social, economic and political realities underlying the system. According to F.W. Watt :

'The political pressures of the nineteen-thirties in America were almost impossible to avoid. It was difficult to find any middle ground between "escapism", an ignoring of social disasters and the political issue of the Great Depression, and "commitment," personal and ideological involvement with a stricken society.'[9]

It was a dark period for American economy. Under those chaotic conditions, there was large-scale unemployment, inhuman exploitation of labour, and simmering discontent, often erupting in unrest and strike. That constituted ideal material for a strike novel and Steinbeck produced one—*In Dubious Battle*. It has been considered as one of the best strike novels.

Even before he had completed it, Steinbeck wrote about the book : "I guess it is a brutal book."[10] He thought it to be, "more brutal because there is no author's moral point of view."[11] He sought to suggest that thought it dealt with strike material, it did not seek to unduly glorify the strikers, or unjustly malign the owners. Rather, in its objective manner, it presented the situation as it was and brutally narrated the acts of both the sides.

In Dubious Battle presents the story of Jim Nolan, a youth who joins a labour organization of the radicals. As part of his apprenticeship, eh goes out with Mac, a party functionary, to organize a strike of fruit-pickers in Torgas Valley. At the orchard, Mac and Jim help Lisa, London's daughter, with her child-birth, and win London's confidence. Dan's accident provides them with an excuse to strike work. Mac and Jim mobilize support from other ranches. Dakin emerges as their leader with London, Burke

and many others besides Mac and Jim, as important functionaries. They are pushed out of the orchard and find shelter on Anderson's land. Camps are laid and Doc arrives to supervise the sanitation and medical services. The owners call more labourers from outside to break the strike. The strikers plan to dissuade them on their arrival, but then Joy, another activist, is killed. His body is used to arouse the passions of the strikers. He is given a ceremonial burial. The strikers picket the ranches to stop all apple-picking. The owners' attacks keep mounting in a well-organised manner. All is beaten and his shop is burnt. Anderson's entire apple crop is brunt, and Doc disappears. The strikers' supplies are disrupted, and ultimately, they are served orders to vacate Andersons' land. The strike is almost finished, and Jim is killed in an ambush. Mac makes use of this opportunity and makes a passionate speech to boost the low morale of the strikers. He feels like Milton's Satan that though the field be lost, all is not lost, for hatred and desire for revenge will remain.

The theme in the novel is that the loneliness. It is a subsidiary theme, which does not contribute much to action. But it is quite significant as it reveals an aspect of characters entirely different from their apparent selves. It reflects a state of mind, a void in the heart, and is delineated mostly implicitly.

In the present novel, the theme of loneliness has been presented mainly through characters like Doc, Jim, Mac, Dan, Anderson, etc. It springs from various causes, e.g., bachelorship and suppression of the self, unpleasant childhood memories, disappointment and frustration, old age and ailments, unprecedented catastrophe, etc.

Doc is the loneliest person in the novel obviously because he sees, believes in and seeks to realize a vision (of humanism) which others do not share or care much about. He is a bachelor, entirely devoted to his profession. He is always busy helping those who need him. He seems to have no time for his own self. Sometimes, after work, even though he is very tired, sleep eludes

him. It happens, on one occasion in the camp too, and when Mac asks him to get some sleep, he says :

"Well, I'm tired, but I don't feel sleepy. For the last hour, I've thought when I was through I might walk out into the orchard and sit down against a tree and rest."[12] Thus he wants to counter his loneliness through more action—physical as well as mental. While other characters generally fail to understand or even notice their loneliness, Doc clearly recognizes his. He is very balanced and has an amazing capacity to rationalize. He talks about his loneliness and helplessness and tells Mac before his disappearance :

"I don't know; I'm lonely, I guess. I'm awfully lonely. I'm working all alone, towards nothing."[13]

He is aware of the cause of his loneliness, which consists partly in the mechanical nature of his life : "There's some compensation for you people. I only hear heartbeats through a stethoscope. You hear them in the air."[14] His friends are worried at his condition : "Doc doesn't eat," Mac complained, "Nobody's seen him sleep. I suppose he'll break, sooner or later; but he never has before. He needs a woman bad; someone that would like him for a night; you know, really like him. He needs to feel someone-with his skin."[15] Mac's prescription may or may not be efficacious, but his observation of the symptoms is correct.

Since the story revolves around Jim's initiation into the party and his training as an organizer, his loneliness assumes greater importance. It is one of the main reasons why he joined the party. He had a sort of void in his heart ever since his childhood. His father, a sticker in a slaughter house, was an extremely aggressive sort of man who always tried to seek justice by literally fighting for it, and always getting knocked off. His mother, a devout Catholic, was extremely submissive and dominated by her husband's wishes. Jim always found himself cut off from both. His later behaviour seems to be a reaction to that of his parents, and he tries to improve upon both. Unlike his mother, be believes

in seeking justice, and unlike his father, he intends to do it in a saner way. When he loses his job, and gets imprisoned for no fault of his, the void is made deeper by his hatred for the system. Later in the jail, he comes across some party men who talk to him. They leave a deep imprint on his mind and he ponders, as he tells Harry Nilson, "…..Everything's been a mess, all my life. Their lives weren't messes. They were working toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again."[16] The party seems to offer a solution to all his problems, and he plunges whole-heartedly into it. Gradually, he becomes a professional, rather more thorough than his mentor Mac. From then on, he stoutly puts down all feelings of loneliness and weakness, and, but for a passing display of some tender feelings for Lisa towards the end, we do not find any trace of them right till his death.

Mac's case is different. He is a dedicated party-man who hardly ever betrays any weak feelings like loneliness. As Doc was devoted to his profession, Mac is devoted to his party and its cause. But the strike in the Torgas Valley turns out to be more difficult than his expectations. He clearly sees the strike slipping off, and his mob lacking miserably in spirit to pull on. When his men fail to break the barricades and get back to the camp unsuccessful, Mac burst out in unprecedented rage, 'Will any six of you yellow bastards fight 'me' with your hands ? Will 'you' ?"[17] He goes on to threaten them, "I'll kill the yellow bastards myself." [18] But soon afterwards, on cooling down, he says, "I'm no good. The party ought to get rid of me. I lose my head."[19] Mac loses his head when he is frustrated because : "They won't help themselves. Sometimes, I have seen men just like these go through a machine-gun nest with their hands. And here today they won't fight a few green deputy-sheriffs."[20] He is so dejected that it "Makes me want to run away, "he said ruefully, "I'd like to crawl down in a haystack and go to sleep, and to hell with the whole damn bunch of them."[21] His frustration and dejection breed loneliness in him and ruffle his otherwise cool interior.

Dan represents the loneliness of old age. He is unable to make his peace the present, and is always harking back to the past. He had been a top-faller in his youth and a proud one. While picking apples in Jim's company he nostalgically tells him about his past prowess and tries to relieve those moments by acting smart. That causes his fall and the hip injury which makes him an invalid. IN this invalid state he has no work and all the time to be miserable. This make him doubly lonely. He is grumbling all the time. The strike makes things worse for him because he believes that it was started by him and that he is being neglected. He tells Jim : "Up that apple tree all you could talk was strike, strike. And who starts the strike ? You ? Hell, no. I start it. Think I don't know. I start when I bust my hip. An then you leave me have alone."[22] He resents being treated like a 'God-damn baby' and feels aggrieved that they are "Goin' to leave me here an' the whole bunch go on a funeral. Nobody cares for me."[23] When Jim reassures him that he would be at Joy's funeral, he becomes immensely pleased, and when he is told that the chief acknowledge him as the real leader, he is puffed up with joy.

Anderson reflects a different kind of a loneliness springing from the shock of a sudden and unprecedented disaster. He was a small owner living in style. Jim exclaims on first seeing his place : "This is nice,"……. "Makes a man want to live in a place like this."[24] But, his association with the strikers, through providing his land for their camp, brings untold miseries on him. He stands isolated from his community that seeks to destroy him : his son is beaten and the box-car burnt, his apple crop is burnt in the barn, and there is every possibility of his losing all his land which was mortgaged. To add salt to the injury, his son is anxious to join the party that he holds responsible for all his troubles. His reaction comes in angry out-bursts against Mac and Jim : "You bastards get out of here."[25] He does not listen to anything from them and says : "You bastards never owned nothing. You never planted trees an' seen 'em grow an' felt 'em with your hands. You never owned a thing, never went out an' touched your apple trees

with your hands. What do you know ?"[26] That reveals the loneliness of one who suffers the loss of something he himself has created. His hatred and anger are so intense that he tells Mac and Jim : "I could shoot you men now, "……." But the sheriff's goin' to do it for me, an' damn qucki."[27] Thus his social boycott, aloofness from his son, and huge financial losses play havoc with him and make him an utterly lonely person.

Of Mice and Men (1937) marks an important landmark in the literary career of John Steinbeck. It turned out to be a masterpiece, and its success, both critical and popular, made Steinbeck one of the most renowned American novelists.

It was right after the publication of *In Dubious Battle* that Steinbeck commenced the preparations for his next book. But little did he know at the time what form his new book was going to take on completion. For, as he wrote in a letter in February, 1935 :

'I'm doing a play now. I don't know that what will come of it. If I can do it well enough it will be good play. I mean the theme is swell.'[28]

Thus he had the 'Play' form in his mind while writing *Of Mice and Men*.

The story of *Of Mice and Men* is very tightly knit and compact. It opens with George and Lennie walking down the highway to a pool by the Salinas river. George is small but intelligent while Lennie is huge and powerful but half-witted. Lennie has a passion for soft and furry animals and likes to stroke them. This habit of his always lands them in some trouble and they are not able to stay at one job for long. This time, they are engaged by an employment agency to work on a ranch. George briefs Lennie about how to behave at the ranch so that they may be able to stick there for some time. George and Lennie share a dream to own a piece of land. The dream means a lot to Lennie.

At the ranch, they meet a number of other characters like the master of the ranch, his son Curley, Curley's wife, Slim,

Carlson, Candy and Crooks. The moment George sees Curley's wife, he smells danger and warns Lennie in no uncertain terms to have nothing to do with her – to keep away from her and not even speak to her. Candy has a very old, toothless dog that stinks. Carlson and others persuade him to get rid of it and have a young pup in its place. Candy gives his consent with great pain and Carlson does the job with his gun. Curley picks a fight with the dumb Lennie who, on being prompted by George, mauls his (Curley's) hand.

When Candy comes to know of George and Lennie's dream of a piece of land, he shows eagerness to join them. George is not serious at first, but when Candy offers to contribute the major part of its price, he agrees. George reveals his detailed plans and Lennie feels elated.

On Sunday, when everyone is enjoying the game of horse-shoe, Lennie is alone in the barn with a puppy killed by his vigorous stroking. He is remorseful because now George will not let him tend the rabbits. At that time Curley's wife comes there and despite Lennie's refusal to even talk to her, makes him stroke her hair to feel its softness. That rouses his passion and he starts stroking vigorously. When the woman panics, he tries to silence her by covering her mouth and nose with his hand, but succeeds only in breaking her neck. When the dead woman is discovered, George guesses the whole happening immediately. Curley and the mob are all set to lynch Lennie. But George, after sending them in the opposite direction, reaches the spot where he had asked Lennie to come in case something went wrong. He then himself shoots Lennie with utmost calm.

