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**JOHN STEINBECK: SOCIAL PHILOSOPHER**

A Thesis

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## PREFACE

A thorough study of John Steinbeck's works of fiction has been disregarded almost entirely by literary scholars of this decade. Peter Lisca has studied comprehensively all of Steinbeck's works; however, he has approached the works strictly from the point of view of the various techniques employed and the content achieved by these techniques. E.W. Tedlock, Jr. and C.V. Wicker, on the other hand, have compiled an anthology of the major critical essays written on the works of Steinbeck; nevertheless, none of these essays thoroughly encompasses all the works of the author. Furthermore, many of these scholars, as well as other scholars, have tended to succumb to the fallacious temptation of labelling Mr. Steinbeck and his works on the basis of his style, form, or dominant theme in a select number of works. Any arbitrary labelling of Mr. Steinbeck or his works, it seems to me, tends to limit and even to obscure a reader's understanding the unique social philosophy of this author.

In this comprehensive study of this author's works, I have refrained from classifying Mr. Steinbeck; rather, I have attempted to understand what he has to say about man as a human being--his drives and his impulses, his loves and hates, his exigencies and his aspirations, his successes and his failures. In this approach, I have become more and more



cognizant of the fact that John Steinbeck, the social philosopher, cannot be portrayed adequately by a single literary trend or philosophy. While it is true that many of Steinbeck's characters exhibit primitive, animalistic behavior which Steinbeck describes in an objective, uncondemning manner (naturalism), it also is true that many of his characters function on a level far above this state of primitiveness (realism). Furthermore, most of his characters are neither totally bad nor totally good (transcendentalism). Several are symbolic of Biblical characters (allegorization), and others are humanistic by innuendo (humanitarianism). All of Steinbeck's major characters, in fact, are wrestling with their dualistic instinctual drives in an attempt to discover meaning and purpose in existing as human beings.

I should desire to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Green D. Wyrick for his inspirational guidance and urbane assistance during the time when this study was in progress. I should desire, also, to express my appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his willing labors and helpful suggestions as a second reader. In addition, I should like to thank my wife, Rosalie, for her constant support, valuable criticisms, and voluntary typewriting of this thesis.

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by I. Glickberg, *Literature and Religion: A Study in Conflict*, p. 170.



## CHAPTER I

### MAN'S PRIMITIVE BEHAVIOR AND SUPERFICIAL FAÇADE:

#### BIOLOGICAL PREOCCUPATION, ALCOHOL, AND SEX

Man . . . is naked, without vestments, till he buy or steal such, and by forethought sew and button them. . . . Nevertheless, there is something great in the moment when a man first strips himself of adventitious wrappages; and sees indeed that he is naked . . .

--Sartor Resartus

The object of the writer of fiction must be to present only the truth. He must, in fact, presume that "truth is anterior to morality."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he may not withhold one iota of the truth, regardless of how ugly and cancerous it may be. He must, instead, examine any and all evil infections of society and attempt to find a cure for these afflicting social poisons. John Steinbeck attempts to do this in his novels and short stories.

Since he does endeavor to present all of the truth, Steinbeck has been both praised and criticized by his readers. Scholars have described him as perceptive, brilliant, poetic, wise, but primitively child-like in some of his works. They have labeled him a proletarian, a communist, a naturalist, and a mystic. Some of his works they have lauded with

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<sup>1</sup>Charles I. Glicksberg, Literature and Religion: A Study in Conflict, p. 170.



elegant adjectives; others they have denounced as mere filth and trash.<sup>2</sup>

The works of Steinbeck which have been condemned most ruthlessly are Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, Cannery Row, The Wayward Bus, Burning Bright, Sweet Thursday, and such short stories as "Johnny Bear," "The Snake," and "Saint Kathy the Virgin." These works have also been described as primitive, vulgar, amoral and repulsive. These critics, in general, tend to feel that these works not only damage Steinbeck's message in such works as In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, and East of Eden, but also portray the real Steinbeck--the unholy, purely naturalistic Steinbeck--who is preoccupied constantly with animals and sex.

One must admit that many--in fact, most--of Steinbeck's works contain vivid, detailed descriptions of so-called unholy sexual activities and other primitive-like, animalistic activities by his characters. It is also true that many of Steinbeck's characters really do not seem to live as human beings. Alfred Kazin remarks that they seem to be on the verge of becoming human, but not quite.<sup>3</sup> It soon becomes evident,

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<sup>2</sup>John Steinbeck, The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, Introduction by Joseph Henry Jackson, p.vii.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature, p. 394.



however, that Steinbeck--consciously or unconsciously--has a definite purpose in using the particular characters, plots, and techniques which he so skillfully employs in all of his works. None of his works is farcical, useless, or without significant meaning. Instead, his works present outstanding observations and analyses of life as it really is. Steinbeck becomes, in fact, a social philosopher in his own right. As a social philosopher, he examines the whole man of society and discovers his problems and weaknesses: primitive behavior and superficial façade, inner conflict and struggle, a search for meaning, and an attempt to solve his own problems. A particular social poison, however, does cause him to linger longer at certain times on a particular problem or social infection.

In the study of Steinbeck's works, it has been rewarding to discover that the primitive behavior and superficial façade of man in Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, The Wayward Bus, and Sweet Thursday is also suggested and recognized, in part at least, in Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, and To a God Unknown. Steinbeck's greatest error in these early works, perhaps, may be his attempt to solve this problem and other problems of his characters and society in these novels. For example, Henry Morgan, the violent and demon-possessed buccaneer in Cup of Gold is too



self-centered to be able to properly attempt to solve his problems. At the end of his journeys, both Buccaneer Morgan and his three cups of gold--Panama, Isobel, and the actual inscribed cup--prove to be mere counterfeits.<sup>4</sup>

In To a God Unknown, Steinbeck begins his treatment of the happy-go-lucky paisanos of California. Maxwell Geismar suggests that Juanito and Steinbeck's other paisanos are Steinbeck's reaction of defiance and opposition to society which is the cause and source of humanity's frustrations.<sup>5</sup> Juanito, in To a God Unknown, does seem to have an answer to some of the frustrations which burden and depress Joseph. Juanito's calm and peaceful attitude, on the other hand, is not the result of carefree living as the paisanos of Tortilla Flat practice, but mostly the result of his ancestral rituals and practices:

Joseph turned slowly. "Juanito, you knew this place. You have been here."  
The light blue eyes of Juanito were met with tears. "My mother brought me here, senior. My mother was Indian. I was a little boy, and my mother was going to have a baby. She came here and sat beside the rock. For a long time she sat, and when we went away again. She was Indian, senior. Sometimes I think the old ones come here still."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup>John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p. 40.



In The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck shows sympathy and compassion to the Lopez sisters who work hard selling tortillas and enchilados, but who feel compelled to become prostitutes whenever a customer buys three or more tortillas or enchilados. These paisanos are not without consciences; they confess to the Virgin every evening. They are, instead, ignorant and biologically-oriented paisanos who attempt to make an honest living in this cruel world. In order to be successful, they know that they must keep their customers happy. The Lopez sisters have honest motives; it is society and its biological temptations, Steinbeck suggests, which overpower the primitive impulses of the sisters.

Shark Wicks, the financial wizard in The Pastures of Heaven, is another and different example of man's superficial façade and childlike behavior. Like a small child playing the big businessman, Wicks keeps a ledger in which he periodically records imaginary purchases and sales of stocks and real estate. In every instance, he sells at the proper moment and, in turn, makes tremendous profits. Eventually, however, Shark Wicks' counterfeit façade also succumbs to society. The success-oriented society, which earlier seduced Wicks into living a life of fantasy so that it might crown him as God of Finance, exposes him publicly so that it might crucify him as Demon of the Valley. Wicks has been exposed and he knows it:



Shark's eyes did not move from the ceiling, but under the stroking, he began to talk brokenly. "I haven't any money," his monotonous voice said. "They took me in and asked for a ten thousand dollar bond. I had to tell the judge. They all heard. They all know--I haven't any money. I never had any. Do you understand? That ledger was nothing but a lie. Every bit of it was lies. I made it all up. Now everybody knows. I had to tell the judge."<sup>7</sup>

Society has spanked Wicks publicly, and he is crying like a child. He does not know what to do. Katherine, his sympathetic wife, seems to understand. She temporarily acts as mother for this grown child and suggests a realistic escape from the pressure of this society: "We'll go out of here. . . . We'll sell this ranch and go away from here. Then you'll get the chance you never had. You'll see. I know what you are. I believe in you."<sup>8</sup> In response, Wicks--the grown boy--can only respond by crying: "I'll go soon. . . . I'll go just as soon as I can sell the ranch. Then I'll get in a few licks. I'll get my chance then. I'll show people what I am."<sup>9</sup>

Not satisfied with his social findings in The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck employs a Quixotic humor and the Arthurian-legend behavior<sup>10</sup> to present the more immediate social issues of the world in a more realistic manner.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>John Steinbeck, The Pastures of Heaven, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Leon Howard, Literature and the American Tradition, p. 301.

<sup>11</sup>Geismar, op. cit., p. 255.



The paisanos of Tortilla Flat momentarily become substitutes for the good life which Steinbeck is seeking. These paisanos realize that their stay in this world is short; consequently, they live hard and fast. They drink, cheat, love, and do what they can to enjoy themselves in this cruel world.<sup>12</sup> Danny is their King Arthur, and they are his knights of the round table. Together, they move and operate on the fringe of the coastal town of Monterey, California, independent and untouched by commercialism and its frustrations.<sup>13</sup>

These paisanos do, however, in their own primitive and superficial ways, attempt to solve the problems of their own primary group. For example, they discuss and analyze Danny's desire to buy Mrs. Morales some candy and Jesus and Maria's plan to buy Arabella Gross ". . . one of those little things that goes higher up. . . . the little silk pockets on a string."<sup>14</sup> They conclude, as a result, that a brassiere is an appropriate gift for a woman, but that candy is not. Candy makes people's teeth ache; consequently, wine is more proper.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>13</sup>The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, p. viii.

<sup>14</sup>John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



Another aspect of these paisanos' characters is their constant indulgence with wine and women. Pilon and Pablo slap Mrs. Torrelli "on the buttocks," call her a "Butter Duck," and take "little courteous liberties with her person."<sup>16</sup> Jesus Maria buys wine and a pink rayon brassiere for Arabella Gross for the purpose of having an affair with her in the woods.<sup>17</sup> Danny, King Arthur himself, begins a passionate affair with Sweets Ramirez after stopping by her house one day for a cocktail.<sup>18</sup> Big Joe has an affair with Tia Ignacia on the street after she invites him in from the rain to dry and to have a drink of warm wine.<sup>19</sup>

These paisanos of Tortilla Flat are simply uninhibited, biologically-oriented illiterates who know and practice only that which--directly or indirectly--is related to alcohol and sex. Their days begin and end with wine and women. Their primitive reign itself, as spurious King Arthur and his knights of the round table, begins and ends with alcohol and sex, wine and women.

In In Dubious Battle, Steinbeck limits his comments on the inherently primitive, sensualistic, and biologically-oriented nature of man to the scene of Mac's delivering

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-4.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 90.



Lisa's baby;<sup>20</sup> to several exchanges of glances between Lisa and Jim;<sup>21</sup> and to Doc's sensual feelings from merely looking at some pointers<sup>22</sup> and from looking into Lisa's "shrinking eyes."<sup>23</sup>

Curley's sexy wife, in Of Mice and Men, tends to affect the primitive impulses of most of the men in the bunkhouse somewhat similarly as wine did to the paisanos in Tortilla Flat; however, only once is she able to seduce anyone--Lennie. Lennie--oafish, savage, and moronic--struggles to resist her; but she takes his hand, puts it on her head, and says, "Feel right aroun there an' see how soft it is."<sup>24</sup> This is enough to release Lennie's primitive, uncontrollable drive of petting and shaking animals until they stop moving. As a result, Lennie shakes Curley's wife until her neck is broken and she stops moving.

Several of the works in The Long Valley also illustrate Steinbeck's unremitting concern for man's primeval urges. "The Chrysanthemum," for example, discloses the relationship between the growth of plant life and the sexual urge in human

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<sup>20</sup>John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, pp.55-59.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. pp. 212-15 and 257.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>24</sup>John Steinbeck, The Steinbeck Pocket Book, Selected by Pascal Covici, p. 169.



beings.<sup>25</sup> Elisa is sexually attracted to an itinerant status--  
 scissors sharpener in talking to him about the growth of her  
 chrysanthemums. This momentary awakening of passion in the  
 controlled and ordinary life of Elisa obtains a new dimension  
 when she realizes that both she and the sharpener have been  
 insincere in their interests. He has pretended to be inter-  
 ested in her flowers, and she has pretended to need to have  
 some old, discarded saucepans repaired.<sup>26</sup> Each experiences  
 both the freedom and the frustration of biological passions--  
 passions stimulated and discharged by insincerity and super-  
 ficiality.

Steinbeck's preoccupation with frustrated women is  
 also observed very clearly in Mary Teller in "The White  
 Quail," Amy Hawkins in "Johnny Bear," and the anonymous  
 woman in "The Snake." Mary Teller has a lack of sexual vigor  
 and drive, and so identifies herself with a single albino  
 quail which comes to drink in her pool. Amy Hawkins' affair  
 with a Chinese laborer clearly emphasizes the potential  
 emergence of the primitive impulse in people, even though

<sup>25</sup>Ray B. West, Jr., The Short Story in America (1900-1950), p. 48.

<sup>26</sup>John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, pp. 15-18.



both people may be from opposing social groups. Social status-- ascribed or achieved--does not guarantee control of this primeval drive. The strange woman who visits the laboratory objectifies her frustration in purchasing both a male rattlesnake and a white rat and observing the male rattlesnake's eating the rat.<sup>27</sup>

The Joads in The Grapes of Wrath live on a low economic and social level, but their behavior cannot be labelled as superficial or primitive. Steinbeck does, however, draw attention to Rose of Sharon's "ripe voluptuousness, [and] her drowsing aroma of universal fertility."<sup>28</sup> He also suggests that Connie Rivers, deserting husband of Rose of Sharon, is a male version of the philosophic witch in Cup of Gold and Curley's wife in Of Mice and Men. Both of these intimations seem to be introductory symbols of "Steinbeck's sexual fascination," as Maxwell Geismar refers to it,<sup>29</sup> and are intended to prepare the reader for the dramatic, symbolic closing scene, wherein Rose of Sharon nurses the dying man with milk which nature biologically had intended for her stillborn child.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Lisca, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>Geismar, op. cit., p. 264.   <sup>29</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>30</sup>John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 619.



of Steinbeck's next thorough study of people--their weaknesses and their strengths--once again involves the paisanos of Monterey. Cannery Row is not a mere combination of Steinbeck's findings and observations in Tortilla Flat; only the locale and general class of people are similar. The people of Cannery Row have no king with his round table whose main task is to arrive at possible solutions to their own problems and those of their immediate neighbors. The people of Cannery Row really have no problems. They seem to understand each other and automatically assist each other in whatever way is needed. They are primitive and biologically-oriented, and they know it. Consequently, they are frank and honest; they make no attempt to hide anything from each other. When Mack, the boys, or anyone else has the impulse and desire for an affair, he simply goes to Dora Flood's whorehouse, requests an appointment with one of the girls, and pays the two-dollar fee for the services. These people have no moral consciences and no social pressure to cause them to refrain from responding freely and uninhibitively to the primitive, animalistic instinct within them. To the people of Cannery Row, the relaxed and happy life is synonymous with wine, women, and prostitution. Prostitution in Cannery Row, however, is quite different from prostitution in Tortilla Flat. The love affairs



of Sweets Ramirez and Cornelia Ruiz in Tortilla Flat ended in frustration, jealousies, and violence for their lovers. Dora's girls conduct their prostitution on a professional level: Each girl receives two dollars for her simple, routine services. Once the sex act is consummated, the customer leaves, and the girl forgets that he has been at the Bear Flag. By the next day, she does not even recognize the customer on the street. In this way, the girl never gets any more involved in a romantic love affair than does an animal when it mates. The girl has merely responded to the animalistic craving within the man; she has merely met his so-called need at the moment.

On the other hand, the people of Cannery Row do maintain a certain perfunctory exterior for the rest of the people in Monterey. For example, Dora Flood cannot hide from the citizens of Monterey the fact that her Bear Flag Restaurant is nothing but a whorehouse; however, she protects her illegal business and herself by contributing heavily to the charities of the city. Furthermore, if a citizen or a police officer should inspect her establishment, he would discover that ". . . she keeps an honest, one-price house, sells no hard liquor, and permits no loud or vulgar talk in her house."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>John Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 11.



Thus, Steinbeck uses the people in Cannery Row to comment on the various aspects of our ". . . civilized man-- his business, his illusions, his sex drive, and his relations with his fellow man."<sup>32</sup> At the end of this frank, Dickensian story, as George Snell describes it,<sup>33</sup> Steinbeck still agrees with his suggestion at the beginning of the book that the paisanos are not model human beings, but that they are people who are capable of being successful and happy in their own primitive and biologically-oriented habitat:

Mack and the boys. . . are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their stomachs in the fight to secure certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them. . . . In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, ruttled by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and to come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums.<sup>34</sup>

Sweet Thursday, a sequel to Cannery Row, contains the same philosophy of life as that of Cannery Row. A few people

<sup>32</sup>Lisca, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>33</sup>George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947, p. 197.

<sup>34</sup>Cannery Row, p. 10.



have died, some have moved away, and a few newcomers have joined the Row; otherwise, Sweet Thursday involves the same people with the same way of life. The main difference is the fact that Doc, owner and operator of the Western Biological Laboratory, gradually becomes the victim of his own biological preoccupations and alcoholic indulgences and, in turn, falls prey to sex in the form of a beautiful hustler from Fauna's Bear Flag Restaurant. This hustler, however, is not a whore at heart; she is a real lady and will make a nice mother for Doc's children, if he ever marries her.

The Wayward Bus, Steinbeck's modern version of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, beautifully reveals Steinbeck's examination of man in the society which Mack and the boys denied in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday.<sup>35</sup> The characters in The Wayward Bus, however, also possess superficial façades and primitive impulses. Their tensions are mostly sexual but are resolved in a few hours when the bus is stuck in the mud. None of the passengers is excused from this self-examination; each must reconcile himself to his inner emotion and/or urge which previously he has successfully suppressed. This self-examination is least painful for Juan Chicoy, Ernest Horton, and Camille Oaks. Perhaps, they are

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<sup>35</sup>E.W. Tedlock, Jr. and C.V. Wicker (ed.), Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 282.



"the saved or elect," as Peter Lisca describes them.<sup>36</sup> To be sure, all three people have four good traits in common: ". . . honesty with themselves and others, an ecological view of things, ability in their respective fields, and sexual attractiveness."<sup>37</sup> Juan Chicoy, for example, possesses all the characteristics of a Steinbeck hero. Contrary to Mr. Elliott Pritchard, Juan is self-reliant and self-contained. Unlike his wife, Alice, he can ". . . look at each thing in relation to the other. . . . [He can] see and judge and consider and enjoy."<sup>38</sup> Juan's relations with women are particularly successful because ". . . his sexuality is open and honest."<sup>39</sup>

Very similar to Juan is Ernest Horton. He, too, is open and honest in his character and sexuality.<sup>40</sup> He easily sees that Norma's disillusioned fascination of being in love with Clark Gable is false and unreal, but he does not make fun of it, as Alice does. Rather, Ernest even volunteers to deliver a letter to Clark Gable for Norma.

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<sup>36</sup>Lisca, op. cit., pp. 233-36.

<sup>37</sup>Tedlock and Wicker, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>38</sup>John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup>Tedlock and Wicker, loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup>Loc. cit.



Camille Oaks, a blond stripper, is able to see through the vulgar façade of Louie, who talks as if every woman were a whore, "a pig."<sup>41</sup> Camille also knows that men cannot ". . . keep their hands off her. . . . [they all want] the same thing from her, and that was [is] just the way it was [is]."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, she is cognizant of this penchant and knows how to control such situations, even with awkward but sex-driven Louie.

Mildred Pritchard, a purgatorial soul,<sup>43</sup> is a sexually attractive girl who has "experienced two consummated love-affairs."<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, she has sufficient moral strength to cause Mr. Van Brunt to face his decrepit, twisted, filthy mind. When he attempts to embarrass her by telling her that her slip is showing and then adds, "I don't care to hear about your underwear. . . . I don't want you to think I had any other motive,"<sup>45</sup> Mildred disgustingly replies:

You see, there are two straps on each shoulder. One is for the slip and the other supports the brassiere and the brassiere holds the breasts up firmly. . . . There isn't anything below that until the panties, if I wore panties, which I don't.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>The Wayward Bus, p. 99.      <sup>42</sup>Ibid.; p. 109.

<sup>43</sup>Lisca, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>44</sup>The Wayward Bus, p. 66.      <sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>46</sup>Loc. cit.



Thus, one by one, the passengers on the wayward bus stuck in the mud are forced to see themselves as they really are. No one is reformed or converted, but everyone is exposed to himself. Mr. Pritchard's business ethics and ideal of service are really high-class blackmail. Camille is a stripper whom Mr. Pritchard ogled during one of his stags. Mrs. Pritchard's illusion of her ideal family is shattered when her daughter Mildred runs after the deserting Mexican-Irish Juan. Later, Mrs. Pritchard is assaulted and forcibly raped by her own husband on the dirt floor of the cave. Mr. Pritchard suffers two more agonizing assaults on his character by Ernest Horton and Camille Oaks. Norma's immature illusion of Clark Gable loving her is replaced by Pimples' crude attempt to seduce her. Mildred runs after Juan, has an affair with him in an old barn, but then admits to him that she does not really want him. At the same time, Juan realizes the potency of his primitive impulses and desires. This dramatic revealing of the true characters of each of the people on the bus is achieved within a few hours, and the allegorical bus soon is on its wayward pilgrimage in the direction of San Juan de la Cruz.

Burning Bright, a symbolic story using the same characters in three different vocations, simply but clearly reiterates Steinbeck's preoccupation with man's primitive, biological drives and impulses. To do this, Steinbeck



momentarily is forced to scrap all moral codes of any society and to accept murder as being on the same innocent level as adultery.<sup>47</sup> Joe Saul is impotent but does not know it. Mordeen, his wife, knows the truth but supposedly attempts to hide it by committing adultery with Victor, Joe Saul's assistant, who is sterile of spirit, but full of animal vitality. Later, when Victor insists on claiming the child when it is born, Mordeen, with the help of Friend Ed, murders Victor in order to hide her affair from her husband. Within hours, however, Joe Saul returns home with the angry news that he knows he's impotent:

I saw the slide--big as a porthole it looked, blinding with light. I turned the knob, and there they were. I saw them--shrunken and crooked and dead, corpses of sperm--dead. And, oh, my God!<sup>48</sup>

Joe Saul's sexual sterility cannot be changed nor can it be completely forgotten by either Mordeen or Joe. The condition may be treated, but a scar--the child undoubtedly will bear some physical resemblance to Victor--will always remain as evidence of Mordeen's affair with Victor. Joe Saul himself, however, does regain his spiritual fertility when he is able to accept life--and this child--as it really is.

<sup>47</sup>Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 444.

<sup>48</sup>John Steinbeck, Burning Bright, p. 144.



Having attained a complete analysis and criticism of man and society, Steinbeck feels compelled to point out that man himself is responsible for his own problems. Society has many weaknesses, but all these weaknesses are the result of the behavior of man--the individual man. Man possesses powerful primitive impulses and drives, but man is also the agent who determines how these impulses and drives are channelled. Man cannot completely eradicate his beastly, sex-oriented nature, but neither can man completely divest himself of his moral nature. Man may act passionately and immorally; however, this does not remove the fact that he possesses a free will to choose between good and bad, love and lust. This verity Steinbeck clearly illustrates in East of Eden.

Even though the story of East of Eden involves the Hamilton family, the main characters of the novel are the three generations of the Trask family. Except for brief contacts between these families, the Trasks and the Hamiltons follow separate courses in life without drastic effects from their juxtaposition. It is the Trask family that retells the Biblical account of Cain and Abel. The Trasks, not the Hamiltons, are the ones responsible for the actions of these symbolic Cains and Abels. The Trasks, in fact, each individual Trask, must deal with his own primeval impellents; each individual Trask has the free will to do good or to do evil, to love or to lust.



One of the dominant problems of man epitomized in this modern-day Biblical family is man's biological, sex-oriented preoccupation and primitive behavior. In this novel, as in many by Steinbeck, man's inability--or unwillingness--to control this rudimentary drive results in a flourishing of the business of prostitution. In other words, the brothel almost becomes the center of activity for these sensualistic individuals in East of Eden.

Even though the Trask men exhibit some Cyprian behavior at times, it is Cathy Ames Trask, however, who seems to be the embodiment of this paramount problem. At the tender age of only sixteen, Cathy begins her indulgence in sensual living by obtaining a job as a private prostitute for a Mr. Edwards, a professional whoremaster. When Cathy attempts to outsmart her sex-partner by changing the lock on her front door, she is taken on a long journey, beaten nearly to death, and left lying in the country by Mr. Edwards.<sup>49</sup>

For a while after her recovery at the home of Charles and Adam Trask, Cathy seems to have discontinued her life of harlotry. She marries Adam and soon expects the birth of a baby. In spite of her self-attempted abortion, Cathy gives birth to twin boys. Not until years later when facing his

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<sup>49</sup>John Steinbeck, East of Eden, p. 37.



... remember how surprised you were that I had regulars. Do you think I'll give them up? Do you think they give me a mean little dollar in quarters? No, they give me ten dollars, and the price is going up all the time. They can't go to anybody else. Nobody else is any good for them.<sup>51</sup>

As Faye attempts to initiate a rebuttal, Kate aggressively continues:

And do you know, Mother dear, that's the way this whole house is going to be. The price will be twenty dollars, and we'll make the bastards take a bath. We'll catch the blood on white silk handkerchiefs--Mother dear--blood from the little knotted whips.<sup>52</sup>

Kate no longer is a woman who has given herself over to her rudimentary impulses; she is a devilish, animalistic woman without moral conscience at all. She has degenerated to the functioning level of an angry coyote bitch. Perhaps, she was predestined to this level of degeneration by having been born with more forcible animalian impulses than most people in society:

... just as there are physical monsters, can there not be mental or psychic monsters born? The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce a malformed soul?

... Cathy Ames was born with the tendencies, or lack of them, which drove and forced her all of her life. Some balance wheel was misweighted, some gear out of ratio. She was not like other people, never was from

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 209.



birth. And just as a cripple may learn to utilize his lack so that he becomes more effective in a limited field than the uncrippled, so did Cathy, using her difference, make a painful and bewildering stir in her world.<sup>53</sup>

Kate's devilish debauchery continues to express itself in various forms: she slowly poisons Faye to death and, then, reinforces the security of her business with pictures and information of important people in the state to use as blackmail if necessary. Kate even admits to Adam, in his first and only visit with her at her brothel, that she has always acted differently from others. One man even had killed himself when he could not go to bed with her when she was only a young girl.<sup>54</sup> When Adam tells her that he is beginning to think that she is "a twisted human--or no human at all," she smiles and calmly says:

. . . Maybe you've struck it. . . . Do you think I want to be human? Look at those pictures! I'd rather be a dog than a human. But I'm not a dog. I'm smarter than humans. Nobody can hurt me. . . .<sup>55</sup>

Eventually one person really does hurt Kate--her son Caleb. Caleb goes to visit his mother at her brothel and calmly tells her, "I was afraid I had you in me. . . . I'm my own. I don't have to be you. . . . If I'm mean, it's my own mean."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-3.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 411.



This face-to-face meeting with her son Caleb and, later, with her son Aaron marks the beginning of a rapid decay of the dehumanized spirit of Kate. Her extreme sensualistic behavior decreases rapidly, to be replaced by a fear of others. She takes extra precautions to insure herself from being destroyed by ousted whore Ethel and by her bouncer Joe Valery. Finally, however, Kate's boldness gives way, and she commits suicide by taking the capsule of poison which she has carried for some time on a chain around her neck.