Steinbeck's treatment of the story, as reflected in his portrayal of setting, characters and actions, is most convincing. That became possible only due to his first hand acquaintance with such places and people. Referring to Albert Halper, James T. Farrell, Studs Lonigan, Erskine Caldwell etc, O'Connor observed that :

'These new writers no longer came from the Ivy League colleges; they wrote from harsh experiences of the realities of American life. And Steinbeck, of course, had shared their "Proletarian" back-ground as a former ranch hand, haberdashery clerk, and bricklayer.'[29]

Thus harsh experiences of the realities of American life, and Steinbeck's 'proletarian' background played a very important role in making *Of Mice and Men* the masterpiece that it turned out to be.

Important theme in the novel is that of loneliness. Moments of loneliness come in the life of everyone, the moments when one feels cut-off and isolated from others. When this feeling persists, it makes one flow out in a separate channel away from the mainstream and withdraw into a shell. It dissolves into a man's nature and gives him a specific pessimistic outlook of life and an indifferent way of looking at things. Steinbeck has picked this human condition and has made a substantial use of it in the thematic design of the novel.

Loneliness is, in fact, a recurrent theme with Steinbeck, he reverts to it again and again in his novels to emphasise one aspect or the other of this condition. But nowhere has he gone into so many facets of it as in *Of Mice and Men*, of which loneliness is the all pervading spirit or tone. It depicts various shades of loneliness resulting from various causes. Thus, there is, first and foremost the loneliness resulting from uncertain, migratory nature of work, which is the natural and inevitable lot of migratory labour. All the farm hands on the farm in the novel suffer from it but none, perhaps, more than George, who refrains from the usual diversions of his age and group in look after Lennie who is not so much his friend as a protection against loneliness. Lennie is, indeed, to him what the puppy, or the dead mouse, was to Lennie.

Then there is the loneliness resulting landlessness : "I seen guys nearly crazy with loneliness for land." Again, all the farm

hands, nay almost the whole tribe of the landless, migratory farm labour, suffer from it, most of them silently. Only George, Lennie and Candy in the novel are articulate about it and cherish the hope of overcoming it. Again, there is the loneliness resulting from physical disability and old age, exemplified in Candy, who cherishes the company of his old, useless, stinking dog and, when that is gone, hugs the dream of independence for which he is prepared to give his all. The loneliness of Crooks, to which he seems to be resigned, springs from the racial divide. That of Lennie is of another kind. It is the result of mental retardation, and the half-witted giant does not seem to be even aware of it. But it is so overpowering that for him a rabbit, a pup, and even a dead mouse, is a great solace, and he instinctively clings to George with pathetic, dog-like servility. Curley's wife too is a lonely woman, her condition springing from her frustrated dream of glamour and marital misadjustment, while her husband's loneliness can be traced back to the arrogance of possession, he being the master's spoilt son and heir.

The first note of loneliness among the characters is struck by George who says : 'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.'[30] That sums up the loneliness of the migrant worker. George also mentions its causes : 'They got no family. They don't belong no place.'[31] They cannot keep families or have a place because they lack stability and means. They are always on the move from one ranch to another looking for work. They stay at one place only as long as there is work for them. After that they have to pack up and move. According to George :

'They come to a ranch and work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're pounding their tail on some other ranch,'[32]

And their predicament is that :

'They ain't got nothing to look ahead to.'[33]

But George and Lennie are different from the rest of the flock. Their predicament is not so dark. George says :

'With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don't have to sit in no bar-room blowin' our jack jus' because we got no place else to go.'[34]

And Lennie agrees :

'But not us. An' why ? Because……. Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.'[35] So, in place of 'family' they have each other's company. They move together, live together.

As for 'place', though they own no place at the moment, they have woven up a dream of a place which serves to fill in they vacuum in their minds to some extent and they, particularly Lennie, draw immense pleasure from talking about their piece of land.

Two other ranch hands may e mentioned here in the context of loneliness. They are Candy and Crooks. Candy had lost his right hand in a farm accident and is put on the meanest job on the ranch, that of a 'swamper.' He presents the typical picture of an old man suffering from physical disability, loneliness and rejection. He has a very old dog and draws almost as much emotional consolation from it as George does from Lennie's company. When Candy loses his dog, he is faced with the darkest moments of loneliness. But soon he finds a ray of hope. Lennie's dream charms him and he attaches himself to it. The dream and the imaginary sense of company provide him with so much fulfillment that he bold enough to talk rudely to Curley's wife in Crook's room.

Crooks, the black stable buck, has more reason to feel lonely than anyone else in *Of Mice and Men*, Firstly, like Candy, he is old and physically handicapped—'with a crooked spine bending him over to the left',[36] and secondly, he bears the burden of social ostracism, Being a Negro, he is treated as an outcast. He is put in a separate room and 'white' hands do not mix with

him. He lives in the 'terrible protective dignity of the Negro.'[37] That is why he rudely tells Lennie to go away from his room :

'You go on get out my room. I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain't wanted in my room.'[38]

Thus, he keeps his distance and demands the white community to keep its own. His aloofness has made him a proud man. He tells Lennie :

'They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me.'[39]

However, Lennie's visit to his room, later followed by Candy's arrival, is like a gust of fresh air which penetrates the age-old layers of hatred and anger in him. Crooks finds it difficult to conceal his pleasure with anger when he tells Candy :

'Come on in. If every' body's coming in, you might just as well.'[40]

Lennie's 'happy' position of having George's company makes Crooks enviously tease and torture him. But Lennie's simplicity wins him over and he opens out :

'A guy needs somebody –to be near him.' He wined : A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you.'[41]

And gain,

'I tell ya', he cried, I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick.'[42]

And most surprisingly, Crooks feels so at ease with them that he shows an inclination, at one stage, to share their dream and offers to work on their farm just for his keep. But Mrs. Curley's arrogant behaviour rudely puts him back in his accustomed place. He shrinks back into his shell and chooses to forget his interest in the dream as a 'joke'. He is again his old lonely self.

Curley's wife too suffers from loneliness. She has that characteristic feminine desire to be noticed. Her earlier ambition

to become an actress hints at the same fact. But that could not come about. She married Curley in exasperation only because, as she tells Lennie,

'I wasn't gonna stay no place where I couldn't get nowhere or make something of myself……. So I married Curley.'[43]

Otherwise she has no love for Curley. She confesses to Lennie :

'Well, I ain't told this to nobody before. May be I oughtn't do. I don' "take" Curley. He ain't a nice fella.'[44]

Her loneliness brings her frequently to the bunkhouse on the excuse of looking for her husband. She is always ridiculed for that by all but Lennie, who has been told not to have anything to do with her. That is why when she tries to talk to him and he shirks, she feels exasperated and says :

'Why can't I talk to you ? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely.'[45]

She feels envious of Lennie and tells him :

'You can talk to people, but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else he gets mad. How'd you like not to talk to anybody ?'[46]

But when her coaxing goes in vain, her anger rises :

'What's the matter with me ?' she cried. 'Ain't I got a right to talk to nobody ? Whatta they think I am anyways ? You are a nice guy. I don't now why I can't talk to you.'[47]

So, to her, Curley is 'not a nice guy' while Lennie is 'a nice guy'. How intense her loneliness must be for her to say so. She desperately tries to fight out her loneliness by developing some sort of company in which she would be noticed and heard even if it meant befriending a dim-wit like Lennie. But her frantic efforts end in her tragic death.

By the time Steinbeck came to *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), he had reached the fag end of his long and

eventful literary career. After *East of Eden* (1952), there had been no major success for about a decade. There was a growing feeling that he was finally slipping off. In fact, a section of critics had already stopped considering him as an active literary artist. But Steinbeck had not written himself off. He made an all out bid to regain his place, and the outcome was *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Richard O'Connor has described the novel as 'a major effort' by Steinbeck.[48]

In 1962, the year following its publication, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, which bears testimony to the success of his effort. Though the prize is given on the basis of the whole body of a writer's work, there can be no doubt that *The Winter of Our Discontent* was primarily instrumental in bringing Steinbeck once again into limelight.

In the sixties, America was riding the crest of financial and material prosperity. The glitter of wealth was being felt all around, and acquisitiveness was at its peak. Success was they key word for the common American, so much so that it came to be identified with the American dream. Shortucts to success were being perfected and applied, and the inevitable outcome was a marked erosion of social and moral values. According to Paul McCarthy, 'Steinbeck's observation of conditions on the East Coast convinced him that many things had gone wrong in the country.'[49] So once again, he found himself occupied with social and moral questions. There was an urgent need for self-criticism on the part of the American society, and Steinbeck's novel was a step in that direction.

Despite the fact that F.W. Watt regarded *The Winter of Our Discontent* as Steinbeck's most ambitious novel since *East of Edn*,'[50] and O'Connor called it 'a major effort,'[51] the novel was not a success with the critics, for, as O'Connor has observed, 'Most critics, regarding him as no longer a literary fashion plate and therefore a safe target, had dismissed *The Winter of Our Discontent* as another Steinbeck "sermon."'[52]

The novel presents the story of Ethan Hawley, a grocery clerk with a proud past. ON the morning of Good Friday, he happens to talk, one after another, with Joe Morphy, the bank teller, Mr. Baker, the banker, and Marrulo, the owner of the store. Their talk refers, coincidentally, to money in one way or the other. At home, immediately afterwards, Margie Young-Hunt predicts him a windfall. This prediction, reinforced by his own secret wish to regain lost glory, raises visions of success which he cannot resist, and he decides to make money without regard for the means. He plans cunningly, and succeeds in acquiring the store as well as Danny's valuable property by means that are not unquestionable. But his conscience, though momentarily quelled, is not dead. He is angry when he learns that his son, Allen, has won his prize in the national Essay Competition by cheating, and indignant when Allen refuses to repent. But Allen's argument that everybody is going it serves to make him conscious of his own guilt, for he too has obtained his 'windfall' by cheating. He is filled with remorse and decides to put an end to this life. But ultimately, he does not do that. The thought of his daughter, Ellen, brings him back from the brink.

Important theme in the novel is that of loneliness. Steinbeck had dealt with this theme earlier too, as in *Cannery Row*, but then it was limited in scope. *In The Winter of Our Discontent*, it is spread wider to cover a host of characters. The theme if loneliness, like that of discontent, deals with a mental condition, which comes in evidence only when it causes the character concerned to act in some peculiar, abnormal manner.

The variety of loneliness reflected in this novel seems peculiar to the prosperous societies of the modern times, viz., loneliness in the midst of crowds. Ethan, Margie, Mary, Allen, Ellen, Danny, and Baker-all are lonely in their different ways.

Ethan is the loneliest of all, though his behaviour is generally normal. He communicates well with others, with his wife and kids at home, and people like Joe and Baker outside. He is jolly to the extent of even playing silly with his wife. Even if

he has to disagree with her, he jokes about it in such a way as to give the impression that he does not take it seriously. Thus when Mary, excited by Margie's prophecy tells him : "Margie Young-Hunt's going to read me again today.' His playful response is 'Like a book? Who's Margie Young-Hunt, what is she, that all the swains—?'[53]

But Ethan's jolliness is just one side of the picture. The other, mostly hidden from the view, is that of an utterly lonely man. He possesses a split personality, which becomes obvious when we observe him in the moments of loneliness. It manifests itself on the street when he speaks to a dog, and in the store where he addresses the inanimate cans on the shelves, and at home when he spends sleepless nights while Mary purrs softly in her sleep, and when he roams about the streets or seeks the sea-shore at midnight in spite of rain and storm.

Such manifestations clearly indicate that there must be matters in his heart which he finds himself unable to express. That may be due to a fear of rejection or ridicule, or a sense of inferiority, when he compares his status to that of his grandfather. Whatever the cause, he prefers to keep matters to himself and maintains a studied secrecy and distance.

Ethan partly lives in his past while other members of his family live mostly in the present, and try to think in terms of future. Any attempt on their part to bring him to the present is met by him with stubborn resistance. The more they try, the more Ethan seems to withdraw into his shell. The awareness of his glorious past is very strong in him, and quite often, has a dampening effect on his thinking. It makes his poverty seem poorer, and adds strings to his discontent :

'Would my great ancestors be proud to know they produced a grocery clerk in a goddamn wop store in a town they used to own ?'[54]

He is an introvert. But his strong sense of reality and rationalization enables him to keep his poise tolerably well. The

loneliness he feels in the company of others seems to settle down when he finds his own company, i.e. he is alone. He craves for such moments. In the store before it opens up, he muses :

'A clerk in a grocery store—Marullo's grocery store-a man with a wife two darling children. When is he alone, when can he be alone ? Customers in the daytime, wife and kiddies in the evening; wife at night, customers in the daytime, wife and kiddies in the evening. 'Bathroom—that's when.'[55]

and in his imagination he says to his wife :

'There ain't nobody nor nobody's feelings here. Just me and my unimum-unimorum-until I open that goddamn front door.'[56]

Willful suppression of thoughts and feelings often leads to abnormality of behaviour. Thus, Ethan starts talking to animals. He advises the red dog to read *Moby Dick*, and 'aroints" the cat in the store saying, 'Mice and rats are free for cats, but you're a sausage nibbler. Aroints : you hear me-aroint :'[57] He even looks for reassurance from the piled and tiered audience on the shelves after the B.B.B. & D. man leaves :

'I thought you were my friends : You didn't raise a hand for me. Fair-weather oysters, fair-weather pickles, fair weather cake-mix. No more animus for you.'[58]

At times, when his mind is greatly disturbed and he is in need of reassurance, he goes out, to his Place by the sea-shore. It becomes a ritual with him, as narration of the dream of land was with Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. It enables Ethan to identify himself with his past. As he himself puts it:

'Sometimes on each visit, I reconstruct Old Harbour for my mind's pleasure-the docks, the warehouses, the forests of masts and underbrush of rigging and canvas. And my ancestors, my blood-the young ones on the deck, the fully grown aloft, the mature on the bridge.'[59]

It provides him great respite – 'No nonsense of Madison Avenue then or trimming too many leaves from cauliflowers.'[60] – and he remembers nostalgically – 'Some dignity was then for a man, some stature. A man could breathe.'[61]

In the penultimate chapter, there comes a moment in which Ethan loses his self-control. That is the climax. He fails to rationalize any more. Communication fails on all sides and he is at his loneliest. He finally decides to say 'good-bye' and goes to surrender himself to the sea. But at the last moment, reassurance comes back to him in the shape of the talisman, and the thought of his loving daughter, and struggles to get back.

Margie's loneliness is typical. It springs mainly from instability of her life. She marries twice in her early youth, but remains a loner. Outwardly, her life is quite jovial. She is a cheerful and carefree type of woman who has a crowd of men around her, and she mixes with them enough. But such company is merely temporary and artificial At heart, she is utterly lonely. She has no prestige, as Mary tells Ethan- 'Why, some men even pretend they don't like her in public, and then they sneak to house or call her up and try to get her to meet them.'[62] Then considers her 'a predator, a huntress, Artemis for pants.'

Margie is well aware of her situation. She satirically impares herself to the horse given to a confused bull to get a horn into, in order to save his spirit from dying. She has been playing horse to confused, puzzled men all along. She tells Ethan, 'If they can get horn into me, that's little triumph.'[63] They obviously boost their own spirits at her cost, and that leaves her lonely, insecure and bitter. In her desperate search for security and company in her old age, she tries to hoax Ethan and even threatens him with the disclosure of his secret :

'You're going to need a friend to talk to and I'm, the only person in the world who fills the bill. A secret's a terribly lonesome thing, Ethan.'[64] But she gets a cold shoulder.

Danny Taylor represents the extreme of loneliness in the novel. He is the only character who is lonely within as well as without. Like Ethan, he too has a rich past. His forefathers used to be ship-builders, and Danny himself started his career at the Naval Academy. But after three years with honours, he got expelled, and that spelt diaster. Danny has never been able to overcome it. He lacks Ethan's wisdom and strength of will. His spirit is shattered beyond repair. He prefers to break rather than bend. He stubbornly drowns himself in wine and opts to die in poverty and misery. The fact that he owns the big meadow hardly matters, except that it satisfies his bruised ego. The place and manner of his death sum up his extreme loneliness.

Mary is, generally speaking, a very balanced character. But she too is not without her share of loneliness, though she is not given to expressing it. Her loneliness springs from a number of causes, mainly, their humble status. She reveals this when, provoked by Ethan, she cannot restrain herself and remarks acidly, 'In this town or any other town, a Hawley grocery clerk is still a grocery clerk.'[65] Ethan has his past to fall back upon, but Mary cannot share his love for his family history because she is present-bound. As Ethan himself tells us :

'By the time Father died, my Mary was pretty tired of Hawley family history, so when she suggested that we store all the things in the attic, I understood how she felt. You can get pretty tired of other people's family history.'[66]

It is not just a matter of feeling tired of Ethan's past, it is the failure of her efforts to make him come to terms with the present that makes her unhappy and lonely. She is a responsible woman, always trying to be helpful. She stands like a bridge between Ethan and the kids and tries to protect them from his anger. That too causes a gulf between her and Ethan, who speaks out in the loneliness of his store : "Weep not for me," he said, "Weep for yourselves and for your children."[67] But Mary does not have to weep. She, in fact, does not seem to take her loneliness

too long or too deep. Her domestic chores steep her too busy for that. Unlike her husband, she always sleeps soundly.

Allen suffers from the social consequences of his father's low status and his friends' ridicule irks him. Then there are his unfulfilled materialistic desires and, sometimes, his father's intolerant attitude towards him. All these add up to make him feel lonely, to which he responds with defiance. Ellen too, like her brother, is sick of being poor, but her protest is very gentle. She seems to have inherited her father's love of the family's past. Even in her sleep, she walks down to the attic to hold the talisman in her hands.

Thus, loneliness lies in every heart. In some, it is strong while in others, it is mild. If strong, as in Ethan and Danny, it affects the personality and personality and behaviour of the character. If mild, as in Mary, it does not mean much. Steinbeck seeks to suggest, through his treatment of this theme that loneliness is an inevitable phenomenon in a society in which money is everything, and that there is but one cure to it, viz., a little 'warmth', a touch of sympathy and affection.

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V
Decline Of Moral Values

The 1920s was a period governed by science and technology. Large organizations used science and technology for their tremendous economic gains. Gradually science and technology became masters. This led to the neglect of human values, the controlling force of a clean and healthy society. Human values were so much neglected that ruthless and ambitious people refused to consider them even of secondary importance.

The driving force of this age was mass consumption. This consumption was encouraged and spurred by a dramatic surge in national income. During this period the Americans worked less and played and relaxed more. The glitter and glamour of big cities attracted people from small towns and hamlets. This was a period of great exodus of big cities. These cities grew over crowed with people who came rushing in without a second thought. Many were frustrated. These frustrated people either became criminals or destitutes, lost completely in the cold and impersonal world of big cities.

The Americans of 1920s were totally a confused lot. The social changes were so rapid that it was almost impossible to discern right from wrong. Traditional values were quickly forgotten. The new standards were adopted eagerly by younger generation. Americans paid a heavy price for this rapid social

change. Moral standards declined to a shocking level. Young people came forward with a zeal and adopted a new moral attitude which transformed impersonal relationships. Intense sexuality became the fashion of the day. Men and women eagerly experimented with new attitudes towards sexuality. Which made sensual pleasure an integral part of the pursuit of happiness.

The Americans used to be proud of their family cohesiveness – a source of real happiness. During this period of American history the family lost its cohesiveness, and consequently the members of the family indulged in the pursuit of new found pleasures with utter disregard for each other. Industrialization and urbanization changed the status of women more effectively than revolutionary ideology and protest, the principal forces of change until then. Women were given the right to vote in 1919. Women insisted upon greater satisfaction, even romantic love. Couples separated more often when marriage failed to offer emotional fulfillment and companionship.

Women started taking jobs and became economically independent. The result was the slacking of husbandly and parental authority. Family relationships deteriorated considerably. Moral depravity in younger generation became frightening. As Allen observes –

"Supposedly nice girls were smoking cigarettes openly and defiantly, if often rather awkwardly and self consciously. They were drinking – somewhat less openly but often all too efficaciously. There were stories of daughters of the most exemplary parents getting drink –0 "blotto", as their companions cheerfully put it – on the contents of the hip – flasks of the prohibition regimes, and going out joy riding with men to four in the morning."[1]

Except this there was no stability in American family life. Relationships between parents and children were strained. Parents did not have time for children. Each had his routine of leisure

time activities, especially clubs, sports and entertainments. Those parents who cared, thought that their children had utterly lost.

John Steinbeck belongs to that group of writers who may be called the pathfinders of society. American society during the first half of the twentieth century was a glittering superstructure of paradoxes : on the one hand there was industrialization, all-round progress, cultural revolution, personal and social security, prosperity and happiness, and on the other spiritual depravity, moral anarchy, mass exploitation and insecurity, mass depression and neurosis. It was a society dominated by materialism and sex promiscuity, envy and ambition, greed and lust, where all means were justified to attain private and selfish ends, where there was no value for human sentiments and ideals and where virtue had lost its meaning. The typical American lived in an acute state of mental and emotional torment. Love, friendship, and happiness were saleable commodities and could be easily acquired by those who were materially well off. Advancement and prosperity could be achieved not through hard work, intelligence, honesty or by any other virtues, but by deception, blackmail and bribery[2]. Thus, sin and evil were inherent in modern American culture and concept of progress. Wealth and materialism which were the basic ingredients of this culture also brought in their vogue insensitiveness and irresponsiveness to higher values of life.

The world of John Steinbeck's fiction is this world of twentieth-century America. It is not a philosopher's world : it is rather a world based upon a definite set of values and morals. John Steinbeck is not formally religious and does not pretend to explain the mistory of life, but he has a deep and abiding sense of good and evil and tells us of the various forms and sources of evil which blast the life of man. He has shown in his novels an endless war between good and evil in which evil triumphs for a moment, but there is a promise of the ultimate victory of good. In order to attain that victory sacrifice is a must. Steinbeck believed in Christian theology. Christ sacrificed his life for redeeming

mankind. This concept of sacrifice is the underlying theme of almost all the novels of Steinbeck—*To a God Unknown, Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, The Pearl*. All the Christ figures of Steinbeck make sacrifices. For Steinbeck, life is a ceaseless struggle, a constant class of impulses, a perpetual conflict of forces both without and within in which evil has dominant role to play and is capable of defeating the nobler purposes of life for some time, but man has an inherent capability to triumph over it and to purge his soul so that he may reach near to God-head. Human soul is all important. As Lee says in *East of Eden* : "It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked and never destroyed—because 'Thou mayest'".[3] Steinbeck does not agree with the concept that 'Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil'. He seems to say that goodness abounds in man in spite of all the deterioration in moral values. There are many characters in his novels like Tom Joad, Casy, Jim Nolam, George, Adam, who live for the welfare of mankind. *The Grapes of Wrath* suggests that that drives towards good in man are as biologically determined as his drives towards breathing. There are certain values essential for the well-being of man and even for the survival of the race, which are constant. Any society would fall apart if it is not based on those values promoting the principle of cooperation, of love, of courage, Steinbeck is of the view that no man can be saved from mental or moral distress so long as he is not freed from economic destitution. But, at the same time, he also asserts that excess of materialism makes a man inhuman.