Kate has lived the life of a degenerate human governed entirely by the lowest of her primitive impulses and, consequently, pays the ultimate price herself in suicide. This price is high but, even then, not so high as the price of being exposed and destroyed at the hands of others. Society is never lenient with an individual who willfully and defiantly violates its mores to indulge in sensualistic, animalistic living.

Does man have to admit that he is merely an animal governed, or, at least, strongly affected by primeval, sex-centered drives and impulses? Is man's social self actually a counterfeit--a superficial façade--for his biological preoccupations and primitive behavior? John Steinbeck, by his analytical novels and short stories of man and his



society, has substantiated that these descriptions of man's genuine nature are essentially true. Man is not all devil or all angel, says Steinbeck; but man does possess powerful primitive drives and impulses which are controlled or released by man himself.

MAN'S INNER CONFLICT AND STRUGGLE:  
 VIOLENCE VERSUS NON-VIOLENCE

There were instincts buried in all; that these instincts, selfish and unselfish, egoistic and sexual, constructive and destructive, were striving at aims which entailed frequent collisions and compromise, and that this made necessary the suppression and repression of this and that instinctive drive.

#### -The Uses of Violence

A novelist often uses violence as underpinning for the philosophy or moral which he is attempting to present. John Dos Passos, for example, in Three Soldiers, very vividly uses violence to portray the way in which war dehumanizes man. Ernest Hemingway, in A Farewell to Arms, uses violence to show the futility of struggle in life. Religion, socialism, love--none can give Patrick Henry a lasting peace. He seems doomed to violence and suffering. He has sought and struggled for peace, but circumstances have violently prevented him from attaining peace. John Steinbeck, on the other hand, uses both violence and non-violence to present his understanding of the inner conflicts and struggles in man. Steinbeck, like Freud, realizes that man's inherent nature is composed of dualistic instincts and impulses: love and hate, nonviolence and violence.



## CHAPTER II

### MAN'S INNER CONFLICT AND STRUGGLE:

#### VIOLENCE VERSUS NONVIOLENCE

I have said there were instincts behind it all; that these instincts, selfish and unselfish, egoistic and sexual, constructive and destructive, were striving at aims which entailed frequent collisions and compromises, and that this made necessary the suppression and repression of this and that instinctive drive.

#### --The Human Mind

A novelist often uses violence as underpinning for the philosophy or moral which he is attempting to present. John Dos Passos, for example, in Three Soldiers, very vividly uses violence to portray the way in which war dehumanizes man. Ernest Hemingway, in A Farewell to Arms, uses violence to show the futility of struggle in life. Religion, socialism, love--none can give Patrick Henry a lasting peace. He seems doomed to violence and suffering. He has sought and struggled for peace, but circumstances have violently prevented him from attaining peace. John Steinbeck, on the other hand, uses both violence and non-violence to present his understanding of the inner conflicts and struggles in man. Steinbeck, like Freud, realizes that man's inherent nature is composed of dualistic instincts and impulses: love and hate, nonviolence and violence.



Man, however, possesses the jurisdiction to determine which of these instinctual drives he will permit to be expressed. Man himself becomes either the master or the slave of these intrinsic forces.

Steinbeck, however, unlike Freud or his disciples, assumes that society and nature generally are hostile and violent toward man. In this manner, man's instinctual impulse to hate, hurt, and kill is constantly aggravated and tested. As W.H. Frohock suggests, man, as described by Steinbeck, becomes the victim of destiny and, consequently, must react violently. Violence becomes a part of his human condition and response to these hostile forces of destiny.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Steinbeck clearly shows that it still is man who determines and who is responsible for the release of these polar instincts which cause him to exhibit animalistic or humanistic behavior.

Sir Henry Morgan in Cup of Gold is not born a violent, angry individual. He becomes that kind of person by his own choosing and conditioning. He does not have to leave home to become a buccaneer; he chooses to do so. His aggressive drive may have stimulated a feeling of restlessness within his bones, but Henry Morgan himself makes the decision to leave parents and friends to become a pirate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W.M. Frohock, The Novel of Violence in America, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>John Steinbeck, Cup of Gold, p. 34.



Henry's abrupt and aggressive leaving home only marks the beginning of an evolutionary development of anger and violence. As an indentured servant of plantation owner, James Flower, Henry begins his apprenticeship in sadistic violence by observing every hanging of a slave. The crime committed is not important. What is important is that the other slaves become more afraid of Flower and Morgan because of the hangings. Henry Morgan is not cruel; he is "merciless." He is operating a human factory. He has no time to ". . . think of being kind to a sprocket or a flywheel"; consequently, he has no time or conscience to ". . . think of pampering his slaves."<sup>3</sup> Even the devoted slave girl whom Henry owns while he is still an indentured servant finds no place in his cold, hostile heart. He has had the privilege of enjoying her body whenever he desired; what more does he want of her?<sup>4</sup> Later, Sir Henry's fellow pirates also are treated as mere slaves. In Panama, when his heart and mind become infected with suspicion, Sir Henry, in ruthless violence, turns on his two best friends, Cockney and Coeur de Gris, and heartlessly shoots them.<sup>5</sup> On his death bed, however, angry and violent Sir Henry Morgan himself becomes the victim of violence--passive violence in the form of bleeding by a physician.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 84.    <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 96.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 201, 208.



Steinbeck's wholesale sadism of man in Cup of Gold changes to sacrificial slaughtering in To a God Unknown. Sir Henry Morgan sought happiness by violently dominating the world; Joseph Wayne seeks happiness by primitive renunciation. Joseph Wayne sacrifices himself to the world which Sir Henry scorned as a ". . . blind, doddering worm."<sup>6</sup>

Man's violence in To a God Unknown has a definitely mystical quality. Both Joseph Wayne and the old man near the beach sacrifice life for the sake of life. "Life must be sacrificed to life," states Maxwell Geismar, "and God, the unknown God of Nature. . . as blood thirsty as his creation. . ." <sup>7</sup> receives the sacrifice as adequate. In this manner, Steinbeck suggests that man, especially primitive man, does not engage in violence without a purpose, concrete or mystical. Man is either revolting against the pressures of a cruel, mechanistic society or searching for a meaning in life. Even Sir Henry Morgan, in Cup of Gold, was searching for an answer; but he approached it from the wrong direction. He left no room for a mystical element of some type to assist him in his search. Sir Henry Morgan's violence was

<sup>6</sup>Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars, p. 248.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 250.



an angry, sadistic violence; Joseph Wayne's and the old man's are merely sacrificial violences, not at all angry or sadistic. The old man kills some animal every day at sundown because this supplies some emotional need.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes he thinks that he does it only as ". . . a symbol of the sun's death," but then he realizes that

. . . it does not help the sun. But it is for me. In a moment, I am the sun. . . I, through the beast, am the sun. I burn in the death. . . . Some time it will be perfect. The sky will be right. The sea will be right. My life will reach a calm level place.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Wayne has suffered much anguish and brutality from cruel nature. The drought years have cost him his wife and child, his brothers and sisters, and his cattle. Finally, Joe thinks about the old man's sacrifices. As a result, Joseph kills a calf, but no rain comes.<sup>10</sup> In defeat, he decides to flee the country, but his horse, his last possession, runs away. Joseph Wayne has struggled hard, but nature has won. Consequently, he finally resorts to violence in an attempt to conquer nature; he climbs on a rock and commits suicide by cutting his wrists.<sup>11</sup> The result of this sacrificial violence is that nature finally gives rain to the dry, thirsty land. Thus, Joseph Wayne symbolizes man

<sup>8</sup>John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 242-43.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 244.



struggling with a hostile, external force and finally resorting to violence in order to conquer this force. His suicide is not a defeat; it is a victory.

In the same manner, Jim Nolan, in In Dubious Battle, also resorts to violence in his attempt to dominate or, at least, to overcome the hostile forces of society. The difference between these two men, however, is the fact that Joseph Wayne is able to refrain from violence for many years. He suffers pain and loses much, but he does not retaliate until he has lost all, including his last horse and the small stream in the grove. Jim Nolan, on the other hand, arrives at his conclusion through observation and reason, without the expense of time and the suffering of pain. Thus, Jim begins and ends his struggle with hostile and inhumane society by the use of violence--sometimes horrible violence.

The chief protagonists in In Dubious Battle are Mac and Jim. They are angry, violent men who constantly use violence in their attempts to convert other unexperienced and undisciplined men to the way of violence. Mac and Jim are convinced that society is cruel and hostile and that the only way for the victimized man to win this battle is to fight. Society--the Grower's Association in Torgas Valley--has cut the price of wages until it is almost impossible to feed and clothe oneself.<sup>12</sup> There is only one way out for

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<sup>12</sup>John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 30.



these poor people: Mac and Jim must go to Torgas Valley and organize a strike--a violent strike!

Mac's and Jim's use of violence in Torgas Valley begins passively and slowly amplifies until it becomes ghastly, bloody violence.<sup>13</sup> Superficially, Mac's delivery of Lisa's baby<sup>14</sup> on the bank of a river seems merely to be a good deed, but it actually is a passive form of violence, as Maxwell Geismar suggests,<sup>15</sup> and serves as an effective opportunity to implant the germ of social revolt and violence within the minds of these apple pickers. Mac has risked the life of both the mother and the child, but his intuitive obstetrics is a salient success for both the mother and baby and the cause of violence.

The beginning of the strike itself also is a passive form of violence. None of the strikers is permitted to carry a gun, and no violent activities are immediately planned. The apple pickers only want to bargain with the landowners and, thus, keep from being reduced to the terrifying concept of cheap labor.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Frohock, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>14</sup>In Dubious Battle, pp. 59-61.

<sup>15</sup>Geismar, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 262.



Their leaders, Mac and Jim, however, have ulterior motives which involve much violence and fighting. At certain times, turbulence and fighting become the most important thing for these protagonists. They have to "make 'em mad" and keep them that way, or they will not have any cause to fight for.<sup>17</sup> Mac and Jim are developing a tumultuous thing--hate and revenge--in the minds of these people; consequently, continual bluster of some sort must be maintained at all times. Thus,

. . . the end is never very different in its nature from the means. Damn it . . . you can only build a violent thing with violence.

. . . All great things have violent beginnings.<sup>18</sup>

When the vigilantees shoot the "misshapen, gnome-like" Joy in cold-blood, Mac and Jim are ready for intensified violence.<sup>19</sup> This incident with all its horrible bloodiness is exactly the type of thing they need to engage the strikers in active violence with this cruel world of cheating landowners and ambushing viligantees. Joy's animal-like death scene itself also contributes to this end:

Joy had stopped, his eyes wide. His mouth flew open and a jet of blood rolled down his chin, and down his shirt; his eyes ranged wildly over the crowd of men. He fell on his face and clawed outward with his fingers. . .

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<sup>17</sup>In Dubious Battle, p. 159.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 162.



the squirming figure on the ground. . . . The line of strikers stood still, with strange, dreaming faces. Joy lifted himself up with his arms, like a lizard, and then dropped again.<sup>20</sup>

London, the assistant-leader figure of the strikers, stoops to wipe away the bloody dirt from the face of Joy, but Mac says, "Don't do that, London. Leave it that way, just the way it is."<sup>21</sup> Mac knows that taking Joy's body, with all the blood and dirt of the violence of the vigilantes on it, will more effectively arouse the emotions of the strikers. Violence is the best creator of violence--a violence which will be greater and worse than its creator.

The bloody, blustering death of Joy marks the beginning of angry, hateful, and retaliatory violence of the strikers. When scabs are imported by the landowners to pick fruit, the strikers attack the scabs. At one place, in a matter of moments, ten scabs are brutally beaten and ". . . their faces kicked shapeless."<sup>22</sup> When the owners burn the barn of the man on whose land the strikers are camped, Sam sets fire to the house of one of the largest fruit growers in the country<sup>23</sup> and kicks out the brains of another.<sup>24</sup> When a high school boy with a 30-30 Winchester carbine is caught snooping around

<sup>20</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 287.



the stikers' camp, Mac, in the presence of Jim and London, beats the boy with a calm, calculated manner:

"I want a billboard," said Mac, "not a corpse. All right, kid. I guess you're for it." . . . Mac took him firmly by the shoulder. His right fist worked in quick, short hammer blows, one after another. The nose cracked flat, the other eye closed, and the dark bruises formed on the cheeks. . . . short, precise strokes. . . . He wiped his bloody fist on the boy's leather jacket. . . . "You'll show up pretty in high school. Now shut up your bawling. Tell the kids in town what's waitin' for 'em."<sup>25</sup>

The violence of the landowners is always countered by even greater and worse violence on the part of the strikers. The landowners are hostile and violent, but the strikers are even more violent in their retaliatory actions. The landowners wound and kill several strikers, but the strikers leave human billboards as testimony of their potential reprisal.

When the violent instincts in the strikers seem to wane, Jim, the inspirational leader of the entire struggle, offers to "pull off the bandage" over the gunshot wound on his shoulder and "get a flow of blood."<sup>26</sup> This form of arousing the emotions is not necessary, however, because in a few minutes, a shotgun blast completely destroys Jim's face.<sup>27</sup> There is more than sufficient blood to stir up the violent instincts in the strikers. However, just to

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp.272-73. <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 341. <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.342.



make sure, Mac props the body against a corner post on the platform in the center of the camp and tells the crowd quiveringly: "This guy didn't want nothing for himself-- . . . Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself--" <sup>28</sup> During all this violence by the landowners, vigilantees, and apple pickers, it is also significant that Steinbeck introduces the nonviolent character of Doc Burton into this dubious battle. Doc assists the strikers' cause, to a certain extent, by helping them maintain proper health and sanitation standards in their camp. On the other hand, Doc never acts or reacts violently to anyone. He merely does his job the best way he knows how. He does not take sides in the issue because, as he tells Mac, "I want to see the whole picture--as nearly as I can." When Mac tells Doc that revolution and communism will cure all social injustice, Doc agrees but then adds, ". . . disinfection and prophylaxis will prevent the others." <sup>29</sup>

Thus, Steinbeck, in In Dubious Battle, has used violence, and some nonviolence, to portray rather dramatically the conflict and struggle within man. Protagonists Mac and Jim, two extremely angry and violent men, definitely assist the destructive instinct in man by cleverly manipulating

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-44.



people and events so that hate and violence seems to be the most natural reaction. Society is cruel and violent, but Mac and Jim make certain that man will see only this aspect of society. If blood is needed to insure violent reactions, blood will be shed at any cost. At times the strikers' erotic instincts seem to immerge, and the strikers begin to fear violence. Mac and Jim, however, are governed entirely by their destructive instincts and fear nothing, unless it is love and nonviolence. Even when Doc Burton quietly and willingly offers his services to the strikers, Mac and Jim seem to be somewhat afraid of Doc's nonviolent attitude. Doc's nonviolence might neutralize the very emotions and instincts which Mac and Jim cleverly are arousing. Thus, Mac and Jim keep Doc busy with the numerous health and sanitation problems of the camp; they want his medical services but not his attitude of nonviolence. Mac imperiously tells Doc,

Gurley We've a job to do. We've got no time to mess around with high-falutin ideas.

. . .if you talked to other people that way, we'd have to kick you out.<sup>30</sup>

Oafish, savage, poetic, and moronic Lennie is the chief protagonist of the violence in Of Mice and Men. This

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 147.



infantile and mystic character is somewhat similar to Johnny Bear in The Long Valley and the weird old man in To a God Unknown.<sup>31</sup> Lennie is, in fact, the embodiment of the characteristics of both of these violent mystics, only in a completely different way. Lennie does not injure others by mimic exposure of people's secrets for a few swallows of whiskey;<sup>32</sup> neither does he kill animals for a sacrifice to nature.<sup>33</sup> Lennie's violence is expressed by his hands killing animals while his mind is totally unaware of the violence in process. Lennie, it could be said, is two Lennies in one body. The one is the infantile and mystical Lennie in the mind; the other is the semi-sadistic Lennie in the extraordinarily strong hands.

Lennie's mind loves animals, but his violent, instinct-controlled hands cannot resist squeezing the animals until they are dead.<sup>34</sup> In his mind, Lennie also loves people; however, his hands cannot passively hang by his side when Curley brutally slugs him in the face until his face is "covered with blood." Lennie's hand grabs Curley's swinging

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<sup>31</sup>Geismar, op. cit., p. 257.

<sup>32</sup>John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, pp. 166-67.

<sup>33</sup>To a God Unknown, pp. 200-01.

<sup>34</sup>John Steinbeck, The Steinbeck Pocket Book, pp. 92-104.



fist and ragingly crushes almost every bone in it.<sup>35</sup> When Curley's wife seductively takes "Lennie's hand and put[s] it on her head," but then screams when he musses up her hair a bit, Lennie's hands again panic and react violently:

. . . Lennie's fingers closed on her hair and hung on. "Let go," she cried. "You let go!"

Lennie was in a panic. His face was contorted. She screamed then, and Lennie's other hand closed over her mouth and nose. "Please don't," he begged. "Oh! Please don't do that. . . ."

. . . Then Lennie grew angry. "Now don't," he said. I don't want you to yell. . . . And she continued to struggle . . . he took her then, and he was angry with her. "Don't you go yellin'," he said and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck.<sup>36</sup>

Society's violence is also observed in Of Mice and Men. Society has laws which not only forbid a person's murdering someone but also promises that every murderer must pay for his deed, usually with his own life. Sometimes the people of the society decide to carry out the punishment of the law themselves. The men on the ranch where George and Lennie are working pass the same judgment when Lennie murders Curley's wife. George, close friend of infantile but violent Lennie, however, hurries and finds Lennie on the bank of the Salinas River. Torn between his love for Lennie and his respect for society, George finally realizes that violence and death is the inevitable fate of Lennie:

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-46.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 170.



. . . George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger. The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again. Lennie jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering.<sup>37</sup>

Pepe', a nineteen-year-old boy in "Flight" who is forced to assume the responsibilities of manhood suddenly, experiences an inevitable fate of violence and death somewhat similar to Lennie's. Like Lennie, Pepe' has impulsively committed murder and, consequently, flees in an attempt to avoid the punishment of his society. Pepe', too, loses the struggle and must pay the punishment with his life.

The main difference between Lennie and Pepe', however, is the way each faces his fate. Lennie is unawaringly shot in the back of his head by his best friend; Pepe' stoically faces his enemy and waits for his execution. The pursuers of Pepe' have killed his horse<sup>38</sup> and have seriously wounded his arm.<sup>39</sup> Gangrene threatens to kill Pepe' slowly, but he chooses to confront his fate directly and calmly like a man. Pepe', in fact, chooses the type of violence and death which is to be his fate and destiny.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>38</sup>The Long Valley, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 64.



Kino, in The Pearl, also attempts to escape the punishment of society after he accidentally has killed a man in the dark.<sup>40</sup> Even though Kino has killed his attacker in self-defense, cruel and cold society demands his life. Kino himself still is responsible for his deed of violence. Society--the pearl buyers and the doctor--has been hostile to Kino from the day that he found the large pearl; nevertheless, society does not excuse or understand Kino's impulsive act of violence. Society has broken Kino's canoe and burned his house,<sup>41</sup> but society will not excuse or pardon his violence in return.

Kino, his wife Juana, and baby boy Coyotito quietly flee but the trackers pursue them as the trackers pursued Pepé in "Flight." Violence--destructive violence--seems to be the only solution. So Kino hides his wife and baby in a cave and risks his own life to destroy the aggressors. The closer Kino gets to the camp of the three trackers, the colder and more violent becomes his anger and hate toward them.<sup>42</sup> Finally, with all the power within him, Kino violently attacks his would-be executioners:

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<sup>40</sup>John Steinbeck, The Pearl, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>42</sup>Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns, p. 152.



. . . The great knife swung and crunched hollowly. It bit through neck and deep into chest, and Kino was a terrible machine now. He grasped the rifle even as he wrenched free his knife. His strength and his movement and his speed were a machine. He whirled and struck the head of the seated man like a melon. The third man scabbled away like a crab . . . But Kino had become as cold and deadly as steel. Deliberately he threw the lever of the rifle, and then he raised the gun and aimed deliberately and fired. He saw his enemy tumble backward into the pool, and Kino strode to the water. In the moonlight he could see the frantic frightened eyes, and Kino aimed and fired between the eyes.<sup>43</sup>

For a moment, Kino relaxes and thinks that he has conquered unjust violence with violence. Then he hears ". . . the keening, moaning, rising hysterical cry . . . the cry of death"<sup>44</sup> of his baby Coyotito in the case with his wife.

Kino basically was a good man, governed by his erotic impulses; but society, with its jealousy, coldness and violence, had caused Kino to lose control of his destructive impulses. Kino had not wanted to kill; he had not intended to kill. The first time he had killed in self-defense; the second time he had killed for the defense of his family. He had found a pearl of great worth but he lost a pearl of greater worth--his baby boy Coyotito.<sup>45</sup>

Tom Joad and Jim Casy become the chief protagonists for Steinbeck's philosophical use of violence and nonviolence in The Grapes of Wrath. They become, in fact, symbols of

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<sup>43</sup>The Pearl, pp. 113-14.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 117.



two attitudes and approaches to life and its problems. They represent the two responses of man to his inner conflicts and struggles. They become, in essence, preachers of the way of hate, or violence, and the way of love, or nonviolence.

Tom Joad has just been released from the penitentiary where he served a four-year-prison sentence for murder. He tells his old friend Jim Casy,

I killed a guy in a fight. We was drunk at a dance. He got a knife in me, an' I killed him with a shovel that was layin' there. Knocked his head plumb to squash.<sup>46</sup>

After four years in prison, Tom still is not sorry for his violent deed. "I'd do what I done--again," says Tom.<sup>47</sup>

Tom attempts to conform to life and its demands as his family is doing, but he finds it very difficult to be passive and nonviolent. He feels much more comfortable and secure with a crank or a wrench by his side. With much pleading and attention from Ma, Tom does, however, try to control his anxiety and temper.

Tom is successful in maintaining his self-control until an incident occurs in Hooverville. A contractor stops and offers the men a job. When a friend of Tom asks the contractor what wages he is paying, the contractor becomes angry and remarks, "You telling me how to run my own

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<sup>46</sup>John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup>Loc. cit.



business?" Floyd, the friend of Tom, replies, "'F we're workin' for you, it's our business too."<sup>48</sup> This back-talk angers the contractor until he complains to the deputy whom he has brought along, and states that Floyd is "talkin' red, agitating trouble."<sup>49</sup> This is reason enough for the deputy. The deputy arrests Floyd on a phony charge of burglary of some car lot. As the deputy forces Floyd into the car, Floyd spins around, swings vehemently, and smashes his fist into the deputy's face. In the same motion, Floyd jumps away and runs down the line of tents. Tom cannot contain his emotions at this point, so he trips the deputy, causing him to fall to the ground and roll a distance. Once again, Tom has acted in a violent manner, but, at least, this time he did not kill.<sup>50</sup>

Jim Casy, who is travelling with the Joad family, enters the scene of activities at this point. He watches the deputy reach for his gun and fire at Floyd. He hears a woman in front of a tent scream as the bullet tears off the knuckles of her hand. At this instant, Reverend Casy can contain himself no longer. He steps forward and, with all the violence he possesses, kicks the deputy in the neck. Casy then quietly steps back and silently watches the heavy man "crumple into unconsciousness."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>51</sup>Loc. cit.



Action of this type is most unusual for Jim Casy. He has left his vocation as a minister but he had not stopped preaching his social gospel based on love and nonviolence.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, he has acted most violently and that in the very presence of his disciple. Casy has preached nonviolence to Tom for many days, but he seems to have destroyed all of its potential in one hard kick.

The ruffianism over, Casy, as a security measure for Tom and, perhaps, as a public repentance for his own impassioned deed, tells Tom to "go down in the villas an' wait;" and he himself will quietly accept the blame for all the violence.<sup>53</sup> This Casy does in a most heroic and vicarious manner.

Casy's vicariously taking the blame for Tom apparently convinces Tom that the way of nonviolence is better than violence. Tom decides to do all he can for the cause of labor, but to do it without brute force. Tom's positive nonresistance, however, is put to a severe test when he observes his teacher of nonresistance brutally beaten to death at a labor strike:

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<sup>52</sup>Frederic I. Carpenter, American Literature and the Dream, p. 169.

<sup>53</sup>The Grapes of Wrath, p. 362.



The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crashed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone, and Casy fell sideways out of the light. . . . The flashlight beam dropped, searched and found Casy's crushed head.<sup>54</sup>

Once again, Tom reacts impetuously; he kills the man who killed Casy. In fact, Tom's destructive impulse goes completely berserk, and he sinks three more blows after his victim has fallen. In return, however, Tom's face is badly torn by a club from another strikebreaker:

. . . He felt his numb face and nose. The nose was crushed, and a trickle of blood dripped from his chin. He lay still on his stomach until his mind came back. . . . He bathed his face in the cool water, tore off the tail of his blue shirt and dipped it and held it against his torn cheek and nose. The water stung and burned.<sup>55</sup>

Tom's face soon heals and so does his destructive impulse. His new philosophy of love and nonviolence becomes his final answer to the conflicts and struggles within. Thus, Steinbeck suggests at the end of this novel, that the non-violent approach to life and its problems is the more positive one:

. . . and this you can know--fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself.<sup>56</sup>

In East of Eden, Steinbeck seems to ignore the violence of society and to concentrate entirely on the violence and nonviolence in man. He seems to suggest that society is no

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 527. <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 528. <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 205.



more violent or nonviolent than its individual members; therefore, the instinctual response of each individual member to his inner conflicts and struggles is the matter of greatest concern. Man is still a dualistic creature with powerful--very powerful--erotic and destructive instincts. His control and use of these instinctual drives determines his fate or destiny in society.

Charles and Adam Trask are symbolic of the Biblical Cain and Abel; however, Steinbeck still gives each of them the freedom of will to choose to do good or to do evil, to love or to hate. As their symbolic names suggest, however, Charles is the violent aggressor and Adam, the nonviolent protector. When Samuel, their father, shows more favor to Adam's gift of a stray mongrel pup than to Charles' gift of an expensive pearl-handled knife, Charles' destructive impulses becomes completely uncontrollable. In turn, Charles attacks his brother Adam:

. . . One fist lanced delicately to get the range, and then the bitter-frozen work--a hard blow in the stomach . . . then four punches to the head. Adam felt the bone and gristle of his nose crunch. . . . Charles drove at his heart.

. . . square fists whipping nausea into his stomach . . . to force his legs apart. And he felt the knee come up, past his knees, scraping his thighs, until it crashed against his testicles and flashing white pain ripped and echoed through his body. . . . He bent over and vomited, while the cold killing went on.