In Steinbeck's novels there is symbolical and allegorical representation of the forces of sin and evil. Steinbeck believes that evil is not always slight or trivial or unattractive; if it were so, that would be no problem of recognizing it. On the contrary, it is generally alluring and attractive like the cup of gold or the pearl or Cathy Ames and attracts the attention of man and ensnares him so completely that he finds himself caught in coils of destruction. In *Cup of Gold* Henry Morgan is attracted by the

glitter of gold and goes blindly in pursuit of it. The story in *Cup of Gold* begins when Henry Morgan, at the age of fifteen, grows ambitious and decides to embark on a career of a sea pirate. But when he boards the 'Bristal Girl' he is betrayed by a companion and is sold as an indentured slave. This is his first acquaintance with evil and wickedness of the world. When his term as an indentured slave comes to an end, he himself organizes a pirate troop with the help of the money he had accumulated by dishonest means after gaining his master's confidence as an indentured slave. Like Macbeth and Faust Henry's ambition takes an evil turn and his lust for money and power not only takes him to North Pole, an icy aloofness from humanity, but he even gives up the elementary traits of humanity. In order to achieve fame and fortune he renounces warmth and companionship to embrace "cold, lonely greatness", separates himself from his fellows, and kills friends and foes alike. After the conquest of Panama, he does not spare even his best friend Coeur de Gris, kills him in cold blood, and leave the buccaneers who had served him so well at the mercy of fate. In the career of Henry Morgan Steinbeck shows the sin of pride and ambition based on pure materialistic pursuits. The cup of gold and Elizabeth are the symbols of Morgan's greed and ambition. Throughout his novelistic career Steinbeck argued that obsession with wealth destroys both happiness and humanity and isolates a man from his fellows. In *The Grapes of Wrath* he writes, "The quality of owning freezes you forever into 'I', and cuts you off forever from the 'we'".

The Pearl, as one critic remarks, is 'a folktale parable of the universal struggle between good and avail'. In part it is a parable about the impersonal and dark forces of evil overcoming the beauty of a simple and innocent family life, but more poignantly it records the triumph of Envy and Greed over Ambition and Determination. When the story opens we meet Kino as a simple and contented man; the song of the family is sweet and harmonious. But when Coyotito is stung by a scorpion and immediate help of doctor is needed, Kino comes in contact with

the materialistic civilization of the town whose god is Mammon. When the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito without payment, Kino out of sheer anger and desperation unwittingly decides to become a part of this callous civilization and dives deeper in order to find pearls by which he desires to purchase the evils of the world. And when he really finds one, the music of the pearl rises like "a chorus of trumpets in his ears" and his ambition takes an evil turn. Now he wants not only to treat his child, but also to celebrate a church marriage, to provide education to his son and to have a rifle. He has a false notion that new clothes and church marriage will give them social position and respect and make them proper husband and wife, that education will make him and the Indians free, and that the rifle will give him dignity and power. He runs after false standards of social and moral values and the shine of the pearl blinds him to his family. He forgets that his canoe is his real need : "It was at once property and the source of food, for a man with a boat can guarantee a woman that she will eat something. It is the bulwark against starvation".[4] In short, he wants to purchase the ugliness of the world which is behind "the stone and plaster houses"—power, show and material comforts which bring in turn greed and inhumanity. All this he wants to exchange for the old peace of his life. Levant rightly observes, "Steinbeck indicates the immediate corrupting influence of 'the world' on Kino's organic values"[5] when Kino says, "I was attacked in the dark", Juan Thomas remarks, "It is the pearl. There is a devil in this pearl. You should have sold it and passed on the devil".[6] Juana also recognizes that the pearl is evil and wants to throw it away, but the devil has already taken possession of Kino and under its effect he strikes his innocent wife. He even says, "This pearl has become my soul. If I give it up I shall lose my soul".[7] What Mack and the boys have rejected in *Cannery Row,* Kino is after that. Doc says, "The sale of souls to gain the whole world is completely voluntary and almost unanimous".[8] Kino is prepared to sell his soul for merely the glitter of the pearl. The evil completely takes possession of Kino for some time. The pearl

becomes a source of spiritual and domestic discord. After the first attack on Kino by midnight intruders, his wife Juana says of the pearl, "This thing is evil. This pearl is like a sin? It will destroy us".[9] But for Kino the pearl continues to radiate beauty and alluring promises. Gradually but inevitably the pearl's evil spirit gains ascendancy in Kino's affairs and by the time he realizes that his life is in danger and leaves the village, the pearl has become an obsession with him and Kino is no longer a free agent. He cannot surrender it—"If I give it up I shall lose my soul". Thereafter, in fact, Kino becomes pearl's instrument. Hopefully, he looks into the shining surface of the pearl, but he sees only the pictures of impending disasters, "and the music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears".[10]

By the end of the novel Kino has come to recognize the pearl as a symbol of evil; it is now "ugly…..like a malignant growth",[11] and the song it transmits to his mind is "distorted and insane". As he returns home, after the loss of his son, his house and his canoe, the pearl's meaning is fully transformed : all the former promises have entirely disappeared and only the malignant evil flames out. Fontenrose aptly remarks : "the pearl of salvation became damnation for Kino".[12] And it is only when the pearl is once again thrown into the sea and it settles down among the ferns that the evil music fades away. Thus, the pearl is not merely a source of wealth and selfish indulgence for Kino's family, but equally a symbol of false hope of total salvation through material possessions. At one level, therefore, *The Pearl* tells the simple story of a Mexican-Indian pearl-diver and his wife and child; but, at a deeper level, it also depicts the perennial fight between good and evil, in which evil triumphs for a while, but ultimately good predominates : Kino repossesses his soul and returns to his happy abode shorn of the evil dream of material comfort, show and power.

In *The Pastures of Heaven* again Steinbeck is concerned with the perennial question of evil. All the stories in the book are linked together with the Munroes who come to the Valley after

suffering a lot of misfortunes. Bert Munroe had "engaged in many enterprises and every – one had failed not through any short-comings on Bert's part, but through mishaps, which, if taken alone, were accidents".[13] And these "accidents", according to Bert Munroe, are "the acts of a Fate malignant to his success".[14] To escape the influence of the "evil Cloud", Bert Munroe comes to the Valley and buys the Battle farm, a place that is supposed to be under a curse. When he jokingly explains to T.B. Allen that "maybe my curse and the farm's curse got to fighting and killed each other off", Allen replies, "Maybe your curse and the farm's curse has mated and gone into a gopher hole like a pair of rattle snakes. Maybe there'll be a lot of baby curses crowling ground the Pastures the first thing we know".[15] And so indeed it happens. These baby curses are the subject matter of each story of the happy Valley of Eden. Every story is concerned with a fall' and who is responsible for this fall?—that is a vital question. Apparently it appears that the Munroes are responsible for this 'fall' because everyone who comes in contact with the Munroes is doomed to be ruined. The question is : are they really responsible for the ruin of the nine families who live in the Pastures of Heaven? In a letter to his agents in 1931 Steinbeck said, "The Valley was for years known as the happy Valley because of the unique harmony that existed among its twenty families. They were ordinary people, ill educated but honest and as kindly as any. In fact, in their whole history I cannot find that they have committed a really malicious act or an act that was not dictated by humble expediency or out-and-out altruism. There have been two murders, a suicide, many quarrels and a great deal of unhappiness in the Pastures of Heaven, and all of these things can be traced to the influence of the A—S. So much is true. I am using the following method. The manuscript is made up of stories, each one complete in itself, having its rise, climax and ending. Each story deals with a family or an individual. They are tied together only by the common locality and common contact with the A—S. I am trying to show this peculiar evil cloud which follows the A—S….."[16] Steinbeck says about Bert Munroe,

"He was a kindly man; he enjoyed doing favours for his friends, and, more important he had no hesitation in asking favours".[17] The Munroes, in short, are kindhearted jovial people, always ready to help others, but they are unfortunate in the sense that whoever comes in their contact is ruined. From their good actions evil emanates. How are we to explain this evil? Warren French has, perhaps, misjudged the whole point when he calls them "villainous" and "callous" and makes them responsible for all evils in the novel. He writers, "It is precisely other people's 'feelings' to which the Munroes are insensitive; and, since they are callous, it never occurs to them that other people could feel differently from them—that they could be wrong about something".[18] Again he says, "In each episode a Munroe wreaks have by misjudging some aspect of a situation or by thoughtlessly saying or doing thing—the thing that will destroy the world another person has either carefully constructed for himself or come painfully to accept".[19] At another place Warren French writes, "Because they are self-righteous in their wrongness, they are culpable of destroying the happiness of those they come in contact with—culpable not in the sensitive eyes of the law, but in the sensitive eyes of the compassionate artist."[20] Again, "the Munroes not only are at fault in each episode, but each error is graver than the preceding one".[21] This view about the Munroes has no bearing on truth. In the first place, they are never callous; no action of theirs shows deliberate villainy. On the contrary, they are kind hearted, intelligent people, always ready to help their neighbours and away from all sorts of superstitions. They have never destroyed thoughtlessly the "carefully constructed" world of other people. "Shark" wicks' world is not carefu9lly constructed, on the contrary it is based on illusion. So is the case with Molly Morgan and Pat Humbert. All these people live in a world of illusion and not a carefully constructed world. The Munroes are never "self righteous in their wrongness". In fact, their actions are never wrong. The outcome of their action may be unfortunate. Warren French's hypothesis that "their each error is graver than the preceding one"

does not appear to be correct. In the last but one story Mae Munroe's desire to see the interior of Pat Humbert's house is no error at all on her part. On the contrary the error is on the part of Pat Humbert who, after overhearing Mae Munroe's remark, jumps to the conclusion that she is desirous to marry him. In fact, Warren French has tried to portray the Munroes, who themselves have been the victims of repeated misfortunes, as evil characters and in doing so he has misjudged the whole point of the book. In a sense, from the reader's point of view, the Munroes are pathetic people in the story. In spite of their best intentions and kindheartedness, their actions or thought generate one disaster after another in the Valley of the Pastures of Heaven. Steinbeck seems to say that some people are so unfortunate that in spite of their best intentions and sympathy the people around them suffer. Although they have no direct hand in the sufferings of the people, the "peculiar evil cloud" still hangs around them and makes them unwittingly responsible for the sufferings of the inhabitants of the Valley. In fact, it is not always the Munroes who are responsible for the sufferings of the people. In one case people suffer because of the false and make-belief world in which they live, in another they suffer because of the "malcontent forces of Fate" and in the third they suffer because of the false norms of society. Steinbeck believes that real life is dogged forever by radical evil and that evil has a positive role to play in life. It is Octopus life; it has many arms.

Steinbeck, on the whole, has portrayed four types of evil in this novel—i) the evil which results on account of coincidences which Bert Munroe calls "Fate malignant", ii) the evil occurring as the product of illusion, iii) the evil which comes out of the false norms of society, and iv) the evil which results from good intentions since, as *Gita* says, every work is a mixture of good and evil.

To the first group belong the stories of Mrs. Van Deventer, Pat Hunbert and John Whiteside.

Fate was cruel with Helen Van Deventer from the very beginning. Her husband died just before her insane child. When she arrived in the Valley of the Pastures of Heaven to settle down, Bert Munroe out of his good nature, thought it to be quite a nice neighbourly gesture to pay a formal visit to his neighbour Helen Van Deventer without knowing the internal condition of the family. Fate played such a cruel part with him that instead of meeting the mother he could only met the insane daughter Helda, and thinking that she had been cruelly confined, he promised to help her out from the confinement. In spite of his best efforts, however, Bert fails to meet Helen and comes back; and later, when Helda tries to escape from the house under the belief that she would meet her delivery and marry him, her mother kills her with a shot-gun. So it is not Bert who is responsible for Helda's death, but chance element.

Pat Humbert is a lonely man, all the time looking after his sick parents. After the death of his parents, Pat starts a new life. He always seeks the company of people "as an antidote for the poison of loneliness". But at the same time he neglects his house. With the result a rose bush grows so wild that it climbs up the front of the house and "within ten years the house looked like a huge mound of roses". The exterior of the house becomes so lovely that it catches the eyes of the possers by. One day when Mrs. Munroe and her daughter Mae pass strolling by his house, Pat overhears Mae saying, "With a rose like that on the outside, the inside must be pretty". She desires to see the inside of the house some day. Her remarks inspire pat to refurnish it and a secret love for Mae begins to ferment in his heart. But this love he is unable to express to Mae. After some time when the house is furnished and it glows "with welcoming warmth", and Pat is thinking of inviting Mae, fate intervenes. Pat learns by accident from Bert Munroe that Mae is engaged to marry. Bill Whiteside. So Pat's hope of escaping the burden of the past is dazed with a single stroke of unsympathetic fate.

John Whiteside's hope of establishing a dynasty in Pastures of Heaven is also dashed out by fate. Fate doesnot help him in getting more than one child. Then again, cruel fate tricks with him in that his only child Bill is not built like his father or grand-father. He is not a sentimental fool planning to form dynasties in the rural Pastures of Heaven. Willa is right when she says, "He has escape4d you, John, and I don't think you can ever catch him".[22] The tragedy of John Whiteside is that God has not created Bill like his father. When Bill marries Mae Munroe and insists on moving to Monterey. John's hope of forming the rural dynasty is blasted. The interference of Fate is not limited upto this stage only; even his house is burnt down by accident. On Bert's suggestion John agrees to burn the brushes in order to turn the land into a fine pasture. They start burning the brushes on a windless day. But, then, by some ill-luck "a little autumn whirlwind danced down the hill" and "picked up sparks and embers and flung them against the white house".[23] The house is burnt down into ashes.

In all these stories tragedy occurs on account of ill luck or "a Fate malignant". Here man finds himself at the mercy of forces he cannot control. Although one or the other member of the Munroe family is involved in it, their intentions are always good. The families are destroyed on account of the malcontent forces of destiny. All these stories depict Steinbeck's outraged compassion for the victims of chaotic forces.

Under the second group fall the stories of "Shark" Wicks and Molly Morgan.

"Shark" Wicks suffers because of the fool's paradise in which he lives. He shows himself off as a very rich man and even maintains a ledger of fictitious stock transactions. When he comes to know about his daughter's associations with Jimmie Munroe, he loses his temper and decides to kill Jimmie, but is arrested by the deputy Sheriff. Since he has been creating a false image of himself as a rich man, he is fined heavily which he is not in a position to pay. So Wicks suffers because of self-deception that

he is a wealthy man and of course, on account of his prejudice that he wouldn't allow his daughter to dance with young Munroe. Had he posed himself as he was, he would not have been fined that much and thus could have saved himself from utter humiliation. Molly Morgan, again, lives in a world of her own creation. She idolizes her father as Robinson Crusoe. But when she hears Munroe ridiculing a drunken hired man whom she suspects to be her lost father, she cannot bear the reality and leaves the Valley.

In these stories it is not the Munroes who are responsible for the sufferings of these people, but their false and make-belief world in which they live. They do not live in a realistic world, but in a world of illusion and when they come in contact with the Munores, their illusion breaks down like a brittle glass house and the shining surface in the form of truth appears to them. When illusion clashes with truth, they awake to reality and suffer.

The stories of Tularecito, Lopez Sisters, Junius Maltby and his son come under the third group.

Tularecito, "whom God has not quite finished", suffers not because of the Munroes but because of the false norms of society. The otherwise useful boy must go to school and learn C-A-T-, cat. Molly Morgan, the school teacher, in order to enrich his imagination, encourages him to look for gnomes and elves and this leads Tularecito to dig the earth in the garden of Munroes to discover gnomes and elves. When Bert tries to fill in a hole that Tularecito has been digging, Tularecito attacks him with his shovel and this results in his commitment to of a society that Mrs. Munroe represents and personifies".[24] The Maltbys lead a life of innocence and happiness in the midst of their poverty. Then, the neighbours, including Mrs. Munroe, take a kindly view of them and offer new clothes to Robbie, and this leads the father and son to realize for the first time how poor they are in the eyes of society. Their happy stay in the Pastures of Heaven comes to

an end on account of this assault by the foolish "Public Opinion, like a blundering, powerful ox."[25]

Under the fourth group falls the story of the Munroes themselves. The Munroes are good people : throughout the novel they try to help someone or the other most innocently, generously and kindly, but every time their innocent action brings some sort of evil to those they come in contact with or help or even say something about. Steinbeck shows through the Munroes that evil has mysterious ways of operation whereby sometimes even good actions bring in their trail something which is bad and ruinous. Just as there are serpents in Eden, there is evil even in goodness.

The Munroes are the agents through whom Steinbeck has shown this drama of evil in an Eden-like Valley, the Pastures of Heaven, but they are never active participants in the diabolic game of evil. They are rather unwitting exposers of different types of evils which prevail in the world. Therefore, Warren's idea that Steinbeck "attacks them unsparingly"[26] is erroneous. On the contrary, their innocence offers to the readers to notice those ironic contrasts or situations which are not visible to other characters in the novel. They are, therefore, rather pathetic figures. Their involvement in the lives of others is never so direct or powerful that it could be said that they transmit evil to those they come in contact with.

While writing *East of Eden*, Steinbeck wrote to his close friend and editor, Pascal Covici, "I am choosing to write this book to my sons…..And so I will tell them one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest story of all—the story of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of love and hate, of beauty and ugliness. I shall try to demonstrate them how these doubles are inseparable—how neither can exist without the other and how out of their groupings creativeness is born".[27] Later he wrote : "Its framework roots from that powerful, profound and perplexing story in Genesis of Cain and Abe".[28] But his creation of Cathy has created a complicated problem. At one level *East of Eden* is the story of Cain and Abel,

the story of mankind where evil and good exist side by side and man is given the choice to choose either of them, but at another level it is also the story of Satan, the story of pure evil in the form of Cathy. By creating these two stories Steinbeck is perhaps trying to distinguish between devil and man, between Satan and Adam. For Cathy, the Eden serpent (as for Satan), there is no hope for redemption. Cathy is a born evil and this Steinbeck explains at the very beginning of the novel : "I believe there are monsters born in the world to human parents…..if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce malformed soul?"[29] Later he says, "there was a girl like Cathy would have been called possessed by the devil".[30] It appears that Steinbeck has intentionally emphasized the serpent nature of Cathy. Lisca rightly observes : "Cathy is so often described in terms of a serpent, from the shape of her features and her flickering tongue to her dislike of the light, that one suspects Steinbeck had been reading Elsie Venner".[31] So like the serpent Cathy is of the destructive natures always enacting evil in the world. She can burn her house and kill her parents for no reason, she can enter whoredom, she can marry Adam and mix sleeping medicine in his tea on her wedding night and enter Charles's bed, she can try to shoot Adam and then desert her two sons in their infancy. Cathy is pure evil and such a creature with "malformed soul" has no hope of redemption.

But more important than the story of Cathy is the story of Cain and Abel. Lee tells Adam and Samuel, "It is the best known story in the world because it is everybody's story…..the symbol story of the human soul".[32] The Cain and Abel story is enacted in two generations of the Trask family. IN each generation two brothers have some sort of Cain-Abel relationship between them and this relationship is symbolized by their offer of gifts to their father and always in one case it is rejected. In the first generation there are two half-brothers Adam and Charles. Their father, Cyrus Trask, loves his elder son Adam more than Charles. On his birthday he receives gifts from his sons and Adam's gift is

preferred to Charles's. In a jealous rage Charles beats Adam nearly to death Cyrus seeks Charles with a gun, but, having failed to find him, regains his cool temper gradually. On his father's advice Adam joins the army. After ten years in army, Adam returns to Trask farm and lives with Charles. Here he meets Cathy and marries her. She bears ono-identical twins—Caleb resembling Charles, and Aron very like Adam. In the second generation, again, Cain and Abel story is reworked. Adam prefers his son Aron. When Caleb is seventeen he earns $ 15,000 in a partnership business with will Hamilton and offers the money to his father, who has suffered heavy losses in business. Adam callously rejects Caleb's gift branding it as unfairly acquired war profit. Caleb takes revenge on Aron by revealing to him that Kate, the owner of the whorehouse, is their mother. Aron is greatly shocked by this revelation and joins the army and is later killed in the war. This story of Cain and Abel raging in Trask family for two generations is really the story of mankind, since it depicts that man's hostile tendencies spring from the frustration of an innate need for love, and the response to love, on the part of the child. According to Lee, the Chinese servant of Adam, "The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and the rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt—and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputed, the human would not be what he is. Maybe there would be fewer crazy people. I am sure in myself there would not be many jails".[33] Jim Casy's doctrine in *The Grapes of Wrath* that "There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do"[34], has changed considerably in *East of Eden*. In fact, Steinbeck's experience and his art have taught him that 'good' and 'evil' are not "just the stuff people do". Just as people do something good out of love, in the same way evil emits when love is rejected. Lee, the Chinese philosopher-servant of Adam, has a very correct notion of this

fact when he says that the story of Cain and Abel is important because it is the story of rejection from which all evil flows. Steinbeck believes that man is born free, that evil is not inherent in the system of creation, but an accident, a freak of the moment that might be expelled. When Adam tells Samuel, "I would like to know that kind of blood is in my boys", the latter warns him "that not their blood but your suspicion might build evil in them. They will be what you expect of them". He further says, "I don't very much believe in blood. I think when a man finds goods or bad in his children, he is seeing only what he planted in them after they cleared the womb".[35]

Steinbeck also believes in "Timshel"—'thou mayest'—doctrine. He refers to the Biolical story where Lord says to Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him". Steinbeck holds that the King James Version of the Bible erred in its interpretation of the word 'timshel'. He is of the opinion that the word is used not in the sense of command but in the sense of counsel : 'thou mayest', rather than 'thou shalt', rule over sin. "Thou mayest" gives man a choice to reject evil and to choose the good. He ceases to be the slave of external forces, but becomes the master of his will and destiny. Lee says, "It might be the most important word in the world….. "Thou mayest". "Why, that makes a man great……for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice".[36] And so this choice is before all the heroes of Steinbeck—the choice is before Kino, Morgan, Caleb, Ethan. Good and evil exist side by side in man and man is given free choice to choose either way. Krutch sums up the argument thus : "That Good and Evil are absolute not relative things, and,….. that in making a choice between them man is a free agent, not the victim of his heredity, his environment, on of anything else".[37]