. . . the punches on temples, cheeks, eyes. . . . his lip split and tatter over his teeth. . . The punching



continued eternally. He could hear his brother panting with the quick explosive breath of a sledgehammer man . . . could see his brother through the tear-watered blood that flowed from his eyes.<sup>57</sup>

Charles leaves his unconscious brother but later returns with a hatchet to kill him. When he cannot find Adam, disgustedly he throws the hatchet "far off into the field."<sup>58</sup>

After they have grown to manhood, Charles and Adam quarrel occasionally during the intervals that they live together; however, neither loses complete control of his destructive impulse and genuinely attempts to harm the other. Charles, however, has not mastered his inner feelings of conflict. He regularly visits the whorehouse to give vent to his aggressive drive. Furthermore, when Adam's wife, Cathy tricks Adam into taking her opium sleeping medicine and, then, offers herself to Charles for the night, Charles again gives vent to his destructive instinct. As he throws back the covers of his bed to receive her, Charles laughs and says, "The poor bastard."<sup>59</sup>

The violence of this act by Charles and Cathy--both Cain symbols of sin and aggression--may seem somewhat passive at first; however, actually it is most direct and destructive. Cathy becomes pregnant, and almost kills herself in a crude

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<sup>57</sup>John Steinbeck, East of Eden, pp. 25-26.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 110.



attempt to perform an abortion.<sup>60</sup> Finally, she bears twin boys from this act of violence: Caleb and Aaron. Caleb and Aaron, another symbolic Cain and Abel, also possess the freedom to choose which instinctive drive will find expression in each of their lives. Caleb--or Cain--is the angry, jealous boy. Aaron--or Abel--is the nonviolent boy who does what he can to avoid a fight with his brother.<sup>61</sup> When they grow older, Caleb develops "a passionate love for his father and a wish to protect him and to make it up to him for the things he had suffered." Aaron's "passions took a religious turn."<sup>62</sup> Caleb, like his uncle Charles, expels his aggressive drive by visits to the brothels of the town, but Aaron encourages his love impulse by preparing to enter the ministry. Caleb works hard and offers his father a gift of fifteen thousand dollars; Aaron can only offer his good life of dedication to the ministry. Adam rejects Caleb's gift and says, ". . . If you want to give me a present--give me a good life. That would be something I could value."<sup>63</sup> In fiery anger and revenge, Caleb takes his brother Aaron to see their real mother, owner of a whorehouse with

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 298-99.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 497-80.



most sadistic standards. Caleb wants to destroy his brother at any cost, and he does. Aaron impulsively leaves town, joins the Army, and is killed in battle. Upon receiving the news of Aaron's death, Adam has a stroke and slowly dies, also. Caleb has acted violently, so violently that he has destroyed both his brother and his father.

The other and most important protagonist of violence in East of Eden is Cathy Ames Trask. Through her, Steinbeck portrays most vividly that the wages of violence is death--violent death. Each of Cathy's demonic actions brings her nearer to her fate and destiny--death. She, too, is born with the freedom to choose either to do good or to do evil. She chooses to do evil; she chose to do evil while still a child.

When only ten years old, Cathy Ames seduced some boys to tie her in order to have an affair with her. When her mother discovers them about to begin the act, young Cathy decides that a lie is the best protective device for the moment.<sup>64</sup> This lie, however, is only a passive beginning of her life of violence and animalistic behavior--behavior which results from giving unmitigated expression to a most powerful, destructive instinct. From that day in the barn, Cathy's erotic instinct to be good and to do

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp.67-68.



good is forever destroyed. Never again does she exhibit any good or humanistic behavior.

At the age of fourteen, she begins an affair with her Latin teacher which ends in his suicide.<sup>65</sup> When she is sixteen, Cathy meticulously carries out a plan to destroy her own family: even though her bones are not found with her parents' bones in the ashes of their burned house, Cathy leaves adequate evidence to indicate that she has been murdered by the villain who robbed and murdered her parents and then set fire to the house.<sup>66</sup>

Cathy's successful use of trickery and violence in the murder and robbery of her parents apparently causes her to feel that she is omnipotent. She seems to think that no one is capable of outsmarting her. As a private prostitute for whoremaster Edwards, Cathy attempts to control Edwards. She changes the lock on the front door of her house. When she does admit him, she cuts his face severely with a broken champagne glass.<sup>67</sup> This is too much for calm Mr. Edwards. He has given Cathy a house, money, and champagne; and he has no intention of accepting her impetuosity. He plans to whip her and move her from town to town until she is of no use to anyone. Then he will throw her out and let her face

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 70. <sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp.77-78. <sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp.84-85.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 87. <sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 119. <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 176.



the local police. As he plans this revenge, however, Edwards himself loses control of his destructive instinct. He takes Cathy out in the country and barbarously beats her almost to death. The impulse to kill has complete control of his hands:

. . . After two slashes the quirt was not enough. He dropped it on the ground and used his fists. His breathing came out in squeaking whines.

. . . she tried to run. He leaped at her and brought her down, and by then his fists were not enough. His hand found a stone on the ground and his cold control was burst through with a red roaring wave.<sup>68</sup>

Cathy's savage beating by Mr. Edwards does not put fear in her: instead, it seems to implant deeper within her a feeling of hate, revenge, and vehemence toward everyone, especially men. When Adam kindly nurses her to health and then marries her, Cathy repays him by putting him in an opium sleep and having an affair with his twin brother, Charles.<sup>69</sup> When the twins--Caleb and Aaron--are born from this aggressive act and Cathy is feeling better, she tells Adam to throw the babies in the well because she is leaving. Adam attempts to talk her out of leaving, but Cathy coldly and sadistically shoots Adam in the shoulder and walks out on him.<sup>70</sup>

As a professional whore in Salinas, Cathy--then called Kate--becomes more and more animalistic, more and more sadistic. The erotic instinct has no place in her; her most

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 87. <sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 110. <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 178.



powerful and developed ruinous instinct governs all her actions. She has a list of regular customers who willingly pay her ten dollars, instead of two dollars as the other girls charge. Kate is cognizant that". . .they can't go to anybody else. Nobody else is any good for them. . . Look at the heelmarks on the groin--very pretty. And the little cuts that bleed for a long time."<sup>71</sup>

When Faye, owner of the whorehouse accepts Kate as her own daughter and wills everything to her, Kate forces Faye to let her make their entire whoring business very devilish. Kate imperiously tells Faye,

"Flight. . . Mother dear, that's the way this whole house is going to be. The price will be twenty dollars, and we'll make the bastards take a bath. We'll catch the blood on white silk handkerchiefs--Mother dear--blood from the little knotted whips."<sup>72</sup>

Then, Kate slowly, meticulously, and carefully carries out a plan to poison Faye with tincture of nux vomica in her own glass and swallows a small bottle of Cascara Sagrada so that she too becomes intensely ill. Both Faye, and Kate vomit and have diarrhea and spasms; however, Kate soon recovers. Faye, on the other hand, begins to bleed internally and becomes very weak. Under the pretense of giving her medicine, Kate completes her violence against Faye by giving

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 208-09.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 219-22.



her a fatal dosage of the poison. The doctor, however, says that Faye died of botulism.<sup>73</sup>

Kate continues her life of malicious violence until she comes face-to-face with her sons, Caleb and Aaron. Caleb denies having inherited any of her animalistic characteristics; and Aaron, who resembles her physically, rejects her by planning to enter the ministry. Kate's animalistic spirit governed by her destructive instincts begins to decay and to give way to fear. Then fear, like violence, intensifies itself until Kate is suspicious of everyone. She no longer is omnipotent; rather, she feels like Pepe in "Flight" and Kino in The Pearl, who attempted to flee from the punishment of society. Like Pepe and Kino, Kate cannot escape her inevitable fate--death. She has lived by violence--sadistic violence--and must eventually die by violence. So Kate commits suicide by taking the capsule of poison which she has carried on a chain around her neck for some time, probably since the day she poisoned Faye.

Kate-Cathy Ames Trask--began her life of anger, hate, and violence when she permitted her destructive instinct to cause her to tell a defensive lie at age ten; and she ends her life of violence by turning all the anger and hate of her death instinct on herself. Her suicide is not an act

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 219-22.



of self-sympathy; it is an act of self-destructive violence. Thus, Steinbeck uses her to symbolize the ultimate fate of man when he is unable to make peace with his inner conflicts and battles.

If you obey my commands, you will continue  
in my love. . . . This is my commandment to you,  
to love one another as I have loved you. No  
one has greater love than this--that a man lay  
down his life for his friends.

—John 15:10, 12, 13

John Steinbeck, recognizes the existence of another aspect in man. He realizes that man is more than a mere animal; even though he tends to exhibit animalistic behavior. He realizes that man also possesses an instinct of love and a soul--both which seek to promote positive responses by the individual and, as a result, to give real meaning and purpose to his life. Consequently, Steinbeck's characters in his more important novels search for meaning in life by returning to religion and religious symbols.

Mr. Henry Morgan, in *Log of Gold*, completely ignores his inner searching for a deeper meaning in life. His abrupt and aggressive leaving home to become a pirate seems to give full outlet to his primitive, destructive instincts, at the expense of completely destroying his intellectual propensities. Consequently, Mr. Henry ignores the religious aspect of life until he faces death at the end of the novel.



## CHAPTER III

### MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING:

#### RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

If you obey my commands, you will continue in my love . . . This is my commandment to you, to love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this--that a man lay down his life for his friends.

--John 15:10, 12, 13

John Steinbeck, recognizes the existence of another aspect in man. He realizes that man is more than a mere animal, even though he tends to exhibit animalistic behavior. He realizes that man also possesses an instinct of love and a soul--both which seek to promote positive responses by the individual and, as a result, to give real meaning and purpose to his life. Consequently, Steinbeck's characters in his more important novels search for meaning in life by recourse to religion and religious symbols.

Sir Henry Morgan, in Cup of Gold, completely ignores his inner yearning for a deeper meaning in life. His abrupt and aggressive leaving home to become a pirate seems to give full release to his primitive, destructive instincts, at the expense of completely destroying his antithetical propensities. Consequently, Sir Henry ignores the religious aspect of life until he faces death at the end of the novel.



In his obsession, he has been pursuing a quest for an allegorical Holy Grail,<sup>1</sup> without any awareness of the positive potential of such a quest. He has been so intent on attaining his own selfish, purely physical goals that he has not permitted himself to think about anything spiritual.

Even on his death bed, Sir Henry Morgan has no real concern for his soul. On this earth he has never been interested in anything religious, and he does not want to bother himself with such superfluties when dying. The Vicar, whom his religious wife Elizabeth has called, pleads with Sir Henry to pray and to repent of his sins. Under the transitory influence of his religious wife and the Vicar as well as of his thoughts of his own childhood, Sir Henry is able to pray but not to repent:

. . . what are my sins, then? . . . I remember only the most pleasant and the most painful among them. Somehow I do not wish to repent the pleasant ones. It would be like breaking faith with them; they were charming. And the painful sins carried atonement with them like concealed knives. How may I repent, sir? I might go over my whole life, naming and repenting every act from the shattering of my first teething ring to my last visit to a brothel. I might repent everything I could remember, but if I forgot one single sin, the whole process would be wasted.<sup>2</sup>

After these words, Sir Henry immediately enters the dark grotto of death and is brought face-to-face with each of the

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>John Steinbeck, Cup of Gold, p. 264.



deeds and the thoughts of his life. These "faceless little creatures" crowd near Sir Henry and harshly cry, "Why did you do me? . . . Why did you think me?"<sup>3</sup>

Thus Buccaneer Henry Morgan typifies the natural man who lives an empty life but who is too preoccupied to wonder why. Sir Henry's preoccupation with himself and his physical goals demolishes the inherent inclinations of his soul and of his erotic instinct to find a deeper meaning in life, a spiritual significance in existing as a human being. This total eradication of the religious hardens Sir Henry's volition to the extent that he cannot repent of his sins on his death bed. There is no reason to believe that Henry does not desire to repent; he simply cannot repent. He has lost his freedom of the will and his soul as the result of his intentional repudiation of this aspect of his life during the many years before his day of judgment.

Joseph Wayne, in To a God Unknown, fares much better with his soul. Joseph, too, is preoccupied; however, he is engrossed with a mysterious governing power in the universe, not with himself or his physical aspirations. Joseph's constant working to develop a successful and prosperous farm is important in his life only as it relates to his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 267.



obsession with his religious rituals. Joseph is neither a Christian like his brother Burton, nor a sinner like his brother Thomas; rather, he is a mystic with his own religion and his own house of worship. He does not intentionally exclude others from his religious faith, but others simply do not desire to affiliate themselves with his faith.

Joseph Wayne's mysticism is a combination of druidism and the fecundity of the earth. Joseph's father's spirit transmigrates from Vermont to a lone oak tree on Joseph's ranch in California.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Joseph develops an uncontrollable passion for fertility:

. . . All things about him, the soil, the cattle, and the people were fertile, and Joseph was the source, the root of their fertility; his was the motivating lust. He willed that all things about him must grow, grow quickly, conceive and multiply. The hopeless sin was barrenness, a sin intolerable and unforgiveable.<sup>5</sup>

Together these two sectors of his soul give tremendous support and meaning to Joseph's life as well as cause him to become alienated from his own family. Only Elizabeth, his wife; Juanito, the paisano who voluntarily becomes his vaquero; and the old man near the sea really understand Joseph and his religious faith.

Joseph Wayne, like the Joseph of the Old Testament, gradually becomes the object of ridicule and scorn of his

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<sup>4</sup>John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 30. Ibid., pp. 25 ff. Ibid., pp. 27-30.



brothers. Joseph is the favored son and receives a coat of many colors in the form of his father's blessing. Immediately, he senses jealousy in the hearts of his brothers, They will be glad "when he has gone."<sup>6</sup> Not long after his departure, his brothers realize that a famine is nearing; and they are forced to go to Joseph and live off of his generosity and kindness.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Joseph succeeds in getting his father (in spirit form) to come to live with him in Egypt (California).

With the entire family on his ranch, Joseph Wayne then begins his reign as patriarch of the group, similar to Abraham of the Old Testament:

... he was the father of the farm. As he watched the community of cabins spring up on the land, as he looked down into the cradle of the first-born--Thomas' new child--as he notched the ears of the first young calves, he felt the joy that Abraham must have felt when the huge promise bore fruit, when his tribesmen and his goats began to increase. ... This place was not four homesteads, it was one, and he was the father.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after beginning his rule as a symbolic Abraham, however, Joseph recognizes the need for his having a wife. His intensifying "passion for fertility" is not in proper perspective unless he himself is able to contribute to this goal. Consequently, Joseph marries Elizabeth McGreggor, teacher and daughter of a Monterey philosopher. It is at

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 4. <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 25 ff. <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.



their wedding ceremony, however, that Joseph becomes another symbolic Biblical character--Christ.

During their wedding in a small Protestant church in Monterey, Elizabeth seems to feel insecure. She wants to pray, but there is no crucifix of Christ in the church. As she searchingly looks around for a Christ image, she suddenly sees this image superimposed upon Joseph. As last she can pray. Only after she and Joseph are outside the church does Elizabeth fully realize that ". . . the Christ face was still the face of Joseph." She had been praying to her own husband.<sup>9</sup>

Juanito, another individual who genuinely understands mystical and somewhat strange Joseph, also sees in Joseph's face the Christ image. Near the end of the novel, he sees in the face of Joseph "the crucified Christ hanging on his cross, dead, and stained with blood."<sup>10</sup> Joseph is not dead at the time of this momentary transfiguration in the presence of Juanito; however, it is this image of Christ which Joseph seems to symbolize at the end of the novel when he is sacrificed vicariously for mankind--the families of the Nuestra Senora Valley.<sup>11</sup>

It is this same paisano, Juanito, in whom Joseph hesitantly but earnestly confides at the beginning of the novel:

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp.65=66. <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 229. <sup>11</sup>Lisca, op.cit.,p.46.



. . . My father is in that tree. My father is that tree! It is silly, but I want to believe it. Can you talk to me a little Juanito? You were born here. Since I have come, since the first day, I have known that this land is full of ghosts. . . . No, that isn't right. Ghosts are weak shadows of reality. What lives here is more real than we are. We are like ghosts of its reality.  
 . . . 12

Juanito comprehends what Joseph is saying. Juanito's Indian mother taught him that very thing when he was a child. She even explained that the ". . . earth is our mother, and how everything that lives has life from the mother and goes back into the mother."<sup>13</sup>

It is this type of mystical relationship with Mother Earth that rapidly develops into an important philosophical underpinning for Joseph's religious beliefs and druidic practices. These beliefs and practices, in turn, become the motivating and governing force in Joseph's life. They do, in fact, give meaning to his life, mysterious and superstitious though it be.

For reasons he seemingly cannot explain, Joseph builds his house under an oak tree. When his brothers write that his father has died, Joseph becomes convinced that his father's spirit has transmigrated to the great lone oak tree by the house. From this moment, this oak tree becomes the

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<sup>12</sup>To a God Unknown, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



center of Joseph's theology and practices of druidism. At first, Joseph merely confides in the great oak,<sup>14</sup> but soon it becomes his altar for druidic rituals and sacrifices. He hangs hawks on the tree, nails ear notchings of his cattle to the branches,<sup>15</sup> and pours pig's blood on its bark.<sup>16</sup> During the fiesta he pours a cup of wine on the bark and puts meat on its limbs.<sup>17</sup> When his son is born, he places the child within the crotch of the tree.<sup>18</sup> At no time, however, is Joseph able to rationalize his mystical attitudes and practices because he

. . . did not think these things in his mind, but in his chest and in the corded muscles of his legs. It was the heritage of a race which for a million years had sucked at the breasts of the soil and cohabited with the earth.<sup>19</sup>

Brother Burton, Christian and celebrate, is very disturbed by Joseph's pagan practices. He attempts to convert Joseph to Christianity but is unsuccessful; Joseph continues and expands his mystical activities. When Joseph places his son in the great oak tree, however, Burton can restrain himself no longer. Joseph is dedicating his son to a heathen god of wood. Consequently, Burton leaves the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 118, 129.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 30.



farm. Before he leaves, however, Burton secretly cuts off the roots of the great oak tree, feeling that some day Joseph will appreciate this abrupt ending of his pagan practices.<sup>20</sup>

When his tree dies, Joseph's inner soul momentarily also dies. The earth also seems to die; a severe drought begins. The aridness continues until most of the people are forced to flee, including Joseph's brothers. Before his brothers leave, however, Joseph and Thomas ride out toward the ocean in search of grass and water. Near the ocean they find a fresh green valley and a lonely old man. This old man also is a mystical priest who sacrifices animals to nature. He kills some little thing every night at sundown. Like Joseph, the old man cannot rationalize his odd activities:

While . . . I have made up reasons, but they aren't true. I have said to myself, "the sun is life. I give life to life"--"I make a symbol of the sun's death." When I made these reasons I knew they weren't true.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph, nevertheless, understands the old man's practices and also observes that the land by the old man is not dry, but fresh and green. As a result, Joseph offers a sacrifice of a pig to bring rain to his own farm.<sup>22</sup> This sacrifice is effectual only a short time, so Joseph offers

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp.158 ff. <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 201. <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 108.



a calf. When this does not succeed, he offers himself as a sacrifice--and it begins to rain.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to the killing of Joseph's tree, Juanito and Elizabeth had already found some comfort in a pine grove with a great moss-covered rock in the middle. Juanito had fled to the peaceful grove after murdering drunken Benjy for having had an affair with Juanito's wife.<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth had found comfort as well as horror in the glade when she had gone there shortly before the birth of her son.<sup>25</sup> She had found in the rock what Joseph had found in the tree.

After the death of the oak tree, Joseph and Elizabeth seek comfort and guidance from the moss-covered rock in the pine grove. They now possess a similar belief and a similar house of worship. So, they go together to the rock in the pine grove for their first and only joint religious service. While there, Elizabeth falls and dies of a broken neck. Her symbolic immolation, however, brings rain to the earth.<sup>26</sup> It is to this same sacred rock that Joseph later flees for security when he has lost his family, cattle, and everything because of the lack of rain. It is on this same rock that

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp.242-44

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp.176-77.



Joseph sacrifices himself for all mankind in the valley--  
 "And the storm thickened, and covered the world with darkness,  
 and with the rush of waters."<sup>27</sup>

Joseph Wayne--symbolically Joseph, Abraham, and  
 Christ--lived a most peculiar life, but he lived a life  
 full of meaning and purpose. He was neither Christian nor  
 sinner; he was a queer but devout druid whom no one could  
 contaminate or convert. He was understood by only four  
 people--his father, his wife, Juanito, and the old man by  
 the ocean--but he sacrificed himself that it might rain and  
 all might live.

In East of Eden, Steinbeck allegorically presents the  
 Biblical account of Adam and Eve and their sons, Cain and  
 Abel, as another primitive and pre-Christian attempt of  
 man to find meaning in life. Adam and Cathy Trask and  
 their two sons, Caleb and Aaron, never seem ready to  
 consider either the rituals and practices of pagan druidism  
 or the teachings and attitudes of a symbolical Jesus Christ.  
 They still are, in fact, characters of the early days of  
 creation. They are still in the Old Testament times and  
 possess only the freedom of the will. They are too concerned

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 244.



with their responsibilities of choosing to do right or to do wrong, to do good or to do bad, to be able to consider the implications of discipleship of any particular religion.

True to symbol, symbolic Eve and all the Cain-figures choose to do evil and symbolic Adam and all the Abel-figures choose to do good. Between these two groups is the philosophical Chinese servant called Lee. It is Philosopher Lee who carefully studies the Biblical Cain and Abel story and discovers that the King James Version erroneously translates the Hebrew word timshel as "Thou shalt."<sup>28</sup> Timshel implies freedom of choice by the individual. Timshel means

. . . 'Thou mayest'--that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if 'Thou mayest'--it is also true that 'Thou mayest not.' Don't you see?<sup>29</sup>

It is this discovery by Lee that points to the central theme of the novel: Man, like Adam and Eve and their two sons, Cain and Abel, must choose between good and evil; but, in this choosing, "man is a free agent, not the victim of his environment, his heredity, or of anything else."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Genesis 4:7.

<sup>29</sup>John Steinbeck, East of Eden, p. 269.

<sup>30</sup>Tedlock and Wicker, op. cit., p. 304.



and the Adam Trask, like the Old Testament Adam, is motivated by his positive drives and impulses. Even as a young boy, Adam was loving and kind, nonresistant and nonviolent:

Young Adam was always an obedient child. Something in him shrank from violence, from contention, from the silent shrieking tensions that can rip at a house. He contributed to the quiet he wished for by offering no violence, no contention, and to do this he had to retire into secretness, since there is some violence in everyone. He covered his life with a veil of vagueness, while behind his quiet eyes a rich full life went on. This did not protect him from assault but it allowed him an immunity.<sup>31</sup>

When his brother Charles became angry and violent toward him, Adam still refused to retaliate:

Charles moved close and struck him in the face with bat. Adam covered his bleeding nose with his hands, and Charles swung his bat and hit him in the ribs, knocked the wind out of him, swung at his head and knocked him out. And as Adam lay unconscious on the ground Charles kicked him heavily in the stomach and walked away.<sup>32</sup>

In return for such brutality, Adam would protect his brother by not telling or admitting the beating to his father.

Even as a young man, Adam practiced love and kindness toward others. When brutally beaten Cathy Ames appeared on the doorstep of Charles' and Adam's house, Adam not only took her in but also nursed her back to health. Fear of public gossip did not frighten him. He boldly told his brother

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<sup>31</sup>East of Eden, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 19.



and the doctor, "I'll do the suffering" . . . "I wouldn't put a hurt dog out."<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, Cathy Ames Trask, like the Old Testament Eve, is motivated by her destructive drives and impulses. Like Eve, Cathy was created an innocent human being. "Cathy had from the first a face of innocence."<sup>34</sup> However, she very soon lost her innocence as she partook of the so-called tree of knowledge and discovered her sexual features and impulses. She discovered that by the "manipulation and use of this one part . . . she could gain and keep power over nearly everyone."<sup>35</sup> By age ten Cathy had used her loss of innocence to tempt two boys into wanting to rape her. The discovery of this almost-rape situation by Cathy's mother--symbolically God--resulted in the boys' condemnation and expulsion from the community to a reformatory.<sup>36</sup> When she was fourteen, Cathy's play with sin (sex) resulted in the suicide of her Latin teacher.<sup>37</sup> Finally, at the tender age of sixteen, Cathy's desire to indulge in sex and sin resulted in her murdering her parents.<sup>38</sup> Like Eve, Cathy had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil of her own free will and, as a result, was doomed to eternal separation from her parents--symbolically God.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-99.      <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 63.      <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.      <sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-70.      <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 76.



Adam Trask and Cathy Ames are married in a quiet ceremony and begin their reign as symbolic Adam and Eve on their fertile farm in the Salinas Valley. A neighbor, Samuel Hamilton, is hired to drill wells for their symbolic garden of Eden. As Adam tells Samuel, ". . . I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far I've had no Eden, let alone been driven out." When Samuel jokingly inquires about the location of the orchard for Eve, Adam replies, "I won't plant apples. That would be looking for accidents." Later Adam adds, "You don't know this Eve. She'll celebrate my choice. I don't think anyone can know her goodness."<sup>39</sup>

After nine months, Adam's Eve bares two sons, who later are named Caleb and Aaron--symbolically Cain and Abel. "They aren't alike," says Samuel, "Each one born separate in his own sack."<sup>40</sup> One week after their births, however, Eve deserts her husband and sons to resume her life of sinful indulgence. In this manner, Eve's sin (sexual acting out) drives her eternally from the symbolic garden of Eden in the Salinas Valley. Adam, too, leaves the garden, because a garden of Eden without an Eve would not be proper. Consequently, Adam also suffers religious alienation because of Eve's deed.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 171.



Caleb and Aaron are fraternal twins who were literally conceived in sin. They are the product of an affair their mother had with their uncle, Charles. Thus, both boys seem to inherit rather violent and passionate temperaments. Caleb's disposition, however, tends to be the more aggressive and more violent one. Aaron's "passions took a religious direction. He decided on the ministry for his future."<sup>41</sup> Caleb, after his gift of \$15,000 is not accepted by his father, like Cain of the Old Testament, decides to destroy his brother Aaron--Abel. Caleb shows Aaron their real mother who is madam of a whorehouse. As a direct result, Aaron immediately enlists in the Army and in a few months is dead.<sup>42</sup>

Each of these symbolic characters in East of Eden possesses a freedom of the will and, in turn, must choose between good and evil, love and lust. Cathy Ames does not have to kill her parents and begin a career of prostitution; she chooses to do so. She does not have to be unfaithful to her husband, Adam Trask, nor does she have to become a sadistic, violent whore; she chooses to do these. She possesses both the instinct of love and the instinct of destruction. She chooses to give full release to the destructive instinct, and thus chooses not to be good. It is Cathy Ames Trask

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 482, 525.



herself who chooses to be an embodiment--a terrible embodiment of the Cain-figure.

The same is true for the other Cain-figures--Cyrus, Charles, and Caleb. Each one chooses to live east of Eden. Cyrus chooses to live a life of lies. Perhaps it is easier and more rewarding socially, but he does not have to do it. Charles himself also is responsible for his uncontrollable anger and violence toward his brother Adam. Adam is not at fault for their father's not appreciating Charles' expensive gift. Likewise, Caleb has the freedom to choose between good and evil. He himself chooses to go to the brothels. It is he himself who decides to hurt his brother Aaron by taking him to their mother who is madam of a whorehouse.

In the same manner, Adam and each of the other Abel-figures themselves make the choices of attempting to do the good whenever possible. Alice Trask, step-mother of Charles and Adam, chooses to be a kind mother. Adam elects to practice nonviolence and forbearance in all situations. Aaron himself decides to become a minister, and Abra dedicates herself to the hope that someday Aaron and she will get married and together will minister to a parish.

Both Cathy and Charles have livid scars on their foreheads, both Charles and Caleb ask "Am I my brother's keeper?" and both Charles' and Caleb's offerings are



rejected; nevertheless, each of these characters possesses the freedom of the will to choose between good and evil, between love and hate. Philosopher Lee correctly translates the word timshel as "Thou mayest. Thou mayest rule over sin."<sup>43</sup> Not one of these symbolic Cains and Abels is predestined to eternal depravity or eternal election. Each possesses the dignity of the free will, and each chooses to be a symbolic Cain or a symbolic Abel.

Jim Casy, in The Grapes of Wrath, becomes the apex of Steinbeck's characters who portray man's search for meaning in life by recourse to religion and religious symbols. Jim Casy, as his initials suggest, symbolically becomes Jesus Christ of the New Testament, the great teacher and savior of mankind. Jim Casy, like Jesus Christ, has rejected all the practices and traditions of the old religions and is attempting to give meaning to the lives of all people by a new gospel. Jim Casy's ministry, like that of Jesus Christ, is short. Jim Casy works hard and long because soon he must die for all mankind. Before he dies, however, he also must win disciples who will propagate the new gospel to all the world when he is gone.