In Steinbeck's world evil and good exist side by side and Steinbeck believes that man's efforts should not be towards escapism, but towards realization of evil and to overcome it. This

is achieved in his final novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Ethan Allen Hawley, the hero of the novel and a man of honesty, belongs to an old and respectable family of the town. But after the war he loses his family fortunes and is compelled to take the job as a clerk in the grocery store of Marulloo, which he once owned. He works there for twelve years, until his wife calls him a 'bum' and the whole family complains about their poverty. A change comes in Ethan. When he sees all around him people getting ahead through lying, cheating, and other shortcuts, he also plans to restore his family status by robbing a bank and by deceiving his employer. But a moral revulsion comes on him when he discovers that his own son is infected with the disease of dishonesty and treachery. Unable to bear the corrupt world in which he lives, he goes to drown himself, but finding a talisman which his daughter has put in his pocket, he comes back realizing that he still owes a duty to life. Ethan tries to exchange integrity for success and suffers from moral compunctions. Thus, Steinbeck shows in *The Winter of Our Discontent* Ethan's temptation and fall from innocence and finally his regeneration by recognizing evil and to conquor it living in the midst of it. That way there is a constant development in Steinbeck's thought and it reaches its final culmination in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Steinbeck does not believes man to be a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil, unless he is born with a deformed sould like Cathy Ames. Man himself is not evil. Evil is in the outside world wherein he lives, in the system, in the pursuit of materialism which makes man greedy and inhuman. Like Casy, he believes that "all that lives is holy". He has firm faith in the divinity of man. He does not think that man is a sinner all the time. No doubt he is a victim of various conflicting forces which stand in the way of his discovering himself, but he cannot eternally remain forgetful of his spiritual nature; he is not incapable of choice; if it were so, writes Steinbeck, "we would, millenniums ago, have disappeared from the feace of the earth".[38] One day he will surely find out his self. However dark the night, the dawn

will come. In *East of Eden* Steinbeck writes, "I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty men want to be good and want to be loved….. We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly re-spawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is venerable as nothing else in the world is".[39]

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4. *The short Novels of John Steinbeck*, p. 516.
5. Howard Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck : A Critical Study* (University of Missouri Press, 1974), p. 192.
6. *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck*, p. 550.
7. *Ibid*, p. 552.
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17. *The Pastures of Heaven*, p. 14.

18. Warren French, *John Steinbeck* (Twayne Publishers, Inc. New York, 1961), p. 43.

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20. *Ibid*, p. 43.

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22. *The Pastures of Heaven*, p. 119.

23. *Ibid*. p. 123.

24. *The Novels of John Steinbeck : A Critical Study*, p. 46.

25. *Cup of Gold*, p. 123.

26. *John Steinbeck*, p. 46.

27. John Steinbeck, *Journal of a Novel : The East of Eden* Letters (Pan Books Ltd : London, 1972), p. 14

28. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

29. *East of Eden*, p. 72.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

31. *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 268.

32. *East of Eden*, p. 257.

33. *Ibid*., pp. 257-58.

34. *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 18.

35. *East of Eden*, pp. 249-50.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 288-89.

37. Joseph Wood Krutch, "John Steinbeck's Dramatic Tale of Three Generations", quoted from Tedlock's *Steinbeck and His Critics* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1957), p. 304.

38. *East of Eden*, p. 294.

39. *Ibid*., pp. 393-93.

VI
Making Of An Artist

John Ernst Steinbeck was born in the town of Salinas on February 27, 1902, the son of John Ernst Steinbeck, Sr. That he was born and came to maturity in the Salinas valley is the most important biographical link between John Steinbeck and his writings. From his lush green California valley Steinbeck gained that intimate knowledge and love of nature which plays so important a part in his works. Like several of his characters, as John Whiteside in the *Pastures of Heaven* or Adam Trask in *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's father came to California to settle down, and like Elizabeth in *To A God Unknown*, and Olive Hamilton in *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's mother taught for many years in the public schools of the Salinas valley area.[1]

There are occasional glimpses of Steinbeck himself as a child in his works. It seems that Steinbeck's childhood must have been much like that of the boy Jody in *The Red Pony*, whose love for the Gabilan Mountains to the east and fear of Santa Lucia range toward the ocean, Steinbeck acknowledge as a personal childhood experience on the opening page of *East of Eden*. As Lisca has reported, Steinbeck wrote in the reply to a publisher, who had requested for early biographical information, that the most important things in his childhood would be of no meaning to others-"……. the way the sparrows hopped about on the mud street early morning in the world when my pony had a colt."

Somewhat the same views are expressed in Steinbeck's remarks about his novel *The Red Pony* : "I want to recreate a child's world, not of fairies and giants but of colors more clear than they are to adults, of tastes more sharp and of queer heart breaking feelings that overwhelm children in a moment. I want to put down the way 'afternoon felt'— and the feeling about a bird that sang in a tree in the evening."[2] This reveals the sensitivity of a writer.

Another important factor in Steinbeck's early years was undoubtedly the literary atmosphere he got at home. As him mother was a school teacher, there must have been books around the household to interest a young boy. There are references to that fact in his novels. In the *Pastures of Heaven* Molly Morgan is shown as reading to her pupils from the novels of Scott, Zane Gray, James Oliver Curwood and Jack London. Junius Malthy reads to the boys from Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and carries a copy of *Kidnapped* in his pocket. Steinbeck has written that he remembered "certain books that were realer than experience – *Crime and Punishment* was like that and Madame Bovary and parts of Paradise Lost and things of George Eliot and *The Return of the Native*. I read all of these when I was very young and I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me."

About his later reading interests, Steinbeck says that James Branch Cabell and Donn Byrone greatly influenced him – "These men", he said, "were specialists in sound – and that's that I was after." But the greatest influence on his prose style seems to be that of Hemingway, of whom Steinbeck wrote in 1938, "I am convinced that in many ways he is the finest writer of our time." Other authors whom he has at one time or that admired include D.H. Lawrence, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson and Thackerey.

In *The Novels of John Steinbeck* (1939), Harry T. Moore mentione a Steinbeck habit of playing recorded music while he is writing, and suggests an influence on the rhythm and structure of his work. Steinbeck is a conscious writer and takes pains to avoid any careless writing in his works. This is made clear from his

various letters to his publishers Malcolm Cowley's description of Steinbeck's working methods in *The Literary Situation* throws light on Steinbeck's concern for his work.

"John Steinbeck has a complicated method; first he thinks about a novel for months or even a year until it is clear in his head, then early one morning he starts the first chapter in longhand. At the end of the day's work a dictates from the manuscript into a machine, changing as he goes; dictation is an essential part of the process, because what he writes is a spoken prose. His secretary transcribes the record and Steinbeck revises her transcript. At the end of the novel, the whole manuscript is copied and revised once more; sometimes it has to be copied twice before it is ready for the printer."

A part from the early impressions of childhood and his literary readings, another single factor that throws light on the works of John Steinbeck is his observations of the marine life in the Pacific ocean. Here is developed his biological view of life which informs his observation of man and society. Early in 1940 Steinbeck went to the Gulf of California with his friend Ed Ricketts, the marine biologist. The object of this expedition was "to collect and preserve the marine invertebrates of the littoral." These observations have been collected in *Sea of Cortez*. Though *Sea of Cortez* is neither a piece of fiction nor a system of philosophy, but rather a leisurely journal of informative value, yet its importance in the context of Steinbeck's literary work is immense. It is in a way a record of Steinbeck's basic beliefs, and as Woodburn O. Rose has pointed out, it "stands to his work very much is *Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa* stand to that of Hemingway".[3] Steinbeck has again and again emphasized in his stories and novels the value of human acts and attitudes which he considers in harmony with natural law. In *Sea of Cortez* we find Steinbeck qualifying many of his previous social views, particular reference may be made to that of his group man theory. Steinbeck has always been interested in the behaviour of human beings in a group. His observations of marine life, which

dwell in groups, are of great value as they throw ample light on the behaviour of human beings. We will find many references to *Sea of Cortez* in relation to the works of Steinbeck at appropriate places in the body of the thesis.

As several critics have acknowledged, Steinbeck has never belonged to nor has he founded a "school of writing". Further, he abhors any kind of tag on him. Throughout his long literary career he has been a sort of experimentalist, never repeating himself. This is the reason why it is always a guess as to what his next book will be. But a close perusal of his works shows a certain affinity with his contemporaries. He belongs to that generation of American authors who withdraw from modern civilization with a better, fuller life in a view. Heingway abandons it for adventure abroad. But there is yet another group which prefers to return to the pastoral, where they seek past values. They generally belong to a particular region and in this sense they are regionalist too. Prominent among such writers are Faulkner, Caldwell and Saroyan. Heiney prefers to call them "rural naturalists",[4] as they reject the American civilization for a return to the country. Writing about his native California valley and prasing the simple life of country folk, Steinbeck, too, belongs to this group. In a way Steinbeck is both a naturalist and a regionalist. On the one hand most of his work has been written on his native Salinas valley in central California, and, on the other, like a naturalist, he presents in his novels scenes of great passion and violence. But Steinbeck's position is quite unique. In his concern and lovwe for his native valley, he has imparted poetic quality to its inhabitants. His rural heroes, illiterate and sometimes weak-minded, are nevertheless essentially noble. Steinbeck admires everythings that is not a material success, the have-nots, the simple, the poor and the oppressed.

In his concern for the humblest in nature, Steinbeck shows an affinity to Wordsworth who sought beauty in the meanest of natural phenomena. Steinbeck will always be remembered for the voice he imparted to his oppressed Oakies, who were denied

their right to a decent living in this world. He never denies that his have-nots are not flawless but what he desires is that they may be viewed in another perspective, as he says, in *Cannery Row* of Mack and the boys : "……. 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".[5]

On the other hand Steinbeck's craftsmanship shows an affinity to, that of Charles Dickens. In fact there are striking examples of this in the works of John Steinbeck. Both possess a gift for story telling. There is a marked sympathy for humanity in the works of both the novelists. Some critics have attributed the failures of certain of Steinbeck's works to his sentimentality. This is also a Dickensian characteristic. Agauin Steinbeck can create characters with ease but, unlike Dickens, he is unable to impart life to them. This is the reason why there are very few memorable characters in the works of Steinbeck. Most of the characters are more 'types' bearing certain characteristics. This may be why Hugh Halman calls Steinbeck "twentieth century Dickens of California".[6]

Though there is very little link between Steinbeck's personal life and his literary creation, yet Steinbeck's love of his native country and its people has an important bearing on his writings.

The Salinas valley is actually one of the smaller of California's central valleys, which run up and down the state between mountain ranges. The enclosing hills have the steep slopes and the barren crest which have evoked so many descriptions. It is typical of Steinbeck to evoke the beauty of his native valley and enhance its charm by the colouring of his imagination and style. The lush green valley is thronged by great fields of lettuce, alfalfa, sugar beets, and other crops. Cattles are raised on the slopes of the hills. (where Steinbeck was born and raised) is inland from rivers mouth in Monterey Bay.

Cattle raising has been a valley occupation but the intensive cultivation of vegetables especially lettuce is the main crop. Lettuce is the big industry of the valley and actually most of the economy of the valley is based on this product. In 1936 a strike by lettuce packing workers was crushed mercilessly by the organised group of owners of the lettuce industry. Steinbeck actually witnessed the systematic beatings, wholesale arrests and tear-gas attacks on the workers. Much of his experiences have gone into his novel, "*The Grapes of Wrath*". Though the strike was finally broken, yet it generated sufficient vigour in a young writer to come forward for the cause of the underprivileged of society.

Another peculiarity of this valley is its heterogenous population. As a Freeman has pointed out, that the area contains "an assortment of humanity almost as bizarre and much less permanent."[7] The fisherman and cannery workers are Italian, Portguese, Japanese, Chinese and paisaos of *Tortilla Flat*. To this humanity a contstant stream of tourists also flow, who come to "see the fishing boats and historic adobes and absorb the legends of the ranch and mission days."[8] It is interesting to note here that not only is the population heterogenous, but the nearby Bay swams with a multitude of marine life. One gathers a feeling here of the biological diversity and a constant struggle to survive. It has played an important part in Steinbeck's thinking.

Salinas Valley has been a troubled spot in America from the point of view of its economy, social life and culture. One finds here the two extremes of society: wealth and utter poverty. The common man was kept homeless, voteless, and always near hungry. Whatever communist thinking is there in Steinbeck's novels, is due to this aspect of his valley. It forced Steinbeck to seek answers in *In Dubious Battle*.

This book is the story of two communists and the strike they organized and directed in the fruit valley. They do not get success but they give a new direction. Their main purpose was to

give the strikers an experience of working together and a taste of their united strength, and they achieve it.

Charges have been levelled against Steinbeck of being Communist. But a close pursual of his major work will reveal that he has not much faith in their idealogy. His interest in communist is only upto them being human. He believes with them in the right of survival and raises a strong voice against the exploitation of common man. But it is strange to note that he is never sure of their victory. The doctor of *In Dubious Battle* says:

"There aren't beginnings. Nor any ends. 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 force nor understand. And man has met and defeated every obstacle, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself."

The peculiar circumstances of California Valley are somewhat responsible for this pessimistic vein in Steinbeck. In this valley private greed has always been predominant at the cost of suffering multitude. Perhaps this was the reason that forced Steinbeck to seek communist answers to the various problems of the valley in *In Dubious Battle*.

Other American writers havae made literary use of this region. But it is typical of Steinbeck to make extensive use of the native material available in this region. No doubt he has idealized his native valley and given poetic quality to its habitants, but like a true artist he has finely portrayed their dreams and aspirations. The pages in his works throb with the life of these simple people. But his greatest contribution is that he has given voice to their struggle for survival. This will remain as one of the main achievements of Steinbeck.

John Steinbeck's entry on the American literary stage had none of the sensation or glamour usually attached to a best-seller novelist. On the contrary, it was rather humble and undramatic. In fact, it was after a great struggle that his first novel *The Cup of Gold* could hit the market. It was obviously because he was a

total newcomer on the scene. He had not inherited the American tradition and had no literary background or base, except a genuine love for books and a strong will. The main thing that made him a writer was his dogged determination to be a novelist or nobody. He was so single-minded about it that he never about any other 'decent' career.

The beginning of Steinbeck's literary career was not very encouraging. He first wrote several short-stories and tried to get a collection of them printed. But he could not find a publisher. The first novel that he managed to see in print was *Cup of Gold*, which came out in 1929. The theme of the novel was historical and it was based on the life of Sir Henry Morgan, a Cabell-like buccaneer. The hero is shown ultimately to suffer an estrangement from mankind through his sin of intellectual pride. The novel depicted heroic characters and settings. But *The Cup* and his next two novels did not attract much attention.

In 1930, his collection of short stories brought some hope from him and he had his first taste of success in 1935 with *Tortilla Flat*, a story about Mexican Paisanos. Danny, a Paisano, on coming back from army discovers that he has inherited two small houses. He gets a little weighed down with the responsibility of ownership, and swears to protect the helpless. Gradually his carefree and dissolute friends find shelter under his roof and the book narrates tales of their ludicrous adventures.

Next came *In Dubious Battle* (1936), which presents an honest account of Steinbeck's observations and experiences at transient labour camp in California. It has a touch of the proletarian about it, but it would be rather harsh to label Steinbeck on the basis of merely a couple of novels, and inspite of his studied objectivity. *In Dubious Battle* came to be regarded as one of the most absorbing "strike" novels of the decade. Steinbeck picked up the theme and the situations from his native land Monterey, which was often the scene of labour migrations and strikes. He was well familiar with the labour problems of the Salinas Valley as he had himself worked with migrant labourers on ranches, farms

and road gangs. He possessed an intimate knowledge of the working man—his attitudes, habits, language etc.

In 1937, Steinbeck published *Of Mice and Men*. It has two central figures : Lennie and George. Lennie is a man with the strength of two but the mind of a child-simple, unaffected and kindly. His whole world centers around George, who steers him through life and protects him when his super-human strength and child's mind unwittingly land him in trouble. In the beginning, Steinbeck wanted to write a play "in the physical technique of the novel."[9] But what ultimately emerged was a full-fledged novel which proved to be an immediate success. Its success was due mainly to its direct force and perception in handling a theme genuinely rooted in American life. Its publication marked Steinbeck's rise to the front rank of American writers—Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Scott Fitzgerald etc.

His next book, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), has been referred to as the "Battle Hymn of the Eepublic." It proved to be the most famous of all his books as well as the most controversial one. It has been hailed as the epic chronicle of man's struggle against injustice and inhumanity. He has tried to present the social conditions which occasion the miserable plight of migrant labourers. The story revolves around the Joad family, which, like thousands of others, is forced by men and circumstances to migrate to California for work. They are a family, a unit that later on takes the enormous size of a group. Further, as the family declines morally and economically, the unit breaks up. But the one thing that lasts till the end is their humanity. We perceive one particular quality in Steinbeck's characters—they are poor but not degenerates. It is due to their humanity that we experience such a feeling of calm, towards the end of the story, after the storm and torrid rains and utter chaos. Our hearts go out to the workers because they are so human inspite of their distress.

Towards the close of the War, inspired by a letter urging him to write something different from the war novels, Steinbeck

wrote *Cannery Row*. He himself had suffered disillusionment during the war and now wished to create a world in which the untouchables and misfits of the real world he had observed and previously depicted may be given major roles. *Cannery Row* was the result. Although Steinbeck had written it as a relaxation from the tensions of war, *Cannery Row*, despite its rather farcical situations and loose and episodic structure, was quite serious in intent and bore some resemblance to *Tortilla Flat*. The story centers around a tight little group—Mac and his companions, with its own way of life and moral standards. They are not so much social outcasts as individuals who have retreated from society. Steinbeck uses the structure and mores of this little group to comment upon the structure and mores of the society which they have abandoned.

Then came *The Pearl* (1947) a real gem, the shortest but the most brilliant of Steinbeck's major novels. It is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, and more akin to the French "novella" or the German "novelle". During a marine expedition, Steinbeck had come across a simple little anecdote concerning a Mexican boy who found a great Pearl and conjured up for himself all the pleasure of life after selling it. But when he tried to sell it, he was cheated, abused and tortured, until he threw the pearl away. In Steinbeck's novel, Kino is the finder of the Pearl, and Juana his wife. It was serialized in an American magazine in 1945 and appeared in book form in 1947.

The *Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) came towards the close of his career, in the year preceding his Nobel Laureateship. It marks a departure from his have-not characters and proletarian subjects and turns to the middle-class society in America. It shows the immoral and illegal consequences of uncontrolled materialistic ambitions. Ethan, a clerk at a store, lived reasonably well within his means. But lure of money started working up his mind. At first he tried to resist, but when it got too strong, he yielded to it and adopted wrong means to acquire riches. He succeeded, but was even more discontented. He underwent deep mental agony,

which forced him to go to end his life. He stopped just short of that. *The Winter of Our Discontent* constituted Steinbeck's heroic effort to regain his old form and glory; though, for a majority of critics, Steinbeck was already a spent force.

These are his major novels. In between them, Steinbeck wrote a large number of short stories, articles and other novels which have not been noted here because they do not fall within the purview of the present study.

When Steinbeck's books started coming out, each after persevering endeavour, he had to contend with an unsympathetic group of readers and hostile reviewers who knew little about him. By and by-as indicated by the rising sales of his books, he succeeded in building up an appreciable and appreciative readership, and won over at least some of the reviewers. But the more hostile among them doggedly refused to be imprerssed even when Steinbeck was awarded, in 1962, the Nobel prize for literature.

Steinbeck's literary career, which started in 1929 with *The Cup of Gold*, stretched over more than thirty long years, during which, he wrote more than twenty novels. The rich variety and range of themes and fictional modes in these in almost phenomenal. But the unfortunate fact about Steinbeck is that there is a dearth of book-length studies on him or his works. That reminds us of an observation by Robert Rushmore made with reference to Willa Cather :

"Certain first rate authors-like Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway in the United States establish their presence at once and seem never to lose public admiration. Others like Herman Melville and William Faulkner, go through cycles of neglect and rediscovery. Willa Cather, who is by critical consensus one of the most distinguished of American novelists belongs to this second grouo."[10]

Steinbeck too belongs to the same group. He too has been passing through "cycles of neglect" and at times failed miserably to make himself acceptable, as Kazin bewails :

"Only in America have first-class novelists been driven to 'prove' their acceptability by becoming best-sellers, as can be seen in the cases of John O'Hara, J.P. Marquand, Dashiel Hammett, John Steinbeck, and Thomas Wolfe, among the writers of thirties and forties."[11]

This is confirmed by F.W. Watt, one of the most sympathetic critics of Steinbeck, according to whom,

"Although John Steinbeck is one of America's best known and best-loved novelists, he has received little encouragement from the literary critics except for a brief period in the late nineteen-thirties." [12]

Both Kazin and Watt seek to highlight the fact that Steinbeck was subjected to much adverse, and often unjustified—as we shall presently see—criticism at the hands of critics who, incidentally, are always hostile to everything new or daring. If we probe this wrath of the critics more deeply, we shall discover that their two main contentions are: firstly, that Steinbeck has not taken pains to create a work of art out of his experiences, and that he is just a proletarian novelist, a mere chronicler of proletarian life and aspirations; and secondly, that Steinbeck is not an innovator in the form of the novel.

Taking up the first charge first, it cannot be denied that his novels are mainly concerned with the working class of America and he tells their story in a naïve, chronicler-like way. But behind this apparent simplicity, there is always a conscious artist correlating his themes and fictional modes to the best advantage. His themes are various in nature and the predicament of the proletariat occupies an important place among them. But there are a number of others, no less important, e.g. humanism, loneliness, dreams, alienation, disenchantment, innocence and experience, the ambivalence of human nature, desire for physical

and spiritual fulfillment, and ambition. These are essentially universal in their scope.

With reference to the second charge, viz., Steinbeck's lack of innovativeness in the form of the novel, one cannot but notice the rich variety of fictional modes employed by him. It is open to a novelist to either pick up one form and stick to it, or choose different forms, or even blend them, to meet the requirements of his various themes in the different novels. Steinbeck obviously belongs to the latter category. Authors of the first category, it may be noted, lay more stress on the form and tend to make the theme subservient to it. For those of the second category, the theme is all-important and the form merely an instrument of communication which can be varied and experimented with to make it more effective. Change in the content changes the form too. It should, indeed, it must. Content, i.e. the theme, is the base, and form the superstructure. If the base changes, the superstructure must accordingly be adjusted. This is exactly what Steinbeck has done. He has mostly followed the traditional form and shows very little influence of the stream of consciousness novelists who were the fashion in the forties. But his novels present a rich variety of fictional modes-historical romance, myth, fable, parable, allegory, epic, picaresque and dramatic-which cannot be merely incidental. A systematic study of his themes and fictional modes should provide the key to his greatness as a literary artist.

Steinbeck died on 20th December, 1968, after a long and fruitful literary career. In the course of it he produced as many as twenty-three novels, in additional to numerous other writing. More often than not, he was unable to find favour with the reviewers, obviously because he did not fall in line with the literary fashion of the day. Most of the critics came down on him with an unduly heavy hand. But he went on and on, undeterred and unchanged, from one book to another, with a real artist's conviction. The sheer bulk of his work is impressive enough, but much more important than that is its quality-its force; its truthfulness to life, its deep insight, its sure grasp, its rare wisdom. That constitutes

Steinbeck's claim to greatness and immortality. It is for this that Steinbeck is acclaimed the world over, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962.