Jesus began his earthly ministry after a period of withdrawal into the wilderness for serious meditation and

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 269.



thought. Likewise, Casy begins his ministry in the novel after a similar withdrawal from society. He tells Tom, "I went off alone, an' I sat and figured."<sup>44</sup> Later in a striker's tent, Casy again tells Tom, "Been a-goin' into the wilderness like Jesus to try to find out sumpin."<sup>45</sup>

Prior to the events in the novel, Casy had been a preacher of the old gospel and, as Martin S. Shockley suggests, had vigorously expounded the old traditional concepts of sin and guilt.<sup>46</sup> He had been a Hawthorne who had gone emotional. Casy himself says,

. . .I was a preacher. . . was a Burning Busher. Used to howl out the name of Jesus to glory. And used to get an irrigation ditch so squirmin' full of repented sinners half of 'em like to drawded.

. . .I use ta get the people jumpin' an' talkin' in tongues, an' glory-shoutin' till they just fell down an' passed out. An' some I'd baptize to bring 'em to. An' then--you know what I'd do? I'd take one of them girls out in the grass, an' I'd lay with her. Done if ever' time. Then I'd feel bad, an' I'd pray an' pray, but it didn't do no good. Come the nex' time, them an' me was full of the sperit, I'd do it again. I figgered there just wasn't no hope for me, an' I was a damned ol' hypocrite. But I didn't mean to be.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath; p. 28.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 521.

<sup>46</sup>E.W. Tedlock, Jr. and C.V. Wicker (ed.), Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup>The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 27, 29.



Jim Casy has, however, reformed himself and has rejected his old religion of preaching one thing and practicing another thing. He has cast away his old sinful Adam and has put on a new loving Jesus Christ. Henceforth, Jim Casy is simply and directly a symbolic Jesus Christ.

In the wilderness Casy found that love and nonviolence are the secret to the full life. He discovered what Jesus meant when he said, "A new commandment give I unto you; That ye love one another."<sup>48</sup> This comprehension of the concept of love as the key to true meaning and purpose in existence becomes the central doctrine of Casy's new gospel to the world. He loves mankind, and he spends the remainder of his short life proving it.

Jim Casy's gospel, like Jesus', is too radical and profound for people who prefer an organized religion. As Tom points out to Casy, "You can't hold no church with idears like that. People would drive you out of the country with idears like that."<sup>49</sup> Casy realizes this very well; therefore, he promotes his teachings in a simple, direct manner. He lives his beliefs and in this way, gradually wins others to his teachings. When his teachings and actions, loving and nonviolent though they be, become too threatening to the world, the world destroys Jim Casy but not his teachings.

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<sup>48</sup>John 13:34.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 33.



Like Jesus, Casy goes where the needs are. He tells the Joads, "I got to go. . . I can't stay here no more. I got to go where the folks is goin'."<sup>50</sup> On the way, however, Casy, too, must go through a so-called Samaria. In Samaria (Hooverville) he forgives Tom Joad of his sin of violence by accepting Tom's guilt: "It was me, all right. . . I'll go 'thout no trouble." Then, very symbolic of Jesus Christ's willingly bearing men's sins, Jim Casy proudly sits between his guards, ". . . his head up and the stringy muscles of his neck prominent. On his lips there was a faint smile and on his face a curious look of conquest."<sup>51</sup>

Casy's arrest for the crime of another marks the beginning of the events which soon result in his death. He undoubtedly knows that the world of angry sinners is eagerly waiting for the proper opportunity to destroy him and his radical teachings. Nevertheless, Casy is cognizant of his mission in life and does nothing to shirk his responsibility. When the time comes for his sacrifice, he faces his murderers and says, "Listen, you fellas don' know what you're doin' . . . You don't know what you're a-doin'."<sup>52</sup> When Jesus was murdered, He said, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>53</sup>Luke 23:34.



The great teacher and savior is destroyed but not his teaching. Like Jesus, Casy has won disciples. One of these faithful disciples is Tom Joad, a symbolic Thomas who was a disciple of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Like Thomas, Tom Joad dedicates himself to promoting the gospel of his teacher and savior, even though death may be his ultimate reward.

Jim Casy has symbolized Jesus Christ the great teacher and savior of the world. At the end of the novel, [Rose of Sharon also becomes a symbol of Christ by her sacrificial and redemptive giving of herself so that another might live. When she says "yes" to the unspoken question of whether she will give her milk to the dying old man, Rose of Sharon, like Jesus, is in a Gethsemane and in effect, says "Not my will, but thine be done."<sup>55</sup> She, like Christ, gives her body and becomes the "Resurrection and the Life. . . . In her, death and life are one, and through her, life triumphs over death."<sup>56</sup> ]

In all four of these major works, Steinbeck is attempting to show that man can find meaning in life by relying on religion; however, man himself must make the

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<sup>54</sup>Tedlock and Wicker, op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>55</sup>Luke 22:42.

<sup>56</sup>Tedlock and Wicker, op. cit., p. 270.



choice of accepting or of rejecting a particular religion. Henry Morgan, in Cup of Gold, purposefully avoids a religious experience and, as a result, lives and dies an agnostic. Joseph Wayne, in To a God Unknown, accepts and believes in the pagan rituals and practices of druidism and, consequently, lives a full life. In the end, Joseph gladly lays down his life for the world. He has lived a good life and will inherit immortality of his soul. He is convinced that his soul will transmigrate to some animal or plant and, in this way, will assist in bestowing spiritual meaning to others. The symbolic Cains and Abels in East of Eden, however, do not find refuge in religion or religious symbols. They are too immature spiritually to understand the meaning of any religious discipline or discipleship. They live and die victims of their own free wills--victims of their choice to do good or to do evil. Jim Casy, in The Grapes of Wrath, however, supersedes all of these significant characters. Joseph Wayne twice was transfigured as a Christ-figure, but Jim Casy lives and dies as a symbolic Jesus Christ. His disciple Thomas--Tom Joad--also finds true meaning and purpose in life by following in the footsteps of his master. Even after his master dies, Tom has no fear, only transcendental self-reliance and dedication to the gospel of Jim Casy. Tom tells Ma Joad,



. . . like Easy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one--an' then--

. . . Then it don' matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where--wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Easy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'--I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build--why I'll be there . . .<sup>57</sup>

John Steinbeck, in his analysis of man, readily acknowledges man's inherent desire to associate himself with others. Steinbeck also recognizes the fact that this diffusion of man and the group makes the man more than a man; it makes him a part of the group-man, or the universal brotherhood of all man. Thus, Steinbeck tends to suggest, through most of his works, that man not only seeks to find meaning in life through religion or religious symbols, but also attempts, on another level, to resolve his own problems in life by identifying himself with others in a group. Steinbeck's characters discover that fulfillment of life is found in the group, and in the individual. Consequently, Steinbeck's works are permeated with this idea . . . the concrete person is in himself virtually nothing, whereas the abstract idea 'nobility' is all.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup>The Grapes of Wrath, p. 572. . . of the Grapes of Wrath: A Critical Study. P. 44.



#### CHAPTER IV

#### MAN'S ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE HIS PROBLEMS:

#### GROUP-MAN AND UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

Grant us brotherhood . . . a brotherhood not of words but of acts and deeds . . . . If our brothers are oppressed, then we are oppressed. If they hunger we hunger. If their freedom is taken away our freedom is not secure.

--"Prayer"

John Steinbeck, in his analysis of man, readily acknowledges man's inherent desire to associate himself with others. Steinbeck also recognizes the fact that this diffusion of man and the group makes the man more than a man; it makes him a part of the group-man, or the universal brotherhood of all men. Thus, Steinbeck tends to suggest, through most of his works, that man not only seeks to find meaning in life through religion or religious symbols, but also attempts, on another level, to resolve his own problems in life by identifying himself with others in a group. Steinbeck's characters discover that fullness of life is found in the group, not in the individual. Consequently, Steinbeck's works are permeated with this idea: ". . . the concrete person is in himself virtually nothing, whereas the abstraction 'humanity' is all."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harold C. Gardiner, Fifty Years of the American Novel: A Christian Appraisal, p. 224.



For example, the pirates in Cup of Gold are very insignificant as individuals; in fact, many of them are not mentioned by name. On the other hand, each does become significant as he cooperates with the other members of the group for the goal of the group. It is true that angry and violent Sir Henry Morgan is able to rule and dominate men in a dictatorial manner; however, he still is dependent upon the cooperation of all the men in order to obtain his worldly goal of the cup of gold. If his pirates would not cooperate and function as one man--a group-man--, Sir Henry Morgan would never realize Panama, Ysobel, or the actual inscribed cup of gold.

Having introduced the concept of group-man on the physical level, Steinbeck continues, on a mystical level, in To a God Unknown, to develop his concept of the universal brotherhood of man. Joseph Wayne not only realizes that cooperation is necessary for group success but also that group membership automatically results in a esprit de corps for all. When Benjy dies, Joseph also suffers, even though Joseph is unable to express his pain. He is able, however, to communicate his feelings to the spirit in the great oak tree:

. . . Even a pure true feeling of the difference between pleasure and pain is denied me. All things are one, and all a part of me. . . . Benjy is dead, and I am neither glad nor sorry . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p. 84.



Perhaps, Joseph feels that Benjy really is not gone from the group, that only his body has departed. The spirit of their father still lingers with them in the body of the lone oak tree by the house. This fact Joseph knows from first-hand experience:

. . . the great tree stirred to life under the wind. Joseph raised his head and looked at its old, wrinkled limbs. His eyes lighted with recognition and welcome, for his father's strong and simple being, which had dwelt in his youth like a cloud of peace, had entered the tree.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph repeatedly and almost regularly seeks the counsel of his father in the old oak tree. Before marrying Elizabeth, Joseph takes her to the tree for parental approval. When Elizabeth leans against the tree and gently strokes its trunk, Joseph is pleased. He cries and asks her to climb the tree. As she sits in the crotch from which the great limbs grow, Joseph says, "I'm glad, Elizabeth . . . I'm glad that you are sitting in my tree. A moment back I thought I saw that my tree loved you."<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, after their marriage in Monterey, Joseph and Elizabeth return to the Wayne Ranch only minutes after Benjy has been murdered by Juanito, over an affair with Juanito's wife. The family group looks to Joseph for guidance. Before he does his duty as leader of the group, however,

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.



Joseph again seeks the counsel of the great oak, for it, too, is a member of the Wayne family:

He walked slowly across the yard toward where he could see the black tree against the sky. When he was come to it, he leaned his back against the trunk and looked upward, where a few pale misty stars glittered among the branches. His hands caressed the bark. "Benjamin is dead," he reported softly. For a moment he breathed deeply, and then turning, he climbed into the tree and sat between the great arms and laid his cheek against the cool rough bark. He knew his thought would be heard . . .<sup>5</sup>

At fiesta time on New Year's Day, Joseph makes certain that his father's spirit will also be present at the celebration. Joseph builds an altar under the great oak tree. Then, during the celebration itself, he ceremoniously walks to the tree and pours a small amount of wine on its bark.<sup>6</sup> Father Angelo reprimands him for this ritual, but Joseph really is not concerned about what others think. His father's spirit is in the tree, and it also must share in the festivities of the group.

One evening, Elizabeth tells Joseph that she is pregnant. She also tells him that in certain countries people convey to their cattle such events as births or deaths in the family, and wonders whether Joseph will do the same. Joseph does not bother to explain this peculiar custom or his own strange practices. He merely replies that he

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-18.



will not tell the cattle. Later, however, when he presumes that Elizabeth is asleep, Joseph quietly hurries out to the great oak and informs it of his wife's pregnancy: "There is to be a baby, sir. I promise that I will put it in your arms when it is born."<sup>7</sup> Sometime later, Elizabeth finally informs Joseph of her suspicion. "Why do you love the tree so much, Joseph?" she inquires. "Remember how you made me sit in it the first time I ever came out here?" The night when she had told Joseph of her pregnancy, she had heard him to outside and speak to the oak tree as if it were a person: "You called it 'sir,' I heard you." Joseph is either embarrassed for his secrecy from her or alarmed by her apparent insight; consequently, he tells Elizabeth, "It's kind of a game, you see. It gives me a feeling that I have my father yet." Elizabeth, of druidic heritage, has a keen understanding of Joseph's ideology. She tells him, "No, it isn't a game, but it's a good practice. . . . You should have let me see before. But likely I hadn't proper eyes before."<sup>8</sup>

After the birth of their child, Joseph and Elizabeth introduce the infant to its grandfather, placing the child within the crotch of the tree and observing its gnarled limbs as they curve upward to protect the infant and to welcome him as a newcomer into their universal fraternity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 128.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-41.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 156.



When the great oak tree is destroyed by disbelieving Brother Burton's severing its roots, both Joseph and Elizabeth seek their father in the moss-covered rock in the pine grove on the ridge. Here, Elizabeth slips on the moss, falls, and breaks her neck. When she dies, Joseph loses another important member of his Wayne group. Just as he begins to leave with her body, however, it begins to rain, and

. . . in the rain a vibration of life came into the place. Joseph lifted his head as though he were listening, and then he stroked the rock tenderly. "Now you are two, and you are here. Now I will know where I must come."<sup>10</sup>

Elizabeth is dead, but her spirit continues as a member of the local chapter of the Universal Brotherhood of Man. She remains an incorporeal member of the Wayne family, now residing in the rock in the pine grove. Thus, Steinbeck stresses that group-man is not limited to physical bodies. Joseph, however, now must seek counsel from his wife's spirit in the moss-covered rock rather than from his father's spirit in the oak tree which Burton destroyed. When Elizabeth's spirit is destroyed by the violence of nature, Joseph, too, is destroyed.<sup>11</sup> If he is to hope for a reunion with his father's or wife's spirit, he also must die so that his spirit may join the ecumenical fraternity of

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 242.



group-man spirits. Consequently, Joseph commits suicide.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, as Rama earlier told Elizabeth,

... He is eternal. His father died, and it was not a death. . . . I tell you this man is not a man, unless he is all men. The strength, the resistance, the long and stumbling thinking of all men, and all the joy and suffering, too, cancelling each other out and yet remaining in the contents. He is all these, a repository for a little piece of each man's soul, and more than that, a symbol of the earth's soul.<sup>13</sup>

In Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck again exemplifies the group-man theory on a purely physical level. The paisanos are a closely-knit group with their own unique group-mind and group-code. Every problem which presents itself to a member of this group is discussed by the entire group. The decision of the group-mind becomes the decision of the individual member of the group. Even Danny, the so-called leader of the group, must abide by the decision of the group. He desires to give Mrs. Morales some candy but must change his plans when the group decides that ". . . candy is not good for people. It makes their teeth ache."<sup>14</sup>

The efficacy of the group-code of this paisano fraternity is well illustrated by the episode of The Pirate's money. The Pirate entrusts his friends with his money which he hopes to use to purchase a candlestick for San Francisco de Assisi. This bag of sacred money becomes". . . the point

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>14</sup>John Steinbeck, Tortilla Flat, p. 32.



of trust about which the fraternity revolved [revolves]."<sup>15</sup> To violate this moral code is considered worse than violating the laws of the state. When Big Joe Portagee, one of the members of this paisano group, transgresses this group-code, the group passes judgment in a cold, precise manner. It ties Big Joe's thumbs together and methodically inflicts punishment with a heavy wooden club, a sharp blade of a can-opener, a pick handle, and an axe, until Big Joe passes into unconsciousness.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the novel, when Danny, their leader, dies, this small society quickly disintegrates. The cord which bound them has been severed; consequently, the group-man becomes merely a group of men curiously observing Danny's house as it burns to the ground. After this final and symbolic collapse of the group-man, these paisanos ". . . turned and walked slowly away, and no two walked together."<sup>17</sup>

"The Vigilante," even though not portraying the actual beating, unclothing, and lynching of a Negro man, depicts the psychological affinity between Mike and the mob, the individual and the group-man. The story explores the motivations which caused this ordinary citizen to become an

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 91. <sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-3. <sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-44.



active participant in this violent action of the mob--the ferocious group-man. The vigilante, like the old grandfather in "The Leader of the People," authentically lived only during the time when he was a part of a group. When the group disbanded, the vigilante like the grandfather, was left a "hull."<sup>18</sup> The vigilante's mental image of the entire affair, however, reminds him of his emotional state only thirty minutes earlier:

Half an hour before, when he had been howling with the mob and fighting for a chance to help pull on the rope, then his chest had been so full that he had found he was crying.<sup>19</sup>

Steinbeck's group-man theory adds a new dimension in its aggressive mob action in In Dubious Battle. In total agreement with the theory and practice of Marxism,<sup>20</sup> the social revolution of the apple strikers is a war against capitalist oppression. All of the organizational tactics employed by Mac, Jim, and London are for this so-called common good of the people. The source of the pickers' suffering is money--the origin of all evil in the world. The cure for this suffering is in the concept of a universal

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<sup>18</sup>Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 97.

<sup>19</sup>John Steinbeck, The Long Valley, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup>R.N. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism, p. 25.



brotherhood of man--working and fighting together for justice and equality. As each of the pickers becomes a striker, each becomes a part of the group-man. The violence of this group-man, in turn, causes it to become ". . . just one big animal, going down the road. Just all one animal."<sup>21</sup> Mac--symbolic Marx--elaborates this phalanx theory by saying,

. . . That's right what you said. It is a big animal. It's different from men in it. And it's stronger than all the men put together. It doesn't want the same thing men want--it's like Doc said--and we don't know what it'll do.<sup>22</sup>

This philosophy of this Marxian group-man in the form of the organized mob becomes so effectual that it actually dominates the so-called protagonists themselves. The group-man, in fact, becomes the real protagonist in the novel. Mac, Jim, London, and Dakin merely serve as effective leaders of these activities of the group-man. Also, if these men had not been present to serve in this capacity, the Zeitgeist would have provided others.

Doc Burton--the most leftist man in this Marxian camp--also seems to feel that leadership is of secondary importance in the functioning of this universal brotherhood of man:

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<sup>21</sup>John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, p. 316.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 317.



. . . You might be an effect as well as a cause, Mac. You might be an expression of a group-man, a cell endowed with a special function, like an eye cell, drawing your force from group-man, and at the same time directing him, like an eye.<sup>23</sup>

All three men--Mac, Jim, and London--play extremely important roles, nevertheless, in keeping the group-man on the move. From the moment they dedicate themselves to the cause, everything they do is for the cause of the group--the group-man. Mac, for example, repeatedly tells Jim, London, and Dakin to keep things moving by using the materials available: "We got damn few things to fight with. We got to use what we can."<sup>24</sup> They don't need experts in mob action; they only need men who are willing to do whatever is necessary for the common, ultimate good of the group. If this requires anger and violence by the men, as it always does, this is exactly what must be given. In fact, when the men are not angry, their leaders become concerned. Mac's comment on one occasion exemplifies this concern:

. . . don't like it, . . . This bunch of bums isn't keyed up. I hope to Christ something happens to make 'em mad before long. This's going to fizzle out if something don't happen.<sup>25</sup>

Doc Burton, although not an active agitator in the strike, seems to feel that violence plays a role more

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 145. <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 169. <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 159.



important than merely obtaining the physical goal set up by the group-man. Doc seems to feel that group-man obtains some secondary benefits from participation in impetuous activities. Thus, he says,

It might be like this, Mac: When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we recapture the Holy Land'; or he says, 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy'; or he says, 'We will wipe out 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 . . .

. . . . .

. . . Yes, it might be worth while to know more about group-man, to know his nature, his ends, his desires . . . The pleasure we get in scratching an itch causes death to a great number of cells. Maybe group-man gets pleasure when individual men are wiped out in a war . . . .<sup>26</sup>

In spite of such possible secondary benefits, the group-man becomes extremely angry and overtly violent when members of its body suffer violence. When old fraternity brother Joy is shot in cold blood by vigilantes, the group-man moans and says very little. The guns of the guards cannot stop it from circling around the dead body on the street. The loud threats of the sheriff cannot stop it from picking up the body, placing it on the back of the old green truck, and taking it to camp.<sup>27</sup> In fact, nothing can stop

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-46.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-65.



the group-man from doing anything it desires at that moment, because it is like a quiet but enraged animal.

Throughout the entire dubious battle between the Marxian strikers and the bourgeoisie landowners, nothing can defeat the strikers as long as they remain unified as one group-mind, or esprit de corps. They suffer pain on many occasions, but this only strengthens their feeling of oneness. As Mac explains it on one occasion, "When you get mixed up with the animal, you never feel anything."<sup>28</sup>

When Jim, one of the leaders of the group, is shot, he does not withdraw from the violent activities and recuperate in his own tent. He has dedicated his life to the cause of the universal brotherhood of man and he will fight for this cause as long as he has breath. The burning pain in his shoulder causes Jim to faint at times, but it cannot cause him to resign from his responsibilities to the group-man. He is a part of its very being and cannot sit still while the remainder of the organism is out fighting and suffering pain in a battle--dubious though the battle be. Only a shotgun blast in his face can stop Jim from physically leading this organism in its battle against the evil forces in society. Even then, though dead in body, Jim continues

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 320.



to lead this ecumenical fraternity of men by his spirit of magnanimity. As Mac in a quivering high and monotonous voice tells the group, "This guy didn't want nothing for himself . . . Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself--."29

Jim's heroism for the cause of the universal brotherhood of man marks the zenith to which group-man may ascend in his physical attempt to solve his social problems. Jim has served the Cause well, but he has not secured for it the victory desired. At the end of this dubious battle, the apple strikers, like Milton's Beelzebub and his host of rebel Angels who battled against the monarchial rule of God, are doomed to forceful removal from the Anderson farm--symbolic Heaven in Paradise Lost.

In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck uses the Joad family and Jim Casy in a final endeavor to resolve man's problems in life. The Joads represent the physical aspect of the group-man which gains and loses members to its fellowship and cause during the long journey from Oklahoma to California. When this sector of the group-man finally comes to the point of disintegration, Jim Casy assumes active leadership of the mystical segment of the group-man and attempts a solution in that manner.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 343.



The ecumenical Joads begin their journey westward as a group composed of Pa and Ma Joad; their six children-- Noah, Tom, Rose of Sharon and her husband Connie, Al, Winfield, and Ruth; Grandpa and Grandma; Uncle John; and Jim Casy, "the preacher." As the group declines morally and economically during the journey, the familial unit itself breaks up. Grandpa dies before the group is out of Oklahoma and is buried in a nameless grave, with only a bottle with a note on a borrowed piece of paper in it as his grave marker. Grandma dies and is buried a pauper. Noah and Connie desert, and Al plans to desert as soon as possible. Rose of Sharon's baby is stillborn, Casy is beaten to death by the strikebreakers, and Tom becomes a fugitive. Even Ivy and Sairy Wilson, who earlier joined the group and who gave a page from their Bible for the marker on Grandpa's grave, forsake the Joad brotherhood before the end of the journey.

Ma Joad, in spite of her unique ability to unify the minds of the group, is unable to lead this group--man known as the philosophical Joads (as Frederic Carpenter labels them)<sup>30</sup> to its desired destiny. When the group is forced to leave the migrant camp at Hooverville or risk the danger of facing the prejudiced police, Ma tells Tom and the group:

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<sup>30</sup>E.W. Tedlock, Jr. and C.V. Wicker (ed.), Steinbeck and His Critics, pp. 241-49.



Easy . . . You got to have patience. Why, Tom--us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people--we go on.<sup>31</sup>

Ma's confidence in her own people is very similar to Carl Sandburg's faith in the persistence and final triumph of the plain people as expressed in The People, Yes. Ma, like Sandburg, does not know exactly why she has so much faith in her small chapter of the Universal Brotherhood of Man; she just seems to feel it in her bones.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, slowly but surely this primitive family unit of the larger group-man comes to the point of disintegration, and Ma herself can do nothing to prevent it. Ma, however, leads to the very end of the struggle and, in the end, is instrumental in saving the life of a dying man found in a barn:

. . . Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping.

She said "Yes."  
Ma smiled. "I knowed you would. I knowed!"<sup>33</sup>

This final episode involving Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon summarizes very well the group-man philosophy of the Joad

<sup>31</sup>John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 383.

<sup>32</sup>Joseph S. Beach, American Fiction, 1920-1940, p. 333.

<sup>33</sup>The Grapes of Wrath, p. 618.



family throughout the novel. This group-man possesses a life instinct and the vital persistence which is stronger than mere stoical endurance for the sake of the group. This group-man has ". . . the will to live and the faith in life. . . ." <sup>34</sup> This attitude may result in suffering and death but ultimately will also result in their being united with a greater, mystical group-man.

The chief exponent of the mystical group-man theory is Jim Casy. Even though Jim has forsaken his vocation of preacher and has joined himself with the Joads, he soon begins to develop a new, mystical concept of group-man. He presents some doctrines of his group-man philosophy at the roadside burial of Grandpa. Casy solemnly says:

. . . This here ol' man jus' lived a life an' jus' died out of it. I don't know whether he was good or bad, but that don't matter much. He was alive, an' that's what matters. An' now he's dead, an' that don't matter . . . An' I wouldn't pray for a ol' fella that's dead. He's awright. He got a job to do, but it's all laid out for 'im an' there's on'l one way to do it . . . <sup>35</sup>

Casy's mystical concept of the universal brotherhood of man gradually also becomes a reality to Tom Joad. When Casy is brutally and fatally beaten by some strike-breakers and Tom himself is severely mutilated, Tom goes into the

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<sup>34</sup>Beach, op. cit., p. 332.

<sup>35</sup>The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 196-97.



wilderness to hide in order to clarify his own philosophy of life. He returns with a philosophy of life which he feels is the answer to the problems of mankind: Group-man, or the universal brotherhood of man, is the answer. Tom Joad willingly dedicates himself to the promotion and practice of this transcendental teaching:

. . . like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one--

. . . I'll be ever'where--wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there . . .<sup>36</sup>

Thus, both Jim Casy and Tom Joad combine Emersonian transcendentalism with Whitmanian "earthy democracy" in suggesting an answer to the universal problems of man.<sup>37</sup>

The problems which face Jim Casy and Tom Joad in their crusade for freedom, however, are no different, in essence, from those which faced Steinbeck's other characters.

To sum up, John Steinbeck, through his characters in his works of fiction, becomes a social philosopher. His recognition of the dualistic instinctual drives in man which are in staunch conflict suggests that his philosophy is

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>37</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel, p. 445.



naturalistic. Naturalism, however, leaves no room for religion or Original Sin.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, it denies the existence of free will in man.<sup>39</sup> Steinbeck's characters, it is true, are neither totally good nor totally bad (transcendentalism); consequently, they do not possess Original Sin (naturalism). They possess inherent instinctual drives and often yield to them in the form of primitive behavior or violence (realism), but they also possess complete freedom of the will to choose between doing good or doing bad, between loving or hating. Many of his characters, in fact, support this concept of the freedom of the will and the dignity of man by being symbolic of Biblical characters who choose to give expression to one or the other of these drives in a definite, forceful manner (classical symbolism).

In conclusion, John Steinbeck, as social philosopher, in his unique manipulation of characters and events, advances beyond the limits of both transcendentalism and naturalism. Charles Walcott feels that Steinbeck has a transcendental-naturalistic outlook which preoccupies him constantly with the two great, conflicting elements of American naturalism--spirit and fact, the demands of the heart and the demands of

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<sup>38</sup>Charles I. Glicksberg, Literature and Religion: A Study in Conflict, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Harold C. Gardiner, Norms for the Novel, p. 86.



the will--and the great, harmonizing ideal of American transcendentalism--unity of Spirit and Nature.<sup>40</sup> While this observation, as well as those of other label-prone critics is true, the significance of John Steinbeck rests not in his fitting into a preconceived literary or philosophical mold, but, rather, in his unique understanding and presentation of the whole man as he really exists as a human being.

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<sup>40</sup>Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream, pp. 258 ff.



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