The second, but equally important, factor to his greatness is his fine sense of craftsmanship. He has the capacity to pick upon themes that are very close to life and have, inspite of their local projection, a much wider, in many cases universal, significance. With this is combined a knack of form, of hitting upon the right mode for each theme to communicate his view of life effectively to his readers.

A Steinbeck novel displays a multiplicity of themes, each one so closely interlinked with the other as to form a composite whole and do away with the need of a sub-plot to develop it. One of them is the central theme while the others are subsidiary. For instance, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the major theme happens to be the predicament of the proletariat while the sub-themes are those of resistances and humanity. The sub-themes are used either to strengthen the main theme by enlarging its scope, as the theme of resistance in the *Grapes of Wrath*, or, to tone the main theme down and restrain it from going to the extreme, as that of humanity, in the same novel, seeks to take away the pointed edges.

The wide variety of Steinbeck's themes is truly amazing. They range from economic exploitation and predicament of the poor to the psychological conditions like loneliness, frustration, alienation, and moral-philosophical concepts like contentment. The one thing common to them is that they emerge directly from the different aspects of life around him. They reveal the various moods of the times. Since America in those days was passing through difficult times, and the down-trodden were the hardest hit, many of them come from that class, e.g., exploitation and resistance in *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Pearl*; dreams and aspirations in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Pearl*; loneliness in *Of Mice* and *Men* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*, etc.

Most of these themes are substantially laden with philosophical significance. This is brought out in many instances at the very outset, as through the epigraph in *In Dubious Battle*, or through the title, which is often picked from some famous work, as in *Of Mice and Men*, *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Winter of Our Discontent* etc. This philosophical significance of the themes provides an air of objectivity to the narrative and gives the novels their universal significance. Generally, there are characters projecting philosophy, e.g. Jim Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Doc in *In Dubious Battle*, Ethan in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Sometimes the author sets it upon himself to do the job, as through inter-chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*, or even directly in many instances.

The variety of themes in Steinbeck's novels is matched by the variety of his modes. With each novel, he has come upon with a different mode. Some of his novels make use of single modes, as the allegorical in *Of Mice and Men*, *The Pearl*, and *The Winter of Our Discontent*. In others we find a combination of two, as romance and picaresque in *Of Mice and Men*, or even three e.g. picaresque, allegory and pastoral in *Cannery Row*.

The modes used by Steinbeck are mostly traditional ones, like allegory, picaresque, romance, epic, etc., but by using them in the contemporary setting with modern sets of characters and situations, Steinbeck has added a new meaning to them. It seems rather unfair to complain that he was no innovator in this regard. He was, in fact, a great experimenter. Instead of inventing a new mode, or following a current one, he made experiments with the traditional modes by using them in juxtaposition or investing them with modernity. Against a traditional epic having noble and sublime characters and deeds, he created a folk epic in *The Grapes of Wrath*, with ordinary characters and situations, but not without extraordinary deeds if viewed symbolically. The pastoral in *Cannery Row* is a modern rendering of the mode with an urban set of characters in contrast to the shepherds of the traditional

pastoral. Romance in *Tortilla Flat* is created with rogues as protagonists instead of a king or a noble of the old romances.

The success of Steinbeck's craftsmanship lies in the near perfection of correlation between his themes and modes in different novels. He has been able to achieve this by identifying situations, characters and their actions with different elements of different modes adopted by him. For instance, in *The Pearl*, an allegory, the action flows along two levels, the apparent and the inherent, the latter being reflected symbolically; and in *The Grapes of Wrath,* the epic qualities are attributed to characters and their deeds.

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VII
The Summing Up

It is rather difficult, perhaps even a little premature, to set down an overall estimate of Steinbeck's fiction. The richness and variety of his fiction brings forward several aspects of Steinbeck as a novelist. There is the Steinbeck of the thirties, who raised his voice against the exploitation of the have-nots; there is the Steinbeck, naive, warm hearted, author of *Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row*; there is also the sentimental Steinbeck, of *Of Mice and Men*, having a sort of nostalgia for primitive and pastoral, and there is the Steinbeck of his later fiction who is having a rethinking on old values and concepts. This variety is the peculiar quality of his work. Steinbeck once said: "My experience in writing has followed an almost invariable pattern. Since by the process of writing a book I have outgrown that book, and since I like to write, I have not written two books a like." In this connection he said further: "If a writer likes to write, he will find satisfaction in endless experimentation with his medium. He will improvise techniques, arrangements of scenes, rhythms of words and rhythms of thought."

John Steinbeck is a significant name in the galaxy of modern American novelists. He has given a new dimension to American fiction by making it a mirror of the woes and sufferings as well as the simple joys and aspirations of the commonest of common people, and suffered on that account at the hands of

critics. Moreover, in order to make his message-which, incidentally, is that of humanism-easily and effectively communicable to the common reader, he has resorted to conventional modes, for which too he has been taken to task. It has often been alleged that he was sold to a particular line of thought, and that, he was not an innovator in the form of the novel. In the course of this dissertation, an attempt has been made to explore the wide range of his experience, the variety of his themes and their presentation through suitable modes to determine the truth or otherwise of these allegations.

Steinbeck's first major work, *Tortilla FIat*, carries two themes- the Arthurian theme and that of freedom. One is legendary and the other its modern rendering. The novel reflects characteristics of two different modes-romance and picaresque. The Arthurian theme is symbolic, and hence the elements of romance too have been presented symbolically. The theme of freedom is more concrete and represented through real situations, characters and actions. It is finely superimposed upon the situation, characters and actions of the former, as is revealed by a close parallel between *Tortilla Flat* and the *Arthurian Tales*. The two themes are well knit together, and the two modes, modified to suit the modern setting, have been aptly used to sustain and develop theme.

The next novel, *In Dubious Battle*, presents an entirely different set of themes-those of class conflict, humanism and loneliness. The first is the central theme and the other two sub-themes depicting, respectively, the universal and cosmic view of man and revealing his inner state. The mode is dramatic, in keeping with the central theme and the author's attitude towards it. It enables the author to remain in the background and avoid making any direct social-moral comments on the good or bad of either side. Everything has been conveyed effectively but with perfect objectivity by dramatizing situation, characters and actions. Similarly, the themes of humanism and loneliness have been

dramatized. The descriptive-narrative mode has been used only sparsely to provide setting to the scenes and link them together.

There are three themes in *Of Mice and Men* - those of dream, friendship, and loneliness. Of these the first one is the focal theme. It represents itself through man's unfulfilled desires and his tendency to seek fulfillment in the world of his own imagination. Friendship implies sharing of joys and sorrows, and even the dream. Loneliness reflects the mental and physical privations of a man who is frustrated or alienated. The mode is appropriately allegorical. All .the three themes contribute to the symbolism of the allegory. Besides, the theme of dreams provides an unreal mood to the story, and the moral, yet another allegorical essential is provided by all the three themes. Thus the execution of the themes goes well with the mode of the novel, which establishes that Steinbeck's selection of the mode for the expression of the themes is appropriate.

The Grapes of Wrath once again highlights the predicament of the proletariat as its main theme, besides those of resistance and humanism in supporting roles. The theme of resistance forms an extension of the central theme and emerges as its consequence, while that of humanism seems to offer a solution and invest the story with universal significance. Steinbeck has treated the central theme in a serious manner, and used the folk epic mode to express it. It is a variation on the traditional epic mode. He has achieved this by endowing epic qualities to ordinary characters, and making them to heroic or quasi-divine deeds, which affect the fate of their community, their nation and the humanity at large. Various themes have been made to correspond to, and are correlated with, different characteristics of the epic mode in a planned manner and the happy combined effect entitles the oval to be called a prose epic.

Cannery Row too has three themes - those of freedom, mutual benevolence, and non-attachment. The first two provide direct faction in the novel, and the last constitutes its moral-philosophical content. The modal design of this novel is more

complex than in Steinbeck's most other novels. There are elements three different modes-allegory, pastoral and picaresque. The first two are represented symbolically while the third finds concrete expression. Aspects of all the three themes are individually and admirably correlated with the elements of all the three modes.

The thematic content of *The Pearl* is pretty complex for the short novel that it is. Here again, Steinbeck treats the themes of exploitation and resistance, though these are portrayed solely through and individual character. Dream and disenchantment are the other two themes that tend to make the picture more complete. The mode is mainly allegorical, though there is a touch of the fable too. Various allegorical features like unreal mood, conflict between good and evil, moralizing, and venture into the unknown, correspond and are correlated to various themes at apparent and symbolical levels. The novel is a fine piece of Steinbeck's craftsmanship.

In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Steinbeck has depicted the theme of materialism more fully than in his earlier novels. He has developed it with the help of two supporting themes-of discontentment and loneliness. The central theme reflects the socioeconomic aspect of the excessive materialistic ambitions of on acquisitive society, while the other two themes present the psychological consequences of that. The mode is basically allegorical and all the themes find expression, to a large extent, symbolically. So many abstract things have been brought out suggestively. On the whole, various elements of allegory represent various aspects of the themes quite effectively, and Steinbeck's choice of the mode to present his themes appears to be aesthetically appropriate.

An analysis of his themes, taken together, would reveal that Steinbeck selects theme consciously and purposefully, mainly from the life around him. His preference goes to themes to which he has direct access, through personal experiences, observation, feeling and response, etc. These may be conveniently placed in two groups; the first reflecting socio-economic-political aspects

of the society, e.g., exploitation, resistance, and class-conflict; and the second revealing the intrinsic qualities and psychological conditions of man, e.g., humanism, loneliness, disenchantment and discontentment, etc. The thematic design of his novels emerges from a blending of the two to cover both the aspects of his subject.

The modes adopted by Steinbeck to depict his various themes are equally various. He has not invented or followed any new mode, but experimented with and presented modern renderings of typical old modes like romance, pastoral, epic, etc., in his novels, and even tried various combinations. His familiarity with these traditional modes was a result of his early reading. In his works he has tried a sort of revival, a renaissance of the old modes, and tried to make them acceptable by relating them to the sensibility of modern times. But he cautiously refrains from identifying himself with any single mode. His works demonstrate a constant experimenting with them. It is amply obvious that he does not try to force his themes into a particular mode but allows them the freedom to decide their own mode for themselves. His attitude towards the theme, of course, helps in arriving at some definite mode for the particular novel. He also modifies the traditional modes to suit his ends, picking certain elements relevant to his purpose and leaving the rest.

His detractors, who hold that Steinbeck was no innovator of form, seem to have taken a too limited, if not altogether prejudiced, view of the term and have tended to ignore the revivalist zeal of Steinbeck. An innovator of forms does not necessarily mean one who invents a new mode or toes along the line provided by the contemporary modes. It also covers one who seeks to revive old forms by presenting them in a modern, realistic context, with variations to suit his ends. There is no doubt about Steinbeck's capacity to do so.

Still more remarkable is the degree of success he achieves in correlating his themes and modes. The rapport between them is meticulously obtained by portraying various aspects of themes

through different characteristics of the mode (or even a blend of modes) employed.

To sum up, Steinbeck wrote his novels most prolifically, covering a wide range of themes and modes, and representing a large number of interests. His use of different components of fiction has been judicious and confers upon the work a quality that is enduring.

That is why, despite his characteristic shortcomings, his works have passed the test of time, which is proved by the increasing awareness, among readers and critics, of his works and their merits. He may rightly be regarded, as John S. Kinney points out, as "the most versatile of contemporary American fiction artists."

